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"Is Women's Freedom a Myth or Reality"? The Context of Working-Class Women in Bangladesh

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Abstract- Lately, women's freedom is the most uttered concept in Bangladesh. Civil society has given the statement that women are onward to freedom. Women are now taking part in the various outside world. They are crushing their boundary of the household. But It was confusing after hearing those words. Is there any word called women's freedom? Civil society has given its arguments based on women's economic freedom to earn money. The question has arisen on that issue. If it is so, women are getting freedom as they are working outside and attaining economic solvency. Then what about working-class women who are working in the garments factory. Why are they deprived of equal wages in their workplace? Why are they harassed by the office staff and the male counterparts? Why are they being exploited in the household? Why are their voices not heard? Are there any answers to these questions? Working class women are being exploited in their households as they belong to the patriarchal society. Capitalism is using them as they are cheap labor.

Keywords: women's freedom, economic freedom, working-class women, patriarchal society, capitalism, civil society, exploitation.

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"Is Women's Freedom a Myth or Reality"? The Context of Working-Class Women in Bangladesh

Maria Tahsin [α] & Hiramony Akter [σ]

Abstract- **Lately, women's freedom is the most uttered concept in Bangladesh. Civil society has given the statement that women are onward to freedom. Women are now taking part in the various outside world. They are crushing their boundary of the household. But It was confusing after hearing those words. Is there any word called women's freedom? Civil society has given its arguments based on women's economic freedom to earn money. The question has arisen on that issue. If it is so, women are getting freedom as they are working outside and attaining economic solvency. Then what about working-class women who are working in the garments factory. Why are they deprived of equal wages in their workplace? Why are they harassed by the office staff and the male counterparts? Why are they being exploited in the household? Why are their voices not heard? Are there any answers to these questions? Working class women are being exploited in their households as they belong to the patriarchal society. Capitalism is using them as they are cheap labor. Civil society uses them as the stairs to come to the spotlight. Then, what is the actual meaning of women's freedom? Does women's freedom come from an air-conditioned room? Are the exploited, voiceless, hungry working-class women considering the role model for women's freedom? That is why this research has tried to find out the actual scenarios of women's freedom. Does women's freedom exist or not?**

Keywords: women's freedom, economic freedom, working-class women, patriarchal society, capitalism, civil society, exploitation.

I. Introduction

"The caged bird sings with a fearful trill,
Of things unknown, but longed for still,
And his tune is heard on the distant hill,
For the caged bird sings of freedom."

---- Maya Angelou. (Angelou, 1969)

Bangladesh is a secular country in the context of religion. But the maximum people are Muslims, where the women veil is essential. The norms and values in our society are not woman- friendly. The structure of our society is patriarchal. Women are bounded to maintain the code of conduct in our society. The society treats women as though they have nothing to express. In our social structure, the women's freedom concept is like pouring water into foam.

Nowadays, women are engaged in different outside activities. Civil society defines it as women's freedom because of women's participation in the outside world. But in the context of Bangladesh, the social structure is patriarchal, and the women's freedom concept has created confusion among women. And the important fact is the class stratification is a visible disorder in our society. The concept of freedom varies from class to class, person to person and society to society. Women are different in their way of thinking, in their way of expression.

The codes and conducts of these classes are different. The classes are different in their lifestyle. These stratifications are present in our society, then how could you define it as women's freedom in general? If you define women's economic freedom or women's participation in the outside work as the parameter of women's freedom, then why are the working-class women being deprived in everywhere? They are also working outside. They should have a taste of freedom.

But the research has revealed that women are being suppressed by their male partners, office staff, capitalism, and civil society. Their voices are not present in the patriarchal structure. Because patriarchal society has considered that women have nothing to say. They are facing discrimination of wages in their workplace. Because women are treated as spineless and cheap workers, who are meant to be deprived. Sometimes, their husbands are torturing them. Because men are always treated as superior to women. And most importantly, women are sexually grinding by their male staff or others in their workplace. Because women treat as a body, not as human being. They have to maintain their household along. Because in Bangladesh, patriarchal society contemplates that the household works are only for women. It is their responsibility to maintain household chores. Then, where is women's freedom? Does it exist?

II. Methodology

For assessing the problem regarding women's freedom concept, a survey has conducted at Mirpur-10 in Dhaka city. The Capital of Bangladesh, Dhaka, has been selected as a field. Because there are many garments factories that flourish in Dhaka in recent years. The survey covered total of40 respondents who are working-class women, and their age limit was 15-27.

This research has used a qualitative method to collect data. The qualitative method is effective in identifying factors, like socioeconomic conditions, gender roles, social norms, ethnicity, and religion. It is also useful to find out the human contradictory

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behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of the individual.

This survey has used purposive sampling to collect data. Data have collected with an unstructured questionnaire considering the objectives of the study. Because such kind of social problem was not possible to understand through some questions. And the survey has used the observing participant method and case study to collect data. A case study has used to explain the problem in detail.

III. Findings and Analysis

a) Women's Freedom Concept in the Eyes of Working-Class Women

"Lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, and no bolt

that you can set upon the freedom of my mind."

-Virginia Woolf. (Wolf, 1935)

Nowadays, we hear that women are getting Freedom. Women are working outside; they are cooperating in every sector. That is why the research was about to find out the actual picture of women's freedom in the perspective of working-class women. The question was asked to working-class women. What do you think about women's freedom?

After hearing this question, they have given their answer with no words in their eyes. As if it can be a matter of thinking at all! Almost everyone has given the same answer that 'I do not know about it'. 'What are you talking about?' Not a single voice has found to talk about their freedom. To them, it is not a matter of consideration at all.

One of the respondents said that, "women should obey the rules of their husbands. Because he might take all the decisions for my well-being. So why should I think about it. He has the right to torture me, as he is my husband. He does not need to take permission while having physical relations. It is his right. I do not think that I should restrict him. Because, it is normal for a woman to allow her husband whenever he wanted to do it. I give my salary to my husband, and he uses it in his way. I don't think that I should interfere with this matter. A woman should have to be silent about all matters. It is not good for a woman to interfere in every sphere. *(Source: Fieldwork, 2018).*

But unfortunately, working-class women, a large part of the society, do not even know what it means by freedom. To them, there is no definition of freedom; there is no option to think about it.

They worked hard all day long, almost 12 hours a day; sometimes, it might be 14 hours, come the home with tension, and then serve their family with food and care. Then they go to bed with tension how they will survive the next day. Will you define it as freedom?

b) Does Economic Freedom to Earn Money Ensure Women's Freedom?

The lack of economic freedom could be a very major reason for loss of liberty, liberty of life.

-Amartya Sen. (Sen, 1999)

This research could not fully agree with the statement of Steinem. We always hear that women are getting freedom. They are getting engaged in paid works. They are participating in outside activities. The question is, does economic freedom to earn money to ensure women's freedom?

Swapna Majumdar described the economic contribution of women in society. Her argument was like "the women are bound neither for school nor college. They are off to work. She describes that women's presence is a huge achievement in a country where women's visibility is extremely low. She states that over 1.3 million women may spend their days bent over whirring sewing machines, and their income and independence has triggered a silent revolution among them. Women say they are no longer content to live a life of anonymity behind their purdahs, or veils" (Majumdar, 2002).

On the contrary, regarding women's freedom the question was asked, why are you working outside? Almost everyone has given the answer that we have to live; we have to survive. According to this statement, working outside does not mean that they are getting freedom; they have got their rights. It is about survival.

One of the informants said that "I have started to work in the garments because my family was not able to bear my expenses. I do not have any option to survive. I needed the job for my survival. My husband left me when I was 22 years old. Already I had a baby girl. I felt helpless when he left me. Sometimes he tortured me. I never told him a word. Because I think it is his right to beat me. At the same time, I was afraid. If I protest, he will leave me. Then what will happen to me? But at last, he left me. I could not say anything. I started to work with full effort. In the meantime, one of our supervisors harassed me. I could not protest against him as I did not have any option. I could not leave the job. Already I have a baby girl. I have to think about her future. In this society, every liability goes to women, not for the person who is responsible for it". *(Source: Fieldwork, 2018).*

Here is the reflection of women freedom. Working-class women are working outside because they need money. They are not working outside to fulfill the agenda of women's freedom. Livelihood is the last word in their dictionary. They need to feed, the need to survive, and they need to live, that is why they are working outside.

The research does not argue that woman visibility is not rising. But the matter is that woman

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visibility at the workplace can't give her freedom. Capitalism gives women easy access to the garments industry because capitalism knows that they will never protest against exploitation. Working-class women are working to support their family, to feed their children, to survive in the world. Women are working outside, but the structure of our society is not changing. Working -class women are deprived of equal wages in their workplace and are exploited in their households. Then how does economic solvency define as women's freedom?

c) Is Woman a Neutral Entity?

"I am no bird; and no net ensnares me;
I am a free human being with an independent will."

--- Charlotte Brontë. (Brontë, 1847)

Somehow the quote of the English novelist is not true for the working-class women in Bangladesh. They are never thought of as human being at all. The society has always treated women as a burden or unnecessary creation of god.

Simone De Beauvoir (1949) recognizes that men have maintained dominant roles in virtually all cultures because women have resigned themselves to, instead of rebelling against their assigned subordinate status. She described two major premises. First, that man, considering himself as the essential being, or subject, has treated the woman as the unessential being, or object. The second, the more controversial premise is that much of a woman's psychological self is socially constructed, with very few physiological rooted feminine qualities or values. De Beauvoir denies the existence of a feminine temperament or nature. To her, all notions of femininity are artificial concepts. In one of her most telling aphorisms, she declares, "One is not born a woman, but becomes one" (Beauvoir, 1949).

This research agrees with Beauvoir. When a girl is born in this society, the rules and regulations are structured to control her. Society feels the responsibility to protect women's virginity and purity. The society has contempalated women like they are unproductive, and they do not have control over themselves. A girl is not warmly accepted in this society. The patriarchal society considers women as burden for their family as well as to society.

In Bangladesh, having a son is a blessing. Our parents think that the male child will serve them in the last stage of their life. The male child is warmly accepted as shield of the nation. Where male child is considered as a resource to their society and female child are considered at a risk. They are born with tensions and uncertainty. All the rules and regulations are for the woman. They cannot think freely. They cannot move freely. If they go somewhere, they should have the male guardian as a savior! Where society never thinks a woman exempt, how could we look about that society will assure freedom for women?

From the perspective of working-class women, the condition has not changed. As they are born to a lower financial class family, the family deliberates women as a burden. The society never considers women as a means of power. They are deprived of education due to their economic condition. The lower economic class parents also feel the pressure of society to a large extent. Their daughters are treated as more than products. The body of the lower economic class women is treated as easy to access. They do not have power and capital to protest against oppression. To their family and toward the world, women are undesired and meant to be subordinate.

Capitalism shows the world that women have got freedom. But the question is as a society never acknowledges women as a neutral entity, women are not free, how could we look forward that women are getting freedom? Where the problem is in practice, how could women get freedom?

A question was asked to working-class women. How do you spend your salary? Almost everyone said that they do not have access to the money. After getting the salary, they give it to their husband. Unfortunately, in which purpose the money is used, they do not even know that. If they ask them about the money, their husbands torture them. To the patriarchal society, men are not bound to give the answers. But women are questionable for their every movement. Women are working hard all day long for the money, but they do not have access to money. But to capitalism, it is a great achievement for women to get the opportunity to work outside of their household. Are they getting access to money or not? That is not the matter of consideration at all.

One of the respondents shared that "I have been working in the garments factory since 2013. I got married when I was 17 years. When I get married, everything was okay. After somedays, the condition had started to change. When I got my salary, he forced me to give all the money to him. At first, I said that I need some money for my need. So, I cannot give you all the money. He started to torture me. I gave all the money to him. My husband was a little bit addicted to drugs. When I asked him in which purpose are you spending the money? He started to torture me. I had tried to protest, but he behaved more arrogantly at that time. After that, I never asked him about this matter. Every day I go to work, spend almost all day in the workplace, return home with tension and anxiety". *(Source: Fieldwork, 2018).*

The woman does not have access to money they have earned. If they protest against this illegal behavior, their husband torments them. They are not allowed to say about their legal rights. Working-class women are forced to obey the rules that are structured by the patriarchal society. But unfortunately, civil society use the working-class women as a demo for women's

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freedom. It is shocking about the politics of women's freedom and the miserable condition of working-class women. Where the pattern of society has not changed, how could we hope that the situation will be non-persistent and women will get freedom??? The male partner is perceived as all in all and women as good for nothing, but civil society appreciates it as women's freedom.

d) Are the Women Born with Freedom?

"Man is defined as a human being and a woman as a female
Whenever she behaves as a human being
She is said to imitate the male."

— Simone de Beauvoir. (Beauvoir, 1963)

We always hear about women's freedom but not about men's freedom. What does it mean? Women are restrained from their birth, and men are free from their journey. If the comparison and domination are started from birth, how could we expect that women are getting freedom now? When the problem is in the structure of society, how could we define it as women's freedom? Someone perceives that women should work outside; someone consideres that women should stay at home. As if women are optional, they do not have any option to make the decision at all. The argument is given by Sherry Beth Ortner.

Ortner, in her article "Belief and the Problems of Women", initiated an influential and powerful framework for studying the problem of women's subordination through an analysis of gender symbolism, starting from the idea that biological differences between men and women take on significance only within culturally defined value systems, she located the problem of sexual asymmetry at the level of cultural ideologies and symbols.

She argued that all the cultures recognize and make a distinction between human society and the natural world. Culture attempts to control and transcend nature to use it for its purposes. Culture is therefore superior to the natural world and it seeks to mark out or 'socialize' nature to regulate and maintain relations between society and the forces and conditions of the environment. Ortner suggests that women are identified or symbolically associated with nature, while men are associated with culture (Moore, 1988: 13-15).

Working-class women who are contributing to the national economy, give service to the family, their appearance is unwanted. The male is recognized as the authority of society. What is about women? Capitalism uses the term to use women as their weapon to success. On the other hand, women are exploited by the structure of the patriarchal society as males are taking into consideration superior to women.

The question had asked to working-class women, does your husband take the permission while having sex? They feel shy to give the answer. Because in our society, women have no right to discuss sex. Women should have to be reserved. After some time, they said no. It is his right to have physical relations. Why will they ask for permission? The working-class women do not know they have right over their bodies. Society never gives the opportunity to think women as a distinct entity.

One of the respondents shared that, "I have been working since 2015. I got married when I was 17 years old. My husband also a garments worker. My husband takes all the decisions. He never asks me about anything. I also never think that I should know everything. As I am a woman. When he wanted to have physical relations, I never deny him. Because he is my husband. I should not refuse him, because Allah make men as superior. I should respect him. As I am a woman, I should take care of him; I should give the value to his feelings. Sometimes my body does not permit me to be in touch with him, but I have never told him no". *(Source: Fieldwork, 2018).*

According to the case study, it is perceived that the working-class woman does not know that they have an opinion while having physical relations. Society reminds women that you are created to serve men. Men are superior, and women are their servants. Women should be submissive to their husbands. Working-class women do not ponder of themselves as a neutral entity. They suffer a lot, but they never express. Because they know that their voice is not to be reached. Unfortunately, we define it as women's freedom.

e) Women Rights are Beyond Question

"I do not wish them [women] to have power over men; but over themselves."

— Mary Wollstonecraft, (Wollstonecraft,1792)

We always hear that we should make a better world for working-class women. We should ensure safety for them. We should be concerned about their rights. These words confined within the seminar, speech, and article. Even the working-class women do not know their issues are discussed in the seminar. The civil society confines within the media coverage and seminar. Working-class women did not get them when they were needed the most.

Firoj Ahmed described, "the women's freedom movement started to rescue women from all kinds of repression. But in the recent situations the working-class women did not get the leaders when they needed them. So, what does it mean by women's freedom? This question is important, indeed. Because women are women. They can belong to the upper, middle, or lower strata. Then, why did they differ about the working-class women? He described that maybe there are some NGOs which are working to improve the condition of women, but due to their limitations, they are not capable of reaching the majority of women. They are limited to

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the middle class. That's why working-class women may get economic freedom a little bit, but due to many reasons they are not being discussed n most of the writing (Ahmed. 2017).

A question was asked regarding women's freedom. What are the rights of women? They asked in reverse, what is the meaning of women's rights? Civil society is talking about women's freedom, where the working-class women do not know actually what the rights of women are!

One of my respondents told that "I got married at the age of 15. My husband is a rickshaw puller. My husband left me at the age of 19. He got married to another woman. Sometimes he came to the house. He used to torture me and daunted me that I will leave you forever. I could not say anything. Because the society will not accept a divorced woman. Women should maintain all things. Women should obey the rules of society. Otherwise, they will call me a bad woman! I never think that women have their rights. Women do not have any rights. Women are inferior to men. Because they are male members in society. I do not think that women have any right at all. *(Source: fieldwork, 2018).*

They do not even know the right of women. They are tortured by their husband. They accept it. The social norms and values are assigned to the women. We cannot avoid these structures. The reality is crude. We always hear that we should make a better world for working-class women. We should ensure safety for them. We should be concerned about their rights.

These ideas are limited within the seminar, speech, and article. The civil society is confined within the media coverage and seminar. Working-class women did not get them when they were needed the most.

f) Are Women Considered as Spineless Workers?

> "Capital is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks. The time during which the labourer works, is the time during which the capitalist consumes the labour-power he has purchased of him."
>
> — Karl Marx. (Marx, 1867)

Working-class women are working 12 hours to 14 hours a day. They are working hard all day long. Their services enrich the national economy. Unfortunately, their wages are unequal, their safety is questionable, and their rights are not reserved. Working-class women are considered as cheap labors.

Marx gave his capitalism theory in the 19th century. During the industrial revolution, European countries enhanced their power and production. But at the same time, the condition of laborers in their countries was not good at all. An that time, economist Adam Smith and sociologist Herbert Spencer claimed that according to the natural selection theory, the poor people are responsible for their miserable conditions. On the contrary, Marx argued that poor people are not responsible for their miserable conditions. Discrimination of economic resources distribution and a particular class who manipulate the whole production system is responsible for this class distinction. In this way, a particular class gains their capital, and the poor are getting poorer day by day (Smith, 2001).

The question was asked to working-class women, do you get equal wages as men? How is your working environment? They said, their working environment is not safe and secure. The wages are not equal to men. Sometimes they are harassed physically and mentally by the male partners and the office staff.

One of the respondents shared that "I have been working in the garments since 2014. Women are not equal in wages. Men are highly paid for the same work. Sometimes women are harassed by male workers or supervisors, but women cannot flourish it. One day I was proposed by my supervisor to be with him. I refused him. After that, he tried to make my image worse to the GM. Then he bound me to accept his proposal. Because in the garments factory, there is no guarantee of your job. Anytime you could be fired from your job. As the job is needed for me, I did not have any option. I feel ashamed of my behavior with him. And I am afraid. If my husband knows this matter, he will leave me. Because women's purity is very much important to their husbands as well as to society. *(Source: fieldwork, 2018).*

The concept of women's freedom contradicts this statement. Women are paid low, and they are sexually harassed by the male staff in their workplace. Where women do not protest against oppression due to the need for money, but civil society defined it as women's freedom.

g) Is Women's Freedom Concept for Freedom or Exploitation?

Working-class women have contributed to the national economy. At the same time, they are contributing to their family. But they do not get any recognition from their family. Because it is considered that this work is assigned to women.

Rahnuma Ahmed stated that in contemporary Bangladesh, more than three-quarters of the estimated three and a half million people who work in the RMG sector, which accounts for 75-80% of annual export earnings, consist of women. She described that in a poverty-stricken country like Bangladesh, women, as members, did not the access to resources or opportunities to improve their situation. Traditional norms dictated that women should reside under the tutelage of a male guardian. Still, these have been broken as families have increasingly allowed their daughters to migrate to cities, to share rooms with other female garment workers. Many women have become the principle earner in their families, it has helped boost their self-confidence, and it has empowered them to

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make decisions about how to spend their life. (Ahmed, 2011).

But there was a different view of their household. A question was asked to working-class women about this matter, about their activities and lifestyle. How do you manage your work as you work outside and at the household? Everyone said that we wake up early in the morning, go to the kitchen, prepare food for my family, and then go to the workplace. Does your husband cooperate with you? Almost everyone answer no. They said, this is my work as I am a woman. Male counterparts are not assigned for their work. Look at the patriarchal structure. They do not even know that there is any work called cooperation. They have accepted the myth that women have to tolerate pain. It is natural for them.

One of the respondents said that "I got married to a garments worker. She said that I wake up early in the morning to cook food, as he is also a garments worker. He should take rest. He works hard all day. I also do the same job. I work hard all day long. But household work is not for the male partner. If he goes to the kitchen, other male members will judge him as women. This work is for women. I never call him to cooperate with me. And he never comes to help me willingly. I never mind about this matter, as this work is for me. If he helps me, it is good. But if he does not help me, I am not bothered at all. Although it is not easy to maintain all the responsibilities altogether, I somehow manage it. *(Source: Fieldwork, 2018).*

Our patriarchal structure never gives a chance to women to think that work is not fixed. Men are busy proving themselves as superior and busy to do creative work in this world. As women's freedom concept is mostly based on economic solvency, women are not getting help in their household chores. This concept is designed to exploit women.

h) Women are Absent in Decision Making

"No man is good enough to govern any woman without her consent."

— Susan B. Anthony. (Anthony, 1881)

Md. Mehedi Hasan Sikdar described the socio-economic conditions of the garment's workers in Bangladesh. He recounts that the RMG industry do not welcome women to promote their conditions. They welcome women because these women have a great role in strengthening the RMG industry by the fact that poor unskilled women have few alternatives or/ and no better employment opportunities. He alludes that employers prefer female workers not only they are cheaper and abundantly available, but also because they are more vulnerable, docile, and manageable than male workers. Women are not suspected of protesting against injustice.

He also described that control over their earnings and a greater role in household decision - making is important measures of the economic empowerment of female workers. In Bangladesh, women's role in household decision-making is usually much more limited than men. He states that women are earning, but in the household, most of the decisions are taken by their male counterparts. They rely on their male partners for any kind of household matter. Apart they are being repressed in the working place, as opposed to they are not that much important to their family members (Sikdar, 2014).

Working-class women are the most important part of this society. Their voices never reached to us. Our patriarchal structure is, like those women cannot think anything out of it. Like a toy in a wrapped box.

A question was asked, who is the decision taker in your family? Everyone said that our husbands. Then, why are you absent in decision-taking? They replied that our husbands are enough to take every decision. That is why we never think about it. Do your husbands ask for your decision? Almost everyone said that no. But why? They replied, most probably, they do not feel the need to ask us.

One of the respondents shared her experiences. "I have been working since 2014. Now I got married when I was 15 years old. We are in Dhaka for our livelihood. I work hard all day in the garments. I come back home at night. My husband also comes back at night. Almost our every decision is taken by my husband. Because he is the only male member in our family. I never ask him any questions about it. I never think that I can have something to say. As I am a woman, I have never showed any interest in it. If I do bargain about any issue, the people will blame me that I am not an ideal wife. It will hurt him. And most importantly, what will I say? I obey his advice all the time as he is my husband. He deserves respect. And I try to show respect to him". *(Source: Fieldwork, 2018).*

These working-class women do not know that they have the right to make the decision. In the patriarchal social structure never allow them to think about it. They have grown up in a society where they have taught about to respect your male partner, to follow the rules of patriarchal society, to follow the advice of your partner as she is superior to you. But society have never taught women to respect themselves. They did not get the permission to think that you are a neutral entity, you have your vision, and you have your right to think about your life. Women always feel pressure to maintain their life not to live their life. Yes, it is a matter of survival.

Here patriarchal society takes the decision, capitalist society oppresses them in the name of freedom, and civil society is shouting that women are getting freedom. Working-class women do not feel that

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they have something to tell in decision taking. They have never felt like that. The society never gives them that chance to think like that. Their existence is always questionable to society. Then, it is questionable to say that women are getting freedom, women are not confined in their household anymore, and women are feeling better now.

But the study contradicts with this statement that if women have empowered them by working outside, why are they not a part of decision-taking? Why is their voice confined to themselves? Is it like they are dumb?

If they are not able to express their feelings, if they are not able to express her decisions, if they are denied from their rights, how could you define it as their progress? The question is on. They are not asked to give their decision at all. They do not get the floor to express themselves. Because the patriarchal society never feels that women have a neutral entity. The patriarchal society never considered women as human entity. They are never treated as life.

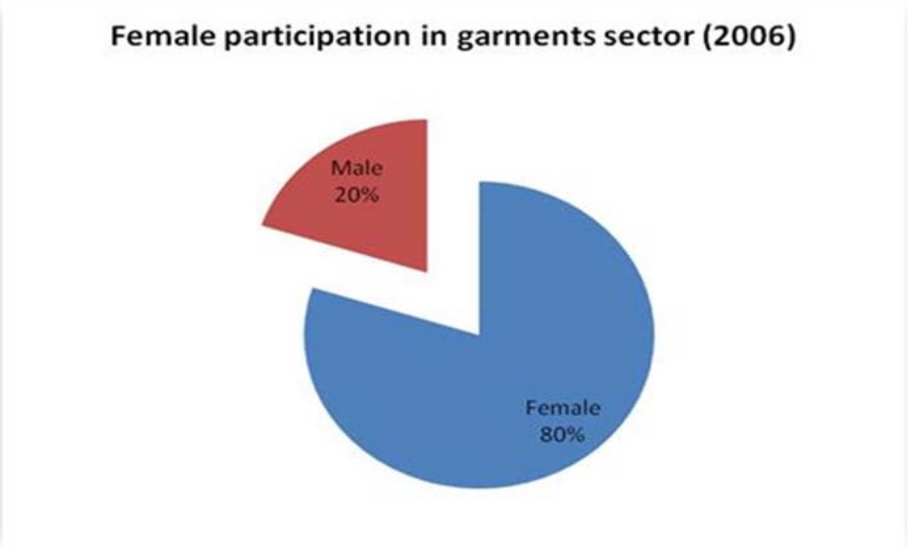
This is the reality we cannot think at all. But working-class women face it every day, every moment. They are treated as dumb to society. That is why, patriarchal society does not feel the urgency to listen to them. Capitalist society uses them their best as cheap laborers, and civil society defines their sufferings as women's freedom. But we never hear the real feelings or emotions at all. They are like a butterfly, but they do not have the wings to fly in the sky. But we define this butterfly as free who do not have the wings at all.

i) Women's Freedom Confines Within civil society

It's in the reach of my arms
The span of my hips,
The stride of my step,
The curl of my lips.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.
MAYA

— Maya Angelou, (Angelou, 1995)

World Bank President Jim Yong Kim has hailed Bangladesh's efforts to integrate more women in the workforce and singled it out as an example to emphasize the need for investing more in women to spur growth. "Countries such as Bangladesh are encouraging female participation in the workforce. If they [Bangladesh] stay on track, their female workforce will grow from 34 to 82 percent over the next decade, adding 1.8 percentage points to their GDP (Byron, 2015).



Source: World Development Report, 2016, ADB, 2015

Figure 1: Women participation in the garments sector in 2006

Unfortunately, working-class women are achieving progress on TV, newspaper, report, seminar, articles etc. Their arguments like women involve themselves in paid works. Do they get their legal wage in the workplace? Are they feeling safe in their workplace? It is not a matter of consideration at all. They are busy with percentages; they are busy with numbers. Bangladesh is ahead of India, where women account for 27 percent of the total labor force, and Pakistan, whose female labor participation rate is 25 percent. Nepal has the highest female labor participation rate of 80 percent, according to the World Bank. The growing women empowerment is also evident in the fact that Bangladesh has the thir-highest number of female lawmakers among the SAARC countries (Byron, 2015).

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While conducting research, a question was asked, do you ever find someone who came to talk about women's rights? They replied that some women came to our garment factory, and requested us to go a campaign. But actually, we did not know what that was. They promised us to give money. But they did not maintain it at all. They did not pay the promised amount.

One of the respondents shared her views that "I have been working since 2014. I got married at the age of 19. My husband is also a garment worker. Our working environment is not good at all. Sometimes our women are harassed by the supervisor and male workers. But we never protest against the domination. Sometimes we are invited from different organizations to go to the campaign. Sometimes we are offered by food; sometimes we are offered by money to join with them. We go to the campaign with our friends who are working there. We wait there until the program, is over. Sometimes it is painful to stand for a long time. But we are ordered by our leader to do it. After completion of the program we come back to home. Sometimes our leader does not provide us with the proposed money. But we cannot protest against it. *(Source: fieldwork, 2018).*

The working-class women are used by the civil society to come in the limelight. Where is the benefit of working-class women? They do not have an education, they do not have the capital to survive, and they do not have the concept of women's freedom at all. They only know how to live. That is the perception of life to them. But, in the context of Bangladesh, we have seen that the civil society and capitalist society claim it as women's freedom. They claim it as a movement towards women's freedom.

Working-class women participate in the program, but the maximum of them do not know that they are here for their rights, for their freedom. Working-class women may not get their rights or freedom, but civil society will get the title of social worker; capitalism will get the capital, and patriarchal society will get the weapon to dominate women. Working-class women will never know that they are sold in the market, but they do not even know about it.

j) Women's Freedom is in the Stomach of Capitalism

> The history of men's opposition to women's emancipation is more interesting perhaps than the story of that emancipation itself."
>
> — Virginia Woolf, (Woolf, 1935)

Emilie Schultze stated that women's integration in the garment factories had played a crucial role. Factory owners have been taken advantage of women's unequal position in society to form an even cheaper, more docile, and flexible workforce. So, rather than challenge their subordination in society, work in the garment industry is reproducing it. Women tend to earn significantly less than men, they face systematic discrimination, and they are only able to access the lowest-paid jobs with very poor prospects for promotion. Many of them have low work security, and if they are not prepared to work on the terms set out by their employers, they run the risk of losing their jobs (Schultze, 2014).

Working-class women are afraid of losing their job. Because working class women belong to the lower strata in our country. They are paid for the lowest work because they are considered as a burden, not as a labor force. If they are considered as labor force, they will get an equal wage at the workplace. But they are deprived of every kind of facility as they are felt like a burden. Working-class women are getting access to the garments industry as they are cheap labor. Capitalism uses women as their weapon to acquire capital. We know it as freedom of women.

These arguments have given by Michel Foucault in his theory of the docile body. The docile body is "something that can be made; out of a formless clay, an inapt body the machine required can be constructed." The words Foucault further uses to describe this body cast it as unformed and willing to be shaped: it is "pliable," capable of being "manipulated, shaped, trained" (Foucault, 1975).

Capitalism uses hungry women because they are easy to catch. They are easy to manipulate. In the context of Bangladesh, the socio-economic condition of women is miserable. The patriarchal society never recognizes women as equal. Working-class women belong to the lower strata of society. They do not have the bone to protest against the oppression. They will never leave the job because there has no option for them.

k) Dilemma in the Universal Definition of Women's Freedom

> "There will be no mass-based feminist movement as long as feminist ideas are understood only by a well-educated few."
>
> — Bell Hooks, (Hooks, 1984)

Women are different in their way of thinking. They are different because of the social structure, cultural structure, norms, values, and socio-economic conditions. The variation is visible in their activities and their habit. The socio-economic and cultural boundary has made a difference among women. How could we say that women are getting freedom? We should have to be concerned about the differences among women. This concept of women's freedom has made contradictions among different classes of women. The class structure is different, but the concept is one. Is it possible?

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In the context of Bangladesh, working-class women belong to the lower strata of society. Their lifestyle is different than any other class of women. Is the women's freedom concept applicable to them? Their socio-economic and cultural conditions do not permit me to think that they are onward to freedom. Then, when we talk about women's freedom, we have to be sure that it is applicable to all classes of women. This concept has created confusion in their life. That is why their working outside is counted as a great achievement towards women's freedom. This has enhanced the domination of women. It has created a foggy environment for women.

This idea is given by Michel Foucault in his theory of discourse. Discourse, as defined by Foucault, refers to ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity, and power relations which inhere in such knowledge and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning (Adams, 2017).

This concept has served power for women. In the context of Bangladesh, working-class women are working outside to fulfill their hunger. But civil society takes it as their great achievement towards women's freedom. Because civil society knows it very well that working-class women will never understand about this matter. Working-class women will never get the point that they are sold in the market. At the same time, capitalism has used them as their weapon to become successful.

I) Contradiction Between Women's Freedom and Social Structure of Bangladesh

To ensure freedom for the women, we should have to change the social structure at first. According to our social structure, women are considered as an ideal wives, mothers, sisters, and daughter. The parameter of ideal women has been fixed by society. Women are dedicatedly trying to fulfill the criteria of ideal women. But why the ideal men concept is not used in our society. Because it is perceived that men are ideal from their birth. In our society, women's purity is very much important. Impure women are stigmatized in our society. But what is about the male? Does he not need purity? Yes, the male is pure all the time. They are the symbol of purity. Male is not questionable in our social structure.

In our social structure, women are anticipated as the companion of men. Women are never treated as a neutral entity. Women are working hard to maintain the family. But it never recognizes as work. It is perceived as the responsibility of women. It is also thought that women are born to do this job. Women are made for household work. They are perfect as an ideal housewife. In the recent context, women are engaging with outside works. They are participating with the male at their workplace. They are earning money. It is true. But does is mean that they are getting freedom? The question is knocking at the conscience. Is women's freedom for our social structure or outside the social structure?

If we look at the working-class women who are working in the garments industry, is the picture different? No, the picture is still the same. Our social structure is not in favor of women, but we think about women's freedom.

Nazila Kibria stated that in Bangladesh, relatively low rates of women's participation in wage employment have traditionally been understood as a reflection of cultural factors unfavorable to such participation. Recent developments, however, challenge the notion that women in Bangladesh, whether due to cultural or other factors, are disinclined to enter the wage labor market. Since the 1980s, an export-based garments industry has mushroomed in Bangladesh. Perhaps the most notable feature of this industry is its heavy use of women workers; an estimated 70-80 percent of those employed in the industry are women. For these women, garments work is a way to enhance personal and household economic resources. It is also a way to gain a measure of economic and social independence (Kibria, 1998).

This statement contradicts with our existing social structure. Working-class women are working for survival. Their economic earning can never define their economic or social independence. The social structure does not recognize the women as a neutral entity, how could one define it as women's freedom? Working class women are working for their needs. When we define it as the parameter of women's freedom, we should be concerned about our social structure. Their existence is in a question, but we know it as women's freedom. Unfortunately, they do not have any idea about women's freedom.

Our social structure is patriarchal. Our economic condition does not allow the working-class to think about freedom. They come back home at night with the tension of food. Working-class women need food, not freedom. Please do not make any more sarcasm about their life. They also have life to survive. Do not bother them with your ideas. Civil society, you know it very well that it is not possible for working-class women to have the taste of freedom. They can only be the Guinea pig- the ultimate exploited part of our country.

IV. Conclusion

A woman as a human being has the right to choose for herself in which way, she wants to live her life. But from the perspective of working-class women, these are the words like pouring something into nothing. To the patriarchal society, women are an unnecessary creature of god. Women are treated in our society as mostly unwanted. They are considered as burden for the family as well as for society. Their existence has no

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meaning to the patriarchal society. Their entity is defined as bare life. As the research has revealed, women have faced disparity in their every sphere of life.

In the context of Bangladesh, the socio-economic condition of women is not well enough. The women are always in question by their male counterparts. They are tortured by the social structure. Our society is disheartening to the women's neutral entity. Our patriarchal society is reluctant to give the rights which a woman deserves as a human being. That is why it sounds ridiculous the women's freedom in the context of Bangladesh. The civil society and capitalism have made a sarcasm that as women participate in the outside work, they are onward to freedom. It is a great acquisition for women. But this study has brought to light that this is a great achievement for the patriarchal society and capitalism and the civil society.

How much the women are tortured, the best example is the working-class women. Working-class women are working in the garments industry for 12-14 hours in a day. And the reason behind it that they are not figuring it out as a tool of getting freedom. They are doing it to survive in this world. They need food for their survival. They are working hard all day long in the garments industry to feed their family members. Besides, the domination of patriarchal society has not stopped.

They are being excruciated in their household, they are taken up by capitalism, they are deprived of equal wages, and civil society has taken advantage of them as their stair to be triumphant. But we know it as women's freedom. Is it freedom?

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