

”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.

Index terms— women’s freedom, economic freedom, working-class women, patriarchal society.

1 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

4 B) DOES ECONOMIC FREEDOM TO EARN MONEY ENSURE

44 sexually grinding by their male staff or others in their workplace. Because women treat as a body, not as human
45 being. They have to maintain their household along. Because in Bangladesh, patriarchal society contemplates
46 that the household works are only for women. It is their responsibility to maintain household chores. Then,
47 where is women's freedom? Does it exist? II.

48 2 Methodology

49 For assessing the problem regarding women's freedom concept, a survey has conducted at Mirpur-10 in Dhaka
50 city. The Capital of Bangladesh, Dhaka, has been selected as a field. Because there are many garments factories
51 that flourish in Dhaka in recent years. The survey covered total of 40 respondents who are working-class women,
52 and their age limit was 15-27. This research has used a qualitative method to collect data. The qualitative
53 method is effective in identifying factors, like socioeconomic conditions, gender roles, social norms, ethnicity,
54 and religion. It is also useful to find out the human contradictory behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and
55 relationships of the individual.

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

60 3 III.

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

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

69 One of the respondents said that, "women should obey the rules of their husbands. Because he might take
70 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
71 husband. He does not need to take permission while having physical relations. It is his right. I do not think that
72 I should restrict him. Because, it is normal for a woman to allow her husband whenever he wanted to do it. I
73 give my salary to my husband, and he uses it in his way. I don't think that I should interfere with this matter.
74 A woman should have to be silent about all matters. It is not good for a woman to interfere in every sphere.
75 (Source: Fieldwork, 2018).

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

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

81 4 b) Does Economic Freedom to Earn Money Ensure

82 Women's Freedom?

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

84 -Amartya Sen. (Sen, 1999) This research could not fully agree with the statement of Steinem. We always hear
85 that women are getting freedom. They are getting engaged in paid works. They are participating in outside
86 activities. The question is, does economic freedom to earn money to ensure women's freedom? Swapna Majumdar
87 described the economic contribution of women in society. Her argument was like "the women are bound neither
88 for school nor college. They are off to work. She describes that women's presence is a huge achievement in
89 a country where women's visibility is extremely low. She states that over 1.3 million women may spend their
90 days bent over whirring sewing machines, and their income and independence has triggered a silent revolution
91 among them. Women say they are no longer content to live a life of anonymity behind their purdahs, or veils"
92 (Majumdar, 2002).

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

96 One of the informants said that "I have started to work in the garments because my family was not able to
97 bear my expenses. I do not have any option to survive. I needed the job for my survival. My husband left me
98 when I was 22 years old. Already I had a baby girl. I felt helpless when he left me. Sometimes he tortured me.
99 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,
100 he will leave me. Then what will happen to me? But at last, he left me. I could not say anything. I started to
101 work with full effort. In the meantime, one of our supervisors harassed me. I could not protest against him as I
102 did not have any option. I could not leave the job. Already I have a baby girl. I have to think about her future.

103 In this society, every liability goes to women, not for the person who is responsible for it". (Source: Fieldwork,
104 2018).

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

108 The research does not argue that woman visibility is not rising. But the matter is that woman visibility at
109 the workplace can't give her freedom. Capitalism gives women easy access to the garments industry because
110 capitalism knows that they will never protest against exploitation. Working-class women are working to support
111 their family, to feed their children, to survive in the world. Women are working outside, but the structure of our
112 society is not changing. Working -class women are deprived of equal wages in their workplace and are exploited
113 in their households. Then how does economic solvency define as women's freedom? c) Is Woman a Neutral
114 Entity? "I am no bird; and no net ensnares me; I am a free human being with an independent will." —Charlotte
115 Brontë. (Brontë, 1847) Somehow the quote of the English novelist is not true for the working-class women in
116 Bangladesh. They are never thought of as human being at all. The society has always treated women as a burden
117 or unnecessary creation of god.

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

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

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

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

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

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

153 One of the respondents shared that "I have been working in the garments factory since 2013. I got married
154 when I was 17 years. When I get married, everything was okay. After some days, the condition had started to
155 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
156 for my need. So, I cannot give you all the money. He started to torture me. I gave all the money to him. My
157 husband was a little bit addicted to drugs. When I asked him in which purpose are you spending the money? He
158 started to torture me. I had tried to protest, but he behaved more arrogantly at that time. After that, I never
159 asked him about this matter. Every day I go to work, spend almost all day in the workplace, return home with
160 tension and anxiety". (Source: Fieldwork, 2018).

161 The woman does not have access to money they have earned. If they protest against this illegal behavior,
162 their husband torments them. They are not allowed to say about their legal rights. Working-class women are
163 forced to obey the rules that are structured by the patriarchal society. But unfortunately, civil society use the
164 working-class women as a demo for women's freedom. (Source: Fieldwork, 2018)

165 freedom. It is shocking about the politics of women's freedom and the miserable condition of working-class

5 D) ARE THE WOMEN BORN WITH FREEDOM?

166 women. Where the pattern of society has not changed, how could we hope that the situation will be nonpersistent
167 and women will get freedom??? The male partner is perceived as all in all and women as good for nothing, but
168 civil society appreciates it as women's freedom.

169 5 d) Are the Women Born with Freedom?

170 "Man is defined as a human being and a woman as a female Whenever she behaves as a human being She is said
171 to imitate the male." -Simone de Beauvoir. (Beauvoir, 1963) We always hear about women's freedom but not
172 about men's freedom. What does it mean? Women are restrained from their birth, and men are free from their
173 journey. If the comparison and domination are started from birth, how could we expect that women are getting
174 freedom now? When the problem is in the structure of society, how could we define it as women's freedom?
175 Someone perceives that women should work outside; someone considers that women should stay at home. As if
176 women are optional, they do not have any option to make the decision at all. The argument is given by Sherry
177 Beth Ortner.

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

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

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

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

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

202 According to the case study, it is perceived that the working-class woman does not know that they have an
203 opinion while having physical relations. Society reminds women that you are created to serve men. Men are
204 superior, and women are their servants. Women should be submissive to their husbands. Working-class women
205 do not ponder of themselves as a neutral entity. They suffer a lot, but they never express. Because they know
206 that their voice is not to be reached. Unfortunately, we define it as women's freedom. e) Women Rights are
207 Beyond Question "I do not wish them [women] to have power over men; but over themselves."

208 -Mary Wollstonecraft, ??Wollstonecraft,1792) We always hear that we should make a better world for working-
209 class women. We should ensure safety for them. We should be concerned about their rights. These words confined
210 within the seminar, speech, and article. Even the working-class women do not know their issues are discussed
211 in the seminar. The civil society confines within the media coverage and seminar. Working-class women did not
212 get them when they were needed the most. Firoj Ahmed described, "the women's freedom movement started to
213 rescue women from all kinds of repression. But in the recent situations the working-class women did not get the
214 leaders when they needed them. So, what does it mean by women's freedom? This question is important, indeed.
215 Because women are women. They can belong to the upper, middle, or lower strata. Then, why did they differ
216 about the working-class women? He described that maybe there are some NGOs which are working to improve
217 the condition of women, but due to their limitations, they are not capable of reaching the majority of women.
218 They are limited to get economic freedom a little bit, but due to many reasons they are not being discussed n
219 most of the writing (Ahmed. 2017).

220 A question was asked regarding women's freedom. What are the rights of women? They asked in reverse,
221 what is the meaning of women's rights? Civil society is talking about women's freedom, where the working-class
222 women do not know actually what the rights of women are! One of my respondents told that "I got married at
223 the age of 15. My husband is a rickshaw puller. My husband left me at the age of 19. He got married to another
224 woman. Sometimes he came to the house. He used to torture me and daunted me that I will leave you forever.
225 I could not say anything. Because the society will not accept a divorced woman. Women should maintain all
226 things. Women should obey the rules of society. Otherwise, they will call me a bad woman! I never think that

227 women have their rights. Women do not have any rights. Women are inferior to men. Because they are male
228 members in society. I do not think that women have any right at all. (Source: fieldwork, 2018).

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

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

235 6 f) Are Women Considered as Spineless Workers?

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

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

242 Marx gave his capitalism theory in the 19 th century. During the industrial revolution, European countries
243 enhanced their power and production. But at the same time, the condition of laborers in their countries was not
244 good at all. An that time, economist Adam Smith and sociologist Herbert Spencer claimed that according to the
245 natural selection theory, the poor people are responsible for their miserable conditions.

246 On the contrary, Marx argued that poor people are not responsible for their miserable conditions. Discrimi-
247 nation of economic resources distribution and a particular class who manipulate the whole production system is
248 responsible for this class distinction. In this way, a particular class gains their capital, and the poor are getting
249 poorer day by day (Smith, 2001).

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

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

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

264 7 g) Is Women's Freedom Concept for Freedom or

265 Exploitation?

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

269 Rahnuma Ahmed stated that in contemporary Bangladesh, more than three-quarters of the estimated three
270 and a half million people who work in the RMG sector, which accounts for 75-80% of annual export earnings,
271 consist of women. She described that in a poverty-stricken country like Bangladesh, women, as members, did
272 not the access to resources or opportunities to improve their situation. Traditional norms dictated that women
273 should reside under the tutelage of a male guardian. Still, these have been broken as families have increasingly
274 allowed their daughters to migrate to cities, to share rooms with other female garment workers. Many women
275 have become the principle earner in their families, it has helped boost their self-confidence, and it has empowered
276 them to "Is Women's Freedom a Myth or Reality"? The Context of Working-Class Women in Bangladesh the
277 middle class. That's why working-class women may make decisions about how to spend their life. (Ahmed,
278 2011).

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

286 One of the respondents said that "I got married to a garments worker. She said that I wake up early in the
287 morning to cook food, as he is also a garments worker. He should take rest. He works hard all day. I also do the
288 same job. I work hard all day long. But household work is not for the male partner. If he goes to the kitchen,
289 other male members will judge him as women. This work is for women. I never call him to cooperate with me.
290 And he never comes to help me willingly. I never mind about this matter, as this work is for me. If he helps
291 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
292 responsibilities altogether, I somehow manage it. (Source: Fieldwork, 2018).

293 Our patriarchal structure never gives a chance to women to think that work is not fixed. Men are busy
294 proving themselves as superior and busy to do creative work in this world. As women's freedom concept is
295 mostly based on economic solvency, women are not getting help in their household chores. This concept is
296 designed to exploit women. Md. Mehedi Hasan Sikdar described the socioeconomic conditions of the garment's
297 workers in Bangladesh. He recounts that the RMG industry do not welcome women to promote their conditions.
298 They welcome women because these women have a great role in strengthening the RMG industry by the fact
299 that poor unskilled women have few alternatives or/ and no better employment opportunities. He alludes that
300 employers prefer female workers not only they are cheaper and abundantly available, but also because they are
301 more vulnerable, docile, and manageable than male workers. Women are not suspected of protesting against
302 injustice.

303 8 h) Women are Absent in Decision Making

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

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

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

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

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

330 Here patriarchal society takes the decision, capitalist society oppresses them in the name of freedom, and civil
331 society is shouting that women are getting freedom. Working-class women do not feel that never felt like that.
332 The society never gives them that chance to think like that. Their existence is always questionable to society.
333 Then, it is questionable to say that women are getting freedom, women are not confined in their household
334 anymore, and women are feeling better now.

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

337 If they are not able to express their feelings, if they are not able to express her decisions, if they are denied
338 from their rights, how could you define it as their progress? The question is on. They are not asked to give
339 their decision at all. They do not get the floor to express themselves. Because the patriarchal society never feels
340 that women have a neutral entity. The patriarchal society never considered women as human entity. They are
341 never treated as life. This is the reality we cannot think at all. But working-class women face it every day, every
342 moment. They are treated as dumb to society. That is why, patriarchal society does not feel the urgency to
343 listen to them. Capitalist society uses them their best as cheap laborers, and civil society defines their sufferings
344 as women's freedom. But we never hear the real feelings or emotions at all. They are like a butterfly, but they
345 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.
346 World Bank President Jim Yong Kim has hailed Bangladesh's efforts to integrate more women in the workforce
347 and singled it out as an example to emphasize the need for investing more in women to spur growth. "Countries

348 such as Bangladesh are encouraging female participation in the workforce. If they [Bangladesh] stay on track,
349 their female workforce will grow from 34 to 82 percent over the next decade, adding 1.8 percentage points to
350 their GDP (Byron, 2015). "Is Women's Freedom a Myth or Reality"? The Context of Working-Class Women in
351 Bangladesh they have something to tell in decision taking. They have Bangladesh has the thir-highest number
352 of female lawmakers among the SAARC countries (Byron, 2015).

353 **9 i) Women's Freedom Confines Within civil society**

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

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

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

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

376 **10 j) Women's Freedom is in the Stomach of Capitalism**

377 The history of men's opposition to women's emancipation is more interesting perhaps than the story of that
378 emancipation itself."

379 -Virginia Woolf, (Woolf, 1935) Emilie Schultze stated that women's integration in the garment factories had
380 played a crucial role. Factory owners have been taken advantage of women's unequal position in society to form
381 an even cheaper, more docile, and flexible workforce. So, rather than challenge their subordination in society,
382 work in the garment industry is reproducing it. Women tend to earn significantly less than men, they face
383 systematic discrimination, and they are only able to access the lowest-paid jobs with very poor prospects for
384 promotion. Many of them have low work security, and if they are not prepared to work on the terms set out by
385 their employers, they run the risk of losing their jobs (Schultze, 2014).

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

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

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

400 **11 k) Dilemma in the Universal Definition of Women's**

401 Freedom "There will be no mass-based feminist movement as long as feminist ideas are understood only by a
402 well-educated few."

403 -Bell Hooks, (Hooks, 1984) Women are different in their way of thinking. They are different because of the
404 social structure, cultural structure, norms, values, and socio-economic conditions. The variation is visible in their
405 activities and their habit. The socio-economic and cultural boundary has made a difference among women. How
406 could we say that women are getting freedom? We should have to be concerned about the differences among

407 women. This concept of women's freedom has made contradictions among different classes of women. The class
408 structure is different, but the concept is one. Is it possible?

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

415 This idea is given by Michel Foucault in his theory of discourse. Discourse, as defined by Foucault, refers to
416 ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity, and power relations which
417 inhere in such knowledge and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing
418 meaning (Adams, 2017). This concept has served power for women. In the context of Bangladesh, working-class
419 women are working outside to fulfill their hunger. But civil society takes it as their great achievement towards
420 women's freedom. Because civil society knows it very well that working-class women will never understand about
421 this matter. Working-class women will never get the point that they are sold in the market. At the same time,
422 capitalism has used them as their weapon to become successful.

423 12 1) Contradiction Between Women's Freedom and Social 424 Structure of Bangladesh

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

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

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

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

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

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

460 IV.

461 13 Conclusion

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

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

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

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

480 They are being excruciated in their household, they are taken up by capitalism, they are deprived of equal
481 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? ^{1 2}

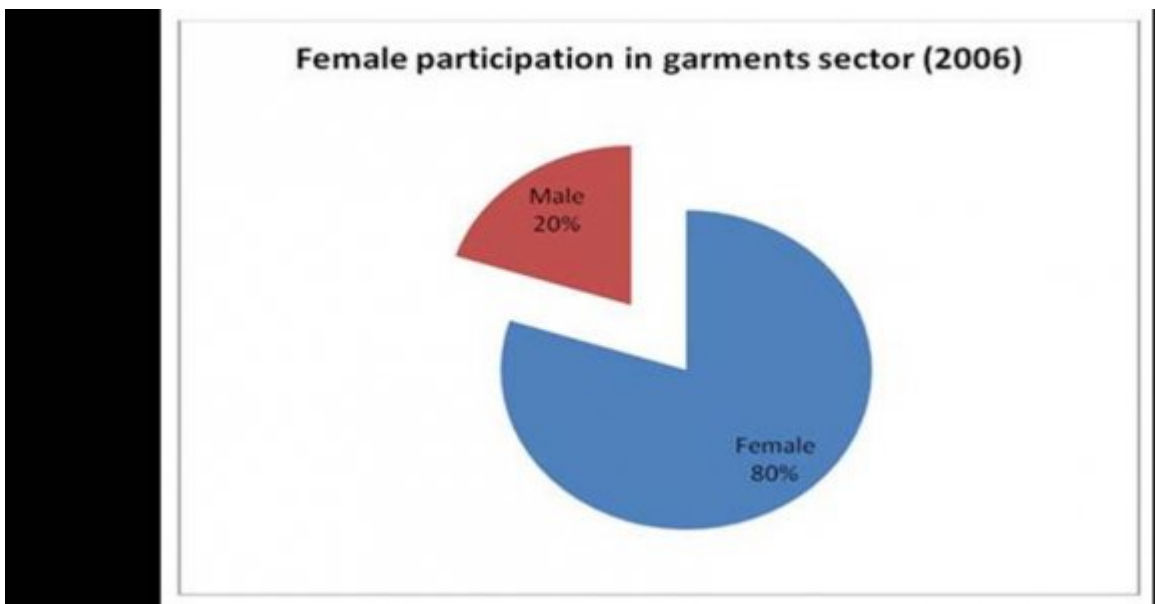


Figure 1: ”

-Virginia Woolf. (Wolf, 1935)

Figure 2:

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²"Is Women's Freedom a Myth or Reality"? The Context of Working-Class Women in Bangladesh

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