

Sexuality and Women Subordination: Global and Local Perspectives

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Introduction

Women's sexuality and subordination are historical phenomena which have been widely analyzed in anthropology and social science literatures. Although it is women's matter, it's dimension includes males' interference, influence and control throughout societies, cultures and time. The focus of this paper is to explain women's sexuality and the pattern of it's control in anthropological perspective. This paper is presented in two sections. Women's sexuality and it's relation to the subordination of women in society have been analyzed in the first section. Then, in the second section, the patterns of women's sexuality and subordination in the society in Bangladesh have been discussed.

Sexuality and Women Suppression across the World:

Foucault's explanation on sexuality helps us to understand how sexuality is a matter of discourse and governmentality. It is a matter of governmentality because sexuality involves into body politics - the ways of conducting ourselves, the relationship we have with our own bodies and the other bodies that constitute society. He says sexuality comprises a set of practices, behaviors, rules and knowledge by which we produce ourselves and we know ethical, social and juridical subjects and links between the levels of state and global politics as well as the level of individuals in every range of life. (Danaher, Schirato and Webb, 2001, 136). Sexuality is theological, political and economic phenomenon and it is linked with the particular mode of production. The discourse of sexuality changes in progression, so it is not static or true (Foucault, 1978). Different political and economic pattern defines the discourse in favor of their goal. He argues since seventeenth century bourgeoisies confined sex carefully and it moved into the home. A single focus of sexuality was acknowledged in social space as well as the heart of

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every household. In Victorian age, to talk about sex is related to sin and one type of sexual practices are prescribed. These practices are circulated to the population by languages. People (especially women) who involve into the forbidden sex are sent to the prostitution. These sexual related rules, regulations and knowledge subjected people. He says *...at the heart of this economic and political problem was sex. It was necessary to analyze the birth rate, the age of marriage, the legitimate and illegitimate births, the precocity and the frequency of the sexual relations, the ways of making them fertile and sterile, the effects of unmarried life or the prohibitions, the impact of contraceptive practices...* (Rabinow, 1991, 307, 308)

Foucault's argument leads us to realize the social system is not static or true rather a technique of ruling people. Different political and economic system develops different rules to control sexuality for governing the people. Different feminists also criticize the social system because they believe the root of women's suppression is totally social and ideological although often people interpret women subordination with their biology. The liberal feminist school of thought explains women subordination is rooted in a set of customary and legal constraints that block women's entrance and success in the so-called public world. Because society has the false belief, by nature women are, less intellectually and physically capable than men, it excludes women from the academy, the forum, and the marketplace. As a result of this policy of exclusion, the potentiality of many women goes unfulfilled. So they argue the rules of the game would be fair to stop women subordination. Marxist feminist's school of thought thinks it is impossible for anyone, especially women, to obtain genuine equal opportunity in a class society where the wealth produced by the powerless many ends up in the hands of the powerful few (Tong, 1989: 2). They argue subordination has a long history. In that case they rely on Engel's explanations of "the world historical defeat of female sex." In his book *The origin of the family private property and the state*, Engels explains in what context female sex has been defeated. He illustrates

different stages of the society and the different stages of families that are formulated based on different types of sexuality discourses. In this case, he relies on the extensive research and writing of First American Anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan. He becomes fascinated by human kinship labeling systems around the world. He links differing terminology system to evolutionary stages of human kind which is evolved according to the evolution of the family. In his book "The Ancient Society" he narrates five types of family which are based on five types of sexuality discourses. The Consanguine Family: The sexuality practices within marriage. The pattern of marriage was intermarriage of brothers and sisters in a group. Next stage of the family is Punaluan Family: rules were the intermarriage of several brothers to each other's wives in a group; and several sisters to each other's husbands in a group. But the term, brother, included the first, second, third and even more remote male cousins, all considered own brothers, sister meaning also like brother. The third stage is Syndyasmian Family: it was founded upon the pairing of a male with a female under the form of a marriage but without an exclusive cohabitation. Divorce or separation was at the option both husband and wife. The form of the family failed to create a system of consanguinity. Next is the patriarchal family: the system was marriage of one man to several wives. Especially the chiefs and principal men of the system practiced polygamy. The last stage of family is the monogamous family: the marriage of one man with one woman, with an exclusive cohabitation (Morgan, 1964). Marx and Engels associates these social-level stages to particular modes of production and to an originally egalitarian social structure that tipped to male dominance with the emergence of private property and institutionalized social stratification (Leonardo : 1991:11).

Engels argues how the commodity production and sexual division of labour in Greece originates the new type property accumulation. Women's subordination to men, the development of the family as an autonomous economic unit and monogamous marriage are all related to the development of private ownership of means of the production. His principle point is that in the absence of private property,

women's and men's work are of equal social value and worth, their domains might have been separate, but this did not mean that one was more highly valued than the others. He concerns with link changes in family form and gender relation to changes in material conditions. He argues the domestication of animal and the development of the agriculture led to the possibility of surplus and to the necessity of controlling the productive property which created the surplus. This productive property was concentrated in the hands of men as the consequence of the natural division of labour. The final death of the collective economic unit and the subsequent rise of monogamous family were due to their genetic offspring and hence the importance of monogamous marriage, which guarantees the paternity of children. Men have scope to sex with women within and out of marriage system but women lose the freedom (Engels, 1942). Marxist feminist claims with Engels that women's oppression originates in the introduction of private property and the non-ownership of means of production. Engels' explanation about women subordination is criticized due to apply the comparative method and generalizes all societies. Feminist anthropologists argue with ethnographical evidences that women do not have the well status of all egalitarian societies. Women in some South American horticulture groups have experience the threat of gang rape. Simply too many 'primitive' women have experience extreme exploitation and oppression at the hands of men (Leonardo, 1991: 15). Here radical feminist thought is relevant to understand the reasons of women oppression because they have explicitly articulated, the ways, in which men have constructed female sexuality to serve not women's but men's need, wants and interests which subordinate women. Pornography, prostitution, sexual harassment, rape, woman battering, foot binding, suttee, purdah, clitoridectomy, witch-burning are the vivid examples of control women sexuality (Tong, 1989, 5, 7).

Meillassoux explanation on reproduction also tells us women sexuality is the subject of control. He argues why control of women reproduction was important for sustaining of domestic community.

For him, control of means of production is less important than control of means of reproduction. He argues three factors which determine social reproduction: foods, seeds and women which are controlled by the male elders of specific domestic unit. He analyzes the working of social relation of production within "domestic community" engaged in subsistence agricultural production which is made of a number of separate "domestic units" which are the basic working cells of society. These are patrilineal and patrilocal. The elder males control their wives, daughters and also young men and their labour because the elder males supply young men's wives and goods for bride wealth payment (Moore, 1988:50). Social relation organizes the means because these are the relations of production of society. Women do not have control on their reproduction. It is a matter of society because by giving birth women not only reproduce the offspring but also labour. Many rules and regulations are developed to control women fertility. Women are controlled by men as long as they are fertile. He argues, "*Women subordination makes them susceptible to two different kinds of exploitation- the exploitation of their labour in that they lose their claim to their produce, which is handed over to their husbands who take control of it or pass it on to the elder and is never returned to them in its entirety: and the exploitation of her reproductive capacities, mostly filiation is always established through men*" (Meillassoux, 1981: 77). His arguments connect women and social relation of production central to an understanding of social continuity and development but his arguments was extensively criticized by the feminist anthropologists. They argue Meillassoux's explanation of women could not analysis women's subordination. He assumes that this subordination is an established and unproblematic state of affairs which does not require further specification and analysis. He treats women as a homogenous category (Moor, 1988:50). Here Mohanty's Explanation is important since she wants to uncover the material and ideological specificities that constitute a particular group of women as powerless in particular context. She distinguishes the platform of third world women from western women because the contexts of subordination of two different groups are not similar. Third world

women's suppressions are vast than western women. Western women suppression is sex and class based in where third world women go through the diversified oppressions: sex, class, race and colony (Mohanty, 1991)

Many writers (Anandi, Lata Moni, Spivak, Mohanty, Debali) are very much critical about the construction of women sexuality during colonial emperor. They argue women sexuality shape and reshape with different movement in the guise of human right, paradigm also shifted but shift occurred under patriarchy. Debali depicts how women's ways of lives in India shape by different agendas. She situates the discussions in a historical continuum. The women issues got importance in India's transition to modernity. It emerged in the nineteenth century in response to colonial censure of Hindu social and cultural practices. The Hindu women caught in colonization discourses of imperial superiority. Many oriental discourses developed regarding women ways of lives. William Jones, N D Halhed, James Mill in their writings furnished an ethical ground of expansion colonialism. The white man was the obligated to save "the brown women from brown men" (Spivak). The Hindu women were oppressed by their tradition of *satidaha* or widow burning. The colonizer intervened their practices and reached their private lives in the name of women wellbeing and legitimated them. Debali says, it was not western liberalism rather rationalist strand on Indian tradition that insisted on a revision and modernization conventions relating women. Lata moni mentions *in the context of the ban on satidaha that the anxiety was not so much about women as it was about civilization, religion and culture. Love, intimacy and women's lives are subjects of intellectual debates conducted entirely in the idiom of religion in the public sphere which is dominated by men* (Mokherjea, 2003). Anandi also concludes by examining different group's arguments related to women sexuality that the women sexuality is the subject of control. She depicts the three different opinions about women sexuality such as Malthusian, Nationalist and Feminist. The Malthusian league argues the overpopulated India is

the result of women's uncontrolled sexuality. They should control their fertility by taking modern birth control methods. On the other hand, Nationalists distinct them from the western people, totally reject the population control program. They argue that their women should maintain their sexuality in the Brahmanic rules. Their opinion is women's sexuality is only for the reproduction not for the sexual enjoyment. Being good mothers, women would be ideal and would be goddess. If they use contraceptive method, they would be like prostitute. The feminist's argument regarding women's sexuality is "It is my body I should have freedom to regulate my body." (Anandi, 1998).

Mernissi also explains the perspective of remodeled women's sexuality in Arab society, how it is shape and reshape over the period. She depicts, in Muslim country, people believe women liberation is totally spiritual not material because the changes direct attack on Allah realm and order. But in twentieth century, socialist societies have showed that the liberation of women is an economic issue. So women have scope in job and women have got job at first in childcare and canteen only for getting food. But it is not for women wellbeing rather ultimate goal is to make profit. According to Arab literatures, during pre-Islamic, sexuality is described as chaotic, all-embracing rampant promiscuity whose essence is women's self-determination freedom to choose and dismiss their sexual partner or partners. It is told that Islam restricts their mobility. The drastic change also happens in Muslim family structure. Muslim marriage is based on the premises that social order can be maintained only by women. Women should accept their men even if their husbands have other sexual partners (concubine, co-wives and prostitute). Arab women were started to be influenced by the western cultures by the television and the dress of the wives of the colonizer in thirties, forties and fifties. Muslim fathers and husbands feel horrified at the idea of their own family and sexuality patterns being transformed into western patterns. The Arab women discard their veils for western dress. Westernization of women has enhanced their seductive powers. The Muslim ethic is against women's ornamenting

themselves and exposing their charms, here veil and walls are particularly effective anti-seduction devices. Westernization allows ornamented female bodies to appear on streets. The men of Arab argue western cultures have two sides e.g. good and bad. Arab women are incapable to choose what is good and what is bad. Mernissi says it is very interesting while Muslim women to claim the right to their bodies as part of their liberation movement, the western women's liberation movements had repudiate the body in pornographic mass media (Mernissi, 1975). From these arguments we can understand that how different context defines women's way of lives differently. They do the change in the name of women's well being. If we examine their agenda we can realize that the programs are artificial, can not bring ideological change significantly. Now I want to analyze the condition of Bangladeshi women's way of lives in this regard.

Sexuality discourses and women in Bangladesh:

Bangladesh is Muslims dominant and patriarchal society where family name and property are transmitted largely through male offspring. The paternity of children becomes a crucial social issue, in such context, engendering rigid controls over women sexuality and reproductive capacity. Purdha is central in such condition. Purdha is the notion that family honour resides in the virtue and modesty of its women; constant surveillance is necessary to ensure that women do nothing which brings shame on their kin. No man other than husband should see even the hair of women head. Even sons become 'other men' when they reach adolescence. Purdha literally means veil or curtain expresses the symbolic, physical and economic demarcation of the universe along gender lines. It divides women and men sphere, hidden and domestic sphere is appropriate for women and public and visible sphere for men. Women status is less than men because they are the bread earners. For the reason, outside is occupied by them. Out side is not secure for the women. Home is their best place. Women work within the household. If women go to outside for the work, it is a matter of disgrace for men. The guardians of those

women are treated with negligence. People think they are not capable to protect their women. So it the symbol of high prestige (kabeer, 2000:34) and veiled women seem secure and pure. Bangladeshi culture teaches women to be obedient and honest to their husbands although husbands treat them badly. "Even if the husband beat them they should tolerate it silently." Women never express their sexual desire because their sexual organs are only for reproduction not for enjoyment. Women sexual desire seems as sin (Arens and Burden, 1980).

Before eighties this was the prevalent discourse about women's way of lives. After that the women empowerment issue enters into Bangladesh which has some background. Surrounding the period, Ester Boserup's theory on women role in economy gets priority to the sustainable development because she criticizes the prevalent modernization theory of the 1960s since it bypasses the poor women. She explains modernization theory only helps the men. Many agencies interprets the call to 'integrate women into the development process' which came out of the UN conference for international women's year 1975 as a demand to integrate women more effectively into the labour market. There thus appears to be a happy coincides between the discoveries of women as the preferred labour force in the new world market. Factories have been springing up in different parts of the third world. The new policy on 'women and development' agenda identifies employment as the most effective route to the goal of integration. Their argument is employment holds the key to end women subordination. It is the wide spectrum of opinion, from the World Bank to Marxist scholars, who all share a view of market forces as a gender-neutral. Although Marxist disagrees the relationship between the capital and labour within the market place (Kabeer, 2000:5), a number of industries is thought to lie behind this preference. These industries rely on largely unskilled labour, their intensive use of such labour means that wage costs form the major portion of their overall costs. Furthermore, the seasonality of demand in industry like clothing, as well as its exposure to international competition, introduces an inherent instability into their

production cycle. They need a flexible labour force, which could be drawn into and expelled from employment, in response to changing levels of demand. In this situation, young unmarried women in the third world constituted an ideal work force (Kabeer, 2000:5).

Women and development ground also makes a significant impact on several donor agencies like the Ford Foundation, NORAD, CIDA, World Bank, USAID and so on. They have changed their strategy and incorporate women into all development programs. A few bilateral programs CIDA, and NORAD have received special mandates to address women's need of developing countries. They target women as the ultimate nation builders because self-sufficient mother can provide good citizens by bringing up economically self-sufficient children who can contribute to the nation. The donors allocate fund on such aspect: poverty alleviation, education, safe drinking water, family planning, use of contraceptive, empowerment of women etc (Naz, 2006). Women are identified the most vital media of those different development programs.

Farida Akter argues, by the name of development western countries establish their indirect rule on third world countries. She says, since 1960 the population issue turns very vital for them. The population of third world is seen as a big obstacle for food security and development. For Akter, it creates the background of population control program of third world countries. At that time, the feminist of western struggled to establish their rights on their sexuality which was highly appreciated by the multinational companies. The companies produced contraceptive methods for them. But after few days middle class women of western countries rejected the contraceptive methods as those caused many side effects. In this situation, the multinational companies created pressure to the donors to circulate it to the nations by contract of getting aids. Many third world countries were bound to take the methods for getting aid. After that, governments of third world countries implement the program desperately targeting women sexuality. They have developed the women empowerment and development discourses (free primary and

secondary schooling, scope of garment work) to promote the programs artfully and strategically in the one hand and started to abuse women body by providing them the long term methods on the other (Akter, 1992). White also criticizes the development programs and its emergence in Bangladesh. She explains, after centuries of subordination under the Mughals, British and Pakistani rule, Bangladesh became the independent state in 1971 and this country is overwhelmingly reliant on foreign aid but aid is a highly political resource for both donors and recipients. Donors allocate aid in accordance with their political and commercial interests. After 1980, Donors like to allocate aid in women development programs. In this situation, the government and NGOs have started work on women issue to get access of aid. As a result, the programs are instructed and regulated by the donor agencies. The donor agencies always implement such program which fulfills their interest instead of women's need. She says that sometimes the commitment of NGOs on gender issues remains instrumental. There are many examples of women's program that reproduce, rather than challenges, establish the pattern of male access to resources. The women programs have lower budgets overall than those for men. Their aims are modest, comprising soft components, such as very basic instruction in health, culinary and sanitary practices rather than harder programs to bring significant economic and structural benefits. Income generating programs that are undertaken to confirm or introduce women into labour intensive, low profit sectors i.e. handicrafts and poultry rearing using very simple technology. Such agency programs can clearly be easily accommodated within an ideology that construes women's work as simple (White, 1992). White argues women work with simple technology, labour intensive and low profit sectors, that is factual, but women are also involved into challenging jobs although the number is not significant. It has not brought ideological change. Women have not got rid of the household's chores rather they are to prove their potentiality in household works as well as to prove efficiency in the working place. In working place, men and women both could do mistakes but the errors are not seen similarly. Women's errors treated as their feminine incapability (Shill, 2010).

Another aspect of the discourse is that women's beauty and their awareness about fashion, smartness are treated as special qualities in working places. As a result, women are to be conscious about the qualities. To sustain their attractiveness, they also go through the standard sense of elegance and beauty. The electronic and print media reproduce the standard shape of beauty. Susmita Chakrobati interrogates the best selling daily newspaper Prothom Alo's weekly magazine "Naksha" and argues how this magazine gives the sense of women standard lives as well as body (Chakrobati, 2006). Rankel also demonstrates how women body is treated as machine. The international beauty contest is the best example. Where women must be concerned about their prescribe beauty standard (Nuton, 2006). To maintain the standard sense of beautification and decorate themselves with exclusive dress-up and get up, they buy variety of commodity. To motivate women and develop their consciousness, many fashions, beauty and style tips programs are televised in local as well as global channels. Very interesting matter of this year (2010) is that on the International Women Day, most TV channels in Bangladesh telecast the beauty tips programs to develop women consciousness about beauty. The key message of those programs is "beauty is women's strength" and it is one of the parts of their empowerment (shill, 2010, 14,15). These programs scatter women mentality as well as again establish patriarchal ideology. Women are treated as sexual objects and go through the harassment out and inside the household. Naila Kabeer explains how the garment workers face problem because of working outside and how they negotiate with the situation. The garments workers express the majority people are very critical of women who work in garments factories. They are treated badly and thought they do not bear good moral characters. They say if any woman goes out on the street after dark, she is assumed to be a prostitute. A number of factories have issued their workers with identity cards with photographs which they

could used to prove that they have legitimate reason for being on the streets after dark. In this situation, many women do not feel comfortable to tell the people that they work in the garments factories (Kabeer, 2000). Women face the paradoxical situations. The development programs are convincing women to involve into public sphere in the name of empowerment but they are not creating the favorable environment for them. As a result, women are not getting emancipation rather derived situation increases their tensions. Nahar explains how the changing society creates social pressure to women. She argues now society has contradictory beliefs such as they have scope to be educated on the one hand and society determines the preferred marriageable age on the other. Women are being educated and they want to enter into job market but the concept of standard age (twenty) of marriage also creates anxieties to them since their sexuality or juvenile is bound with the age (Nahar, 2009). Therefore, women are now in a dilemma. Different perspectives define women's way of lives differently in the name of wellbeing that causes sufferings in their lives.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, we can view how global and local perspectives dominate women lives. It is obvious that the directions of women lives are determined not only locally but also internationally. The study as well discusses in what context the women issues become very important in global context and how it penetrates Bangladeshi women lives and how women are negotiating with the deprived situations. Therefore, to know women lives and their subordination, we should explore the subtle circumstances that make women lives complicated. The patriarchal ideology, women empowerment discourse, social stratification, competition, global market economy all are simultaneously regulating and complicating Bangladeshi women lives.

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চক্রবর্তী, সুস্মিতা (২০০৬) প্রথম আলোর নকশার পাতায় নারী-সংবাদ: উপস্থাপন ও প্রদর্শনের রাজনীতি, সুস্মিতা চক্রবর্তী সম্পাদিত চন্দ্রাবতী, রাজশাহী: রাজশাহী বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়

নাহার, আইনুন (২০০৯) গনহিস্টোরিয়ার বহুমাত্রিকতা : গ্রামীণ বাংলাদেশের প্রেক্ষাপটে 'অসুস্থতা'র লিঙ্গীয় স্বরূপের উপাখ্যান, নৃবিজ্ঞান পত্রিকা, সংখ্যা ১৪, নৃবিজ্ঞান বিভাগ, জাহাঙ্গীরনগর বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়, ঢাকা

নিউটন, সেলিম রেজা (২০০৬) অনুদিত সুসান রান্কেল : সৌন্দর্য উৎপাদন, সুস্মিতা চক্রবর্তী সম্পাদিত চন্দ্রাবতী, রাজশাহী: রাজশাহী বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়

শীল, শ্যামলী (২০১০) নারী দিবসের ১০০ বছর পূর্তি এবং শত বছরের বাঙ্গালী নারীর অবস্থান, মুক্তবর, নারী আন্দোলন- সংগঠন এসঙ্গে ঐতিহাসিক পত্রিকা, সংখ্যা-৩, ঢাকা: ৩০৫ রোজ ভিউ পাজা

