

Gendered Communication and Women's Vulnerability in Digital Media of Bangladesh

Md. Sayeed Al-Zaman*

Abstract: Men in traditional patriarchic societies leverage women to facilitate their own lives, whereas women, being silenced, do whatever their “masters” want. Women are inferior to men in power and possession who are also the controller of social institutions. These conditions govern their communication pattern. Digital media brought both men and women into its virtual platform. Women in Bangladesh, a poverty-stricken Muslim country, misunderstood cyberspace as a modern instrument of their “emancipation” from the vicious patriarchic system. However, this article argues why and how their hopes turn into despair while men are unleashing structured violence and strengthening dominance using digital media. In this regard, recent incidents of virtual harassment have been observed to understand the true color of men's authority on women. It has been seen that women's increasing optimism and progressiveness are positively related to the men's domination over communication in cyberspace to sustain and/or bolster their social position.

Keywords: Gender communication; digital media; violence against women; Bangladesh; patriarchy.

Introduction

A truly democratic state is to protect its citizens' rights and treat them equally. European Union in its promulgation of Fundamental Rights presents five decisive factors: dignity, freedoms, equality, solidarity, and justice to ensure the proper rights to the citizens (Charter of Fundamental Rights, 2012). The constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh addresses a plethora of promises under the section entitled Fundamental Rights in the constitution, such as freedom of speech, human rights, equality before the law, equality of opportunity, etc. (A. Khan, 2014). Although democratic countries pledge to treat their citizens equally and justly, discrimination, suppression, and persecution still exist there. Even in Europe, the voice in favor of separation is rising to date (Henley et al., 2017). On the other hand, Bangladesh has recently secured its position as the most notorious country in persecuting its religious and ethnic minorities (Hasnat, 2017). Therefore, words of human rights are wonderful to ponder between the pages of books, whereas the reality is opposite to some extent.

In Bangladesh, a poverty-stricken Muslim country, diverse co-cultures were promised of social equality along with nationalism, secularism, and democracy after its inception (Haq, 2015). However, “social equality” only remains in the constitution, and co-cultures are enduring agony nowadays. Bangladesh (previous Bengal) society is proudly addressed as the harboring ground of solidarity and “culture of a thousand years”, yet not so much effort has so far been given in investigating the true nature of cultural attitudes and practices, and the interplay among social communities. The Indian sub-continent is the victim of patriarchy from the very early era of civilization in this region. From the Vedic age, women have been living as “subhuman” (Narayanan, 2016). Even Bangladesh has recently ranked 134 in terms of gender inequality in the world (UNDP, 2018) where

* Lecturer, Dept. of Journalism and Media Studies, Jahangirnagar University, Savar, Dhaka, Bangladesh, Email: msalzaman@juniv.edu

women are still being terrified incessantly, and the propensity is swelling. In Bangladesh, from the beginning of this century, remarkable prioritize has been being given to women to elevate their condition and alleviate their prior backwardness, although the outcomes of these are not always convincing and palpable. To picture women's development and empowerment in Bangladesh, few instances are repeatedly shown: two Prime Ministers are women; 50 seats among 300 seats in Jatiya Sangsad are reserved for women; many women are becoming candidates in various elections; the celebration of the International Mother's Day, International Women's Day, etc.; incorporating women in diverse local and national activities; increased reproductive healthcare and conditions of rural women, etc. (Abdin, 2008; Chaity, 2018; "Women elected", 2018).

However, these developments are also questionable as a few selected self-empowered figures do not necessarily represent the conditions of all women. Besides, the reserved seats for women in Jatiya Sangsad, as some opine, is just a "token representation" (Zyma, 2018b). Women empowerment those are shown with greater importance not always paint the actual life that women lead. Rather, most women are still living a primitive life in traditional Bangladesh society wherein patriarchy triumphs with vigor. Because of their social power and status, women are still the utmost victim of gender violence widely. Even crimes against women, such as rape, murder, stalking, humiliation, dowry, etc. are somewhat increasing in contemporary time due to a range of factors, including the absence of justice, and social equality. Women are largely being victims of violence and discrimination even within their own families (Chowdhury, 2014; Odhikar, 2018; UN Women, 2018). Development in Bangladesh is somewhat paradoxical that lets women be more vulnerable since they step out of home and come into contact with the outside world, which is brutally patriarchal; thus, the prevalence of violence outside of the home increases (Khan, 2005).

The contemporary digital revolution is leading the Bangladesh society toward a more complex zone of social chemistry. Traditional society (the present condition of Bangladesh society is likely to be "quasi-traditional" or "would-be-modern") rocked by modern industrial digital products and services is on the brink of utmost transformation. Although it has previously been hypothesized that digital media in the absence of face-to-face (F2F) communication would free women from physical and social restraints, and provide equality and freedom of expression (Morahan-Martin, 2000), a unique method of gender discrimination has been germinated.

Women and Digital Media: A Techno-feminist Perspective

HollaBackNYC, a photoblog and web platform of women activists, was founded in 2005 adopting a slogan "If you can't slap him, snap him" to raise awareness to combat street harassment (Daniels, 2009). In the contemporary networked world, women's online activism against gender inequalities and mistreatments commence a unique feminist movement known as "cyberfeminism", a neologism coined by Plant (2000), demonstrates feminists' works on theorizing and exploiting new media and internet technology. As a conceptual product of Third Wave feminism, this movement either denies or reformulates the previous notion that technological development is socially and culturally constructed which supports and promotes masculine culture. However, Haraway (1987) as the foremost champion of cyberfeminism agrees on women's need to be more proficient in

technology use and engage in “informatics of domination” along with tech-savviness and political awareness.

The concept of “global sisterhood”, although having ethnocentric and dogmatic connotations according to some, is about to turn into a reality with the help of an online network (Zaytoun & Ezekiel, 2016). Furthermore, after few striking incidents, including the Delhi Gang Rape in 2012 and Jimmy Savile's allegations, the Fourth Wave of feminism emerged based on chiefly digital media to bolster the women's network worldwide against misogyny (Cochrane, 2013). Riding this movement, digital media-based feminist campaigns, such as #YesAllWomen, #MeToo, etc. have rocked, and are still rocking the world. However, women's participation in the digital public sphere and the exploitation of new-age communication technology as a boulevard of their social emancipation throughout the world varies in a great deal. Unlike the developed countries, women from traditional societies have little opportunity to convene in cyberspace due to their socio-economic conditions and intense patriarchic bondage. Even the degree of scopes varies within the social classes of women.

Women from Bangladesh urban affluent society, for an example, have higher social status, education, skill, willingness, and access to manifold communication technologies, whereas those from rural area are less interested in entertainment and modern benefits due to their lower social status, less economic solvency, illiteracy, and prime focus in serving family rather than engaging in communication or networking. On the other hand, women from the middle-class socio-economic background are the moderate users of digital media platforms. Due to greater sociocultural openness, urban affluent women embrace new technology and practices than the women from other socioeconomic and sociocultural backgrounds. These women tend to use social networking sites, essential websites, and contemporary digital technologies more frequently. Their modern and would-be modern lifestyles and cultural practices are reflected in their virtual identities. Middle-class women, in practice, have a more complex psyche as they must make a balance between their social image and personal demand, they, therefore, are perceived as relatively more strategic and, to some extent, rigid while partaking in the digital public sphere. Which commonality all women of Bangladesh share, irrespective of their classes, is that men tend to control them even in cyberspace through acute gendered communication.

Gendered Communication: How Women Interact in Digital Media

Gender differences impact communication patterns, thereby both men and women interact differently in real-life contexts according to sociocultural prescription. Apart from biological orientation, women's interactions are designed and guided by the socialization process. Most often, such development is faulty and biased toward men. Following their birth, both male and female enter two distinct subcultures within a broader culture which later produce them as “masculine” and “feminine” respectively assigning different social roles, rules, and regulations (a few exceptions of a female having masculine features and a male having feminine features are avoided here). Those social variations force them to perform distinctively even in verbal and non-verbal communication (Nelson & Brown, 2012). On this ground, “women tend to engage in rapport talk or relationship-oriented talk”, whereas “men tend to engage in report talk or

task-oriented talk”. Thus, men are motivated to status-seeking efforts while women are motivated to intimacy-seeking efforts (Columbaro, 1992; Eunson, 2013; Tannen, 1990). The Bangladesh sociocultural environment is simultaneously traditional, patriarchal, and Islam by nature. Such condition let women to be a suitable subject of patriarchal domination.

Patriarchy shapes not only the psyche of women but also dictates what they should and should not do and/or say, moreover, the language women use and deconstructs women’s demands and hopes, dreams, and realities as well (Mannan, 2011). This legacy continues even in digital media. Women, for instance, barely use slang in the digital public sphere, whereas men use it as usual. Although women’s participation in cyberspace was for salvation and freedom, and cyberspace has also been intended to be democratic and secured, the barriers of interaction remain the same since men have appeared as the supervisor of communication there (Rukhsana, 2018). When men are the gatekeepers of communication, women’s involvement is de-escalated. As Kramarae argues:

The language of a particular culture does not serve all its speakers equally, for not all speakers contribute in an equal fashion to its formulation. Women (and members of other subordinate groups) are not as free or as able as men are to say what they wish to, when and where they wish, because the words and norms for their use have been formulated by the dominant group, men. (Kramarae, 1981:01)

Fearing denial and exclusion, like other co-cultures, women, even qualified ones, usually abstain themselves from engaging in critical discourses in cyberspace, rather involve in phatic communication, the type of communication that “supplies a minimum information but a maximum of supportive chat” through which they maintain and (re)build social relations (Žegarac, 1998). Their attitude in the digital space is often self-censored. Since women in traditional Bengali culture are expected to be docile and susceptible in character so that they can easily be subjugated, they too act upon the unseen patriarchic manuscript *per se*.

Patterns and modalities of gender communication in digital media depend on the contents used. Three different forms of “divergent” contents are seen in digital space: (a) verbal dialogue of conversation is converted into non-verbal written text; (b) movements (and speeches too) in physical settings are converted into recorded documents (i.e. video, audio); and (c) face-to-face communication is converted into (digitally) mediated communication. Therefore, digital media has emerged as a time and space neutral communicative platform.

In another sense, digital media is a hypermedia since it provides scopes to its users to create and manipulate profuse information and contents, and disseminate them to a relatively larger audience within a shorter time than the traditional media. Every medium has its specialties, so do digital media. Narration and engagement in cyberspace highly differ from mainstream media (Manovich et al., 2001). From this aspect, women’s engagement with men, their use of language, and narrative patterns have been observed along with how they are being affected by the online predators in digital media. The pattern of gendered communication in digital media is, to some extent, perceived as one-sided, dominant, arbitrary, tyrannical, and meticulous. Women’s treatment of men there is usually power-driven, although several other stimulants play key roles, such as ideology, the intention of oppression, social position, and prior social learning. In a systematic way, men tend to accomplish three goals through gendered communication:

(a) to become more superior to women; (b) to exploit women; and (c) to preserve their status quo. To do so, they accommodate and modify their behavior and communication patterns while interacting with women in the digital sphere.

The collective approach allows men to mobilize and act as a community to retrograde women's psyche through several methods: misbehaving, denying the legitimacy and importance, devaluing and humiliating, and organize and reshape public conception against the women's validity in society. The collective force of domination gets powerful when women as an opposition try to avail autonomy and privileges breaching men's domination. Those inimical behaviors of men cause dreadful consequences to women: fear of exclusion, self-derogation, and even suicidal tendencies. On the other hand, the individual approach of gendered communication investigates more micro-level interaction between men and women and found some disturbing phenomena. In one-to-one relationships, sexual harassment through digital content, both verbal and non-verbal is rampant. Men in such interpersonal interaction generally harass women based on three specific grounds: (a) relationship issues; (b) desire, and (c) rejection, which means these factors instigate men to become involved in an interpersonal assault. These types of maltreatments include several serious and heinous acts, such as fake profile creation, publicize private information, nudity, and obscenity, revenge porn, threatening, vulgar message, and unwanted nuisance, etc. These actions of men are mainly motivated by anger, revenge, provocation, and the sex which causes women's mental breakdown, depression, body shaming, poor self-esteem, and most notably the suicidal tendency. This strategic persecution targets individual woman, scandalize and molest her virtually, and exemplify her to terrify other women to obey "men" as their master. In Bangladesh, incidents of cyberbullying are skyrocketing, and the vulnerability of women as well. As we see, on either side, women are the looser and endure agony as well as mistreatment (Preetha, 2015).

Cyberbullying and Vulnerability of Women

A few dominant incidents are still haunting the discourse of cyberbullying in Bangladesh. Purnima Shil, a gang-raped survivor of northern Bangladesh during the post-election period 2001 while she was just 13 years old, has repeatedly been tormented by the stigma of rape, and socially treated as "impure". Her ordeal is yet to end as few culprits shamed her by creating a pornographic Facebook page using her name, photographs, and other necessary details. She is incessantly being beaten, threatened, molested, and inhibited in her educational institutions, workspaces, and even in public ("How a Bangladeshi Rape Survivor Was Shamed on Facebook," 2016).

Arif, a man from Shariatpur of Bangladesh, secretly filmed a woman taking a shower, and later forced her to intercourse with him threatening to release the footage on the internet. Thus, he raped her like the other five women he did earlier and spread the recorded rape video in online. The victim subsequently was in fear of losing her conjugal life, and the video compelled her to leave her house making a "refugee" (K. N. Islam, 2017). A victim of revenge porn told that she left her village, and has been living in a relative's house from the day her "secret" video was released on social media. Afterward, she used to wear a veil to save her from further abuse by society and discontinued her study. She has been suffering from psychological issues, including severe anxiety and

stress, depression, flashbacks the abusive memories, distrust, lower self-esteem, alienation, and oftentimes suicidal thoughts. Victims of doctored photos and objectionable text with private photos are also numerous (Malik, 2017).

Cybercrime includes the actions “targeted against women with a motive to intentionally harm the victim, using modern telecommunication networks” (Halder & Jaishankar, 2012:18). Of all subdivisions of cybercrime, cyberbullying is the most discussed and appalling one. In Bangladesh, a technologically developing country, women are the worst victim of cyberbullying than the men. In 2017 alone, the Cyber Help Desk of the Bangladesh government’s ICT division received more than 17,000 complaints (Akter, 2018). Around 73% of women as internet users face manifold cybercrimes; of them, only 23% lodge complaints. A recent study conducted by the Cyber Crime Awareness Foundation (CCABD) found 73.71% of the victims belong to the age group 18 to 30 years. Besides, 30% of total victims do not know how to seek help after affected by cybercrimes (“73% women”, 2017; “Women aged”, 2018). Needless to say that men are the perpetrators in committing these offenses.

Although several attempts have already been made for fighting these heinous attacks of cyber-privacy, including *Cyber Attorokkha* or Cyber Self-defense by Female Empowerment Movement (FEM), Digital Sister Project in collaboration with BRAC, the anti-pornography act, etc., the number of cases are superseding the fruits due to the lack of proper punitive measures (Ahassan, 2017; Digital Sister, 2018). CCABD (2018) identifies four categories of decisive cyberviolence that are usually being committed against women in Bangladesh by their men counterparts. The most threatening of them is denigration that is creating a fake profile, spread rumors, and vile contents, and 27.95% women are the victim of this type of bullying. Due to identity liquidity in cyberspace, anyone can be anyone, and identity theft poses a serious problem. To distort social images of the targeted women, perpetrators collect information, create fake online profiles, and generate and thereafter disseminate vile contents. Some offenders, most of them are known to the victims, often produce and spread rumors about them.

Publishing doctored photos and videos and other information without consent to harass women is another popular technique of victimization, which cause 23.53% women to become bullied. Publicize embarrassing private and identifying information have 22.45% of total sufferers. Besides, online threats and verbal abuse, mostly through “masquerading”, and sending obscene contents, despite having 19.11% sufferers, according to the study, are becoming more widespread nowadays. However, A gargantuan number of incidents are still being remained unreported, concealed, and beyond recognition. Three reports here are to certify the statement: (a) 25% victims do not report as the law would not support them; (b) 23% do not report fearing to be harassed again, and (c) 17% do not report worrying if it tarnishes their social image. This is the missing link of why the number of cases is relatively lower when the violence against women seems very high (CCABD, 2018). Two underlying patriarchic mechanisms encourage women to remain mute and not to speak out against violence.

Firstly, the social base of a woman in Bangladesh society is too fragile compared to a man. A man’s profile in this traditional and prejudiced society is measured by his income, working capacity, strength, and often body structure, while a female’s identity is mostly “image” based: She must have to be benign, sophisticated, beautiful, obedient, naïve,

religious and servile, and getting out of this patriarchal boundary is considered as audacity which would make her “spoiled”. In such circumstances, she always needs to be concerned about her appearance, voice, and attitude in public. Others’ treatment to her become more important which eventually lower her self-esteem. Thereby, fearing if no one would believe them, they abstain from reporting the incidents. Thus, capitalizing social stigma, perpetrators again release cyber assault on women (TED.com, 2015).

Secondly, victim-blaming is the most notorious attitude that women as victims get from their men counterparts after being bullied in both cyberspace and real space. It could either be another deliberate strategy and/or inadvertent outcome from men to prevent women from complaining when it comes to sexual harassment and other forms of violence. When women express their harassment and seek protection, or when the vulnerability of women by men as perpetrators are exposed in public, the other men of cybersociety frequently, as it has randomly been seen, either try to protect the image of their peer or feel threatened with their own identity. Thereafter, they take it easy to blame the victims by using some specific pejorative terms: *behaya* (shameless), *magi* (prostitute), *nosta* (spoiled), *oshalin/oshlil* (indecent), *dushchoritra* (characterless), etc. those are used only to define a “bad” woman’s characteristics.

Two psychological expositions provide a hindsight of victim-blaming. Firstly, when the men see women suffering from violence and oppression, but unable to prevent them, they began to derogate the women for their misfortune. The more they suffer, the greater they scorns is, even though the victim is innocent (Lerner & Simmons, 1966). People’s perception is based on ethical propositions: good people receive good things, whereas bad people receive bad. But victimhood of an innocent person violates this perception, and therefore, to accommodate prior belief, men often deny the innocence of women sufferers as a defense shield. Secondly, men refute women’s misfortune caused by bullying (especially sexual), rather victim-blaming is positively related to men’s past sexual aggression toward women (Gray et al., 1993). In Bangladesh cyberspace, three interrelated unique propensities among men have been observed: (a) most of the men have seemingly a common goal that is to subdue women’s voice; (b) thereby, men often feel sympathetic to other men who are accused of harassing women; (c) this feeling, to some extent, arouse a sense of belongingness and proximity among themselves.

Men oftentimes address beautiful women with gorgeous body shapes as *maal* (“goods” for consumption) in Bengali which is nothing but the objectification of women’s bodies. Therefore, men’s reaction and treatment of women in Bangladesh digital public sphere would better be understood from their dialogues and behaviors. The three most common but significant expressions of men are detailed here as examples. First, men tend to mitigate the crime of rape, revenge porn, or other sexual assaults on women (e.g. revenge porn of Porimol, rape, and assault in Rajbari and Shariatpur) through victim-blaming: “women who go out at night should be raped”, “...if she (woman) would be decent (*pordashil*) and maintain Islamic virtues, she would not be raped”, “due to rape, women are still a little bit decent nowadays”. According to them, women instigate men’s inner concealed lust by revealing their bodies. Therefore, they should be “more Islamic, cultural, and conservative” to evade sexual assaults.

Second, a remarkable number of men in cyberspace have been found unaware and even disgusting against marital rape that prevents them from being dictatorial during

copulation with their partners. On the question of women's sexual rights, including partner choice and punishment of marital rape, scornful statements come out from these men, such as "wife is for sex whenever the husband wishes to, and marriage legalizes this, so then, what is marital rape!" Exemplifying sexual right a Western ideological product, they (mis)interpret it as the right to "free sex" that is prohibited in Islam. They also define it *haram* as *jenah* (having premarital copulation) for Muslims, according to religious scriptures, is an unforgivable sin.

Third, men, as it seems, often perceive women's activism online (e.g. Women's Chapter) and participation in social movements (e.g. Shahbag Movement in 2013) as awkward and irreligious. Thereby, they rebuke them so fervently with a variety of hate speeches: "we will fuck you; we will rape you; we will teach you a lesson", "women can be both mother and whore, but you (the activist women) people are the second one". According to their opinion, what women know is little compared to men, so they should remain silent on salient issues and let the men handle those. Women are delicate and vulnerable who deserve to remain inside the house and not partake in "men's job".

To men, "out-of-boundary" women are subject to be disgraced, and also society repudiates such "outlawed" women because of their "deviant behavior". Such hypermasculine expressions and legitimizations are everywhere in Bangladesh digital media. In some cases, vulgar and abusive language seem to be the weapon of men to expel women from discourses. Such an adverse environment of domination also prevents women from being outspoken against men's assault and bullying.

Reasons for Women's Vulnerability

Narada XIII states: "A woman is unfit to enjoy independence. The father protects her during infancy, the husband protects her when she is grown up, and the sons protect her in her old age." (Spellman, 1964: 46). Such a traditional view of women's life is still performing in Bangladesh society. Although owing to the widespread consciousness and movements across the globe, women got participatory rights in politics along with other necessary human rights, women from underdeveloped countries like Bangladesh are hitherto struggling to achieve their proper legitimacy and equity in society. Unfortunately, the miseries and deprivations of Bangladesh women start from their own family and society play the role of second exploiter.

Social phenomena determine how communication patterns differ between men and women from the aspect of gender. (Millet, 2016) suggests eight instruments that shape and prepare the ground of patriarchy which eventually let men have the opportunity to rule over communication: (i) ideological; (ii) biological; (iii) sociological; (iv) class; (v) economic and educational; (vi) force; (vii) anthropological (myth and religion); and (viii) psychological. However, the root causes of social deprivation those direct the communication pattern between men and women in Bangladesh are more subtle, and, to some extent, unlike what Millet postulates.

Economic disparity

To manifest disparities among social groups, three basic forces function: (a) unequal rights over wealth; (b) subsistent ideological hegemony within society; and (c) social institutions (Riaz, 2014). The foremost condition behind the suppression of women is

their economic backwardness and limited rights over wealth. Although the female labor force participation rate (LFPR) is increasing in Bangladesh after the 1990s, recent data support the gradual inclination in the female unemployment rate. Furthermore, the wage gap between male and female workers for the same work and the same hour, particularly in informal employments, is widening since women get paid almost half of their men counterparts (R. I. R. Islam, 2013; Shibli, 2018; World Bank, 2018). Interesting but true, behind this discriminatory attitude, “capitalistic interest” lies. When a certain group of people in a society is introduced as “subhuman”, they would become easy to hire and less payable in the workforce. Thus, wide discrimination in almost all spheres of women's life in Bangladesh also makes them “cheap labor” (Sharp et al., 1997).

Since most of the women's jobs are still unrecognized and confined into their household chores which have no immediate and explicit economic value and contribution, they are ultimately denied from the economic system (Riaz, 2014). As women's activities have no or little economic significance and/or certification, they become subject to massive and organized social exploitations: fewer human rights and social benefits, limited entertainment, etc. Although the scenario has been changing from the last three decades since women are joining in the working force and contributing to the national economy, men are still controlling the financial sectors and distribution of wealth. Even in most cases, women have no meaningful control over their income. Thus, earning women too is trapped in a man-made economic system.

Women's presence in digital media in pursuing deliverance, to some extent, seems unsolicited to men due to their failure (or fear) of treating women as their equivalent. Such condition allows men, who are economically superior to women, to contemplate that women should not avail the same service, space, and entertainment using new-age technology as men do. Cyberviolence against women, therefore, could be a systematic denial of women's presence and freedom online.

Social power and authority

Power is the production of the intended effects, often over others (Russell, 1996). Economic power lets men to be the supreme authority of the society. Bangladesh's traditional patriarchic society, therefore, gives them enough power to do whatever they like that further reinforce patriarchic strength. In the same way, a man from his boyhood perceives as well as enjoy more rights and better opportunities than a girl which bolsters his sense of superiority and dominance. Familial contribution in making a “strong man” and “good girl” is incontrovertible. Society thereafter, through cultural miseducation like “boys will be boys”, take it like a man, and so on, officialize the discrimination. As male and female both are nourished and trained differently and discriminately, separate roles and rules are attributed upon them. Hitherto the collective idea in Bangladesh society puts muscle power over the knowledge, skill, and quality of a person that sanction women as weak and vulnerable. Due to physically inferior, patriarchy claims, women are unable to do what men are capable of. Rather, they are valued by their outer beauty. *Melamesha* (social contact) of grown-up girls with other boys is seen as unethical in rural areas, and urban middle-class society as well. To prevent so, girls are kept under strict surveillance of the family as well as society as they could something illegal and “spoil” the holiness of the society. The paradox is: prestige and reputation of the family and society depend on women while they are the most deprived groups. Gender socialization thus translates

women into a marginalized group in Bangladesh traditional society (Stockard, 2006), and continuation of exploitation paves the way of women's increased sufferings inside and outside of digital media.

Ideological hegemony

What society teaches women to become “good girls” by not being deviant, and no women should go beyond the unseen line illustrated by patriarchy. To confirm the desired outcome, men in society customize a series of equipment, setting, and decorating what we can call “ideology”. Bangladesh women are highly saturated by male-dominated ideology for decades so that they as a community, women have almost lost their capacity of thinking, rather act according to the vested system. Average women of Bangladesh, beyond individual quality and performance, seem more concerned with their and their peers' appearance, beauty, shape, and how men treat them (Zyma, 2018a). Even perceiving the benefit of adjoining with men, women are also often motivated and ready to eject their feminine conditions. In this process, women internalize patriarchy and become the champion of men's ideology and superiority, and validates their actions (Adler, 1927). Thus, a woman-vs-woman situation is often observed in discourses on Bangladesh digital media.

To exploit women more perfectly and effectively, manipulated religious ideals along with other sociocultural ideologies are used by patriarchy. “Child's heaven is under mother's feet”, a well-recognized colloquial expression, for instance, has been modified into “wife's heaven is under husband's feet” to make women more submissive to his husband as “master”. Besides, subtly, men verify and represent themselves as more pious and defender of religion (Islam in this context) than women who are addressed as the reason for spoiling the essence of scriptures by being “deviant” and “sinner”. As a psychological response, to prove their religious and obedient image in front of society, women often vest themselves more into Islamic practices. However, in this case, Islam act as a political weapon of men to exploit and subordinate women (Mannan, 2011) which also decrees a woman should be *half* of a man whoever the persons are (Azad, 2004).

Islam as a religion is one of the most suitable oppressive tools for men to exploit women in Bangladesh. Men referring to Islam dictates how women should behave and live their lives. Their clothing is also set and often widely criticized by men. Even men take the chance to justify rape and other sexual violence against women through victim-blaming as we have seen in the previous section. Forced attribution of *hijab* and *burqa* (Islamic veil) either from early childhood or grown-up age and acceptance of *Sharia* law in the public domain is accelerating in Bangladesh society as a part of Islamic revitalization and modernization. Digital public sphere as an open and effective discursive zone, Islamists of Bangladesh favoring the newly produced religiocultural notion, relentlessly try to establish the value of “Islamic culture” as a part of greater identity politics (Hussain, 2010).

“Face” politics

Bangladesh in 2000-09 was sickened by the chronic incidents of acid throwing. 99% of the perpetrators were identified as men who left 1392 women affected which is almost twice of affected men, although in the world's perspective, the majority (67%) of the total victims are men. The reasons behind these attacks are rejection in love, dowry, and

refusing a marriage proposal ("Everything", 2017; "Statistics", 2010). Perpetrators' intention is quite simple: to deface the victims, as women in society are most valued by their facial beauty. This propensity over the years has reduced remarkably. However, the same expression of hatred and unfulfillment has been rejuvenated by and seen in digital media. Face in a broader sense not only specify the outer look or a certain body part, rather an individual's social image or identity.

Cyberspace unlocked many possible modus manners to taint women's "face" in front of society, such as revenge porn, rumor spreading, masquerading, public humiliation, etc. Even women in social media often abstain from expressing their mind, fearing they could be humiliated and underestimated by men. These women either tend to avoid partaking in discourses or become naïve in critical issues and rather maintain relations using the social spaces. They are ideologically forced indeed not to be open, and often women themselves conceive such unseen restriction as worthy.

Deceasing name is the foremost attack on one's identity what Afghan women are still enduring and, to a certain degree, fighting for (Joya, 2017). The situation of Bangladesh women is better than this, yet extremely vulnerable in terms of their social, political, and economic identity. They have no socially established and exclusive identity at all, although a handful of women are "quasi-equal" to men. Women's identity is shaped by men as they are the authority of social institutions and ideological spheres.

The discrimination both in real space and cyberspace is based on women's politicized identity. As a socially deprived group, women's identity in Bangladesh is determined by gender, economic capacity, existing Islamic belief amid society, biological features, and superstitions. Patriarchy tends to bestow women almost no equal and shared ground considering them as "worthless" or "incapable" because of their stereotyped gender and biological identity. Thus, men inaugurate a masculine hegemony over the women around them.

Social (mal) treatment

Society itself is biased toward men since patriarchy captures and controls the social institutions: family, economics, religion, education, state, and language. Therefore, men's expressions of masculinity can be seen in every sphere of this male-dominated society. *Salish*, *Panchayat*, and other local judiciary are still active in many villages and sub-urban areas of Bangladesh those tend to provide men almost immunity and women severe punishment for the same crime. Such social malpractices are reinforced from social prejudices, religious myths, and toxic masculinity. Toxic masculinity focuses on stereotypical gender roles. Gender stereotyping certified by the prejudiced society encourages men to see women through a gender-biased lens. To them, men must be aggressive, unemotional, worldly, ambitious, objective, strong, dominant, competitive, self-confident, logical, independent, and should like math and science and act as leaders. Whereas women are gentle, tactful, religious, talkative, neat, dependent, and they cry easily, do not use harsh language, are interested in their appearances, aware others' feelings, and need for security (Taylor, Peplau, & Sears, 1999). These gender stereotypes are the products of anti-women and anti-feminine perception that let men (think to) be more possessive and dominating over women in cyberspace which is also evident in their expressions.

Such stereotypical ideation “perpetuates a collective social fantasy that men are active subjects positioned against women”, whereas women are passive and vulnerable because of men’s “natural” sexual conquest and violence (Bealer, 2011). Moreover, the primitive concept of manhood, gender hierarchy, an “alpha male” is facilitating and validating men’s aggression within the traditional society (Douglass, 2017). Such manifestation of cruelty and unjust of men to women is nothing but for attaining a superiority feeling (Adler, 1927). The features of toxic masculinity follow the men in the digital media and stir them up to engage in negative cyber-attitude, expose to depression, and externalize this depression with anger and aggression more likely to women that they have been incessantly experiencing in contemporary times (Parent et al., 2018). These conditions prevent women from being men’s equivalent either in digital media or outside world.

Conclusion

Communication between men and women indeed complex by nature since a range of factors, including culture, class, religion, gender, economy, politics, and so on contribute to shaping the communication pattern. The truth is offline and online, neither space favor women in Bangladesh. On the contrary, men harvest both spheres to sustain their dominance over women. And to do so, they repeatedly terrify women through cyberviolence that is not necessarily physical rather psychological. The outcome is dreadful. Around the country, the cyberbullying causes an average of 11 suicide attempts of female victims each year from 2010 to 2014 which was 8 until 2008 (Akter, 2018), which means the men are becoming too repressive that is making the women more vulnerable. Why such pitiful incidents are soaring is an inevitable outcome of the absence of proper justice, lack of social concern and motivation, insufficient awareness campaigns, illiteracy and miseducation, poverty, etc. (Halder, 2017).

Hitherto, studies on gendered communication are insignificant in the context of a developing country like Bangladesh where the society is still traditional in nature but social development is speeding up due to the thriving economy. As an inevitable consequence, the cultural lag appears, the existing social norms, values, and beliefs become incompatible with and somewhat contradictory to the technological advancement and modernity. In Bangladesh, owing to the continuing social progress, women are gaining more knowledge and modern outlook, particularly from cyberspace, and steadily escaping the imprisonment of patriarchy. This paradigm shift of their prior social condition has also enhanced their performance in communication with men. In counter of that, patriarchic domination is accumulating more power to tame women fearing women would take over with their increased power. In such a state, gendered communication in Bangladesh cybersociety is getting more complicated, so it is worthy to delve into. Certainly, the coexistence of men and women would be beneficial for the country’s healthy development. Digital media, in this regard, either could be a decisive bridge between both groups or would be ended up as a failure eventually.

References

- 73% women face cyber crimes: Tarana. (2017, March 8). Retrieved January 19, 2019, from The Daily Star website: <https://www.thedailystar.net/country/73-women-face-cyber-crimes-tarana-1372849>
- Abdin, M. J. (2008). *Women Empowerment in Bangladesh* (SSRN Scholarly Paper No. ID 1031612). Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network. Retrieved from Social Science Research Network website: <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=1031612>
- Adler, A. (1927). Individual psychology. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 22(2), 116–122. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0072190>
- Ahasan, N. (2017, November 12). Cyber Attorokkha: How education and training have changed the online experience for Bangladeshi women. Retrieved January 19, 2019, from The Daily Star website: <https://www.thedailystar.net/women-action/cyber-attorokkha-how-education-and-training-have-changed-the-online-experience>
- Akter, F. (2018, June 17). Cyber violence against women: The case of Bangladesh. Retrieved January 21, 2019, from Gender IT website: <https://www.genderit.org/articles/cyber-violence-against-women-case-bangladesh>
- Azad, H. (2004). *Women* (3rd ed.). Dhaka, Bangladesh: Agamee Prakashani.
- Bealer, T. L. (2011). Of Monsters and Men: Toxic Masculinity and the Twenty-First Century Vampire in the Twilight Saga. In G. L. Anatol (Ed.), *Bringing Light to Twilight: Perspectives on a Pop Culture Phenomenon* (pp. 139–152). New York: Palgrave Macmillan US. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230119246_11
- CCABD. (2018, May 20). *Cyber Crime Trend in Bangladesh*. Cyber Crime Awareness Foundation. Retrieved from https://ccabd.org/research_cyber_crime_in_bangladesh/
- Chaity, A. J. (2018, July 11). Women empowerment: Bangladesh sets example for the world. Retrieved January 17, 2019, from Dhaka Tribune website: <https://www.dhakatribune.com/opinion/special/2018/07/12/women-empowerment-bangladesh-sets-example-for-the-world>
- Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. (2012). *Official Journal of the European Union C326*. 391–407.
- Chowdhury, M. F. I. (2014, August 5). Revisiting position of women in Bangladesh. Retrieved January 17, 2019, from The Daily Star website: <https://www.thedailystar.net/revisiting-position-of-women-in-bangladesh-35755>
- Cochrane, K. (2013, December 10). The fourth wave of feminism: Meet the rebel women. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/10/fourth-wave-feminism-rebel-women>
- Columbaro, N. L. (1992). You just don't understand: Women and men in conversation, by Deborah Tannen. (1990). *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 3(4), 398–401. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrdq.3920030412>
- Daniels, J. (2009). Rethinking Cyberfeminism(s): Race, Gender, and Embodiment. *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 37(1/2), 101–124. JSTOR. Retrieved from JSTOR.
- Digital Sister. (2018). *Report Cybercrime in Bangladesh*. Dhaka, Bangladesh. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WDDQ-Z7_N3k
- Douglass, R. (2017, August 4). More Men Should Learn The Difference Between Masculinity and Toxic Masculinity. Retrieved January 21, 2019, from Huffington Post website: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-difference-between-masculinity-and-toxic-masculinity_b_59842e3ce4b0f2c7d93f54ce

- Eunson, B. (2013). *Communicating in the 21st Century* (3rd ed.). New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.
- Everything you know about acid attacks is wrong. (2017, November 17). Retrieved March 20, 2019, from BBC Three website: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcthree/article/5d38c003-c54a-4513-a369-f9eae0d52f91>
- Gray, N. B., Palileo, G. J., & Johnson, G. D. (1993). Explaining rape victim blame: A test of attribution theory. *Sociological Spectrum*, 13(4), 377–392. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02732173.1993.9982040>
- Halder, D. (2017). *Revenge Porn against Women and the Applicability of Therapeutic Jurisprudence: A Comparative Analysis of Regulations in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh* (SSRN Scholarly Paper No. ID 3160444). Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network. Retrieved from Social Science Research Network website: <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=3160444>
- Halder, D., & Jaishankar, K. (2012). *Cyber Crime and the Victimization of Women: Laws, Rights and Regulations*. Information Science Reference.
- Haq, E. (2015, March 9). Fundamental Principles of State Policy. Retrieved January 16, 2019, from Banglapedia: National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh website: http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Fundamental_Principles_of_State_Policy
- Haraway, D. (1987). A manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, technology, and socialist feminism in the 1980s. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 2(4), 1–42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.1987.9961538>
- Hasnat, M. A. (2017, December 28). ‘Religious and ethnic minorities are most persecuted in Bangladesh.’ Retrieved January 16, 2019, from Dhaka Tribune website: <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/law-rights/2017/12/28/religious-ethnic-minorities-persecuted-bangladesh/>
- Henley, J., Sheehy, F., Swann, G., & Fenn, C. (2017, October 27). Beyond Catalonia: Pro-independence movements in Europe. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2017/oct/27/beyond-catalonia-pro-independence-movements-in-europe-map>
- How a Bangladeshi rape survivor was shamed on Facebook. (2016, October 27). *BBC News*. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/magazine-37683929/how-a-bangladeshi-rape-survivor-was-shamed-on-facebook>
- Hussain, N. A. (2010). Religion and modernity: Gender and identity politics in Bangladesh. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 33(4), 325–333. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2010.02.006>
- Islam, K. N. (2017, November 11). Police looking for ex-BCL leader who raped women and released video clips online. *Dhaka Tribune*. Retrieved from <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/2017/11/11/police-leader-raped-women-released-video>
- Islam, R. I. R. (2013). *Female labour force participation in Bangladesh: Trends, drivers and barriers* [Working paper]. Retrieved from http://www.ilo.org/newdelhi/whatwedo/publications/WCMS_250112/lang--en/index.htm
- Joya, B. (2017, July 27). Where is my name? Afghan women fight for their own identity. *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-women-name-idUSKBN1AC3F7>
- Khan, A. (2014). *The Constitution of Bangladesh with Short History and Relevant Explanation* (2nd ed.). Dhaka, Bangladesh: Bengal Law Books.
- Khan, F. C. (2005). Gender violence and development discourse in Bangladesh. *International Social Science Journal*, 57(184), 219–230. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2451.2005.546.x>

- Kramarae, C. (1981). *Women and Men Speaking: Frameworks for Analysis*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House Publishers.
- Lerner, M. J., & Simmons, C. H. (1966). Observer's reaction to the "innocent victim": Compassion or rejection? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 4(2), 203–210. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0023562>
- Malik, S. (2017, December 26). The spectre of online sexual harassment. *The Daily Star*. Retrieved from <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/society/the-spectre-online-sexual-harassment-1510252>
- Mannan, P. Md. A. (2011). *Grameen Nari (Rural Women)*. Dhaka, Bangladesh: Abosar Prokashoni.
- Manovich, L., Malina, R. F., & Cubitt, S. (2001). *The Language of New Media*. United States: MIT Press.
- Millett, K. (2016). *Sexual Politics*. Columbia University Press.
- Morahan-Martin, J. (2000). Women and the Internet: Promise and Perils. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 3(5), 683–691. <https://doi.org/10.1089/10949310050191683>
- Narayanan, S. (2016). Historical Background of Gender Equality and Succession Right of Hindu Women's Right of Property in Tamil Nadu. Intel Prop Rights. *Intellectual Property Rights: Open Access*, 4(2), 1–14.
- Nelson, A., & Brown, C. D. (2012). *The Gender Communication Handbook: Conquering Conversational Collisions between Men and Women*. San Francisco, Calif: Pfeiffer.
- Odhikar. (2018). Statistics on Violence against women. Retrieved January 17, 2019, from [/statistics/statistics-on-violence-against-women/](http://statistics/statistics-on-violence-against-women/)
- Parent, M. C., Gobble, T. D., & Rochlen, A. (2018). Social media behavior, toxic masculinity, and depression. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, No Pagination Specified-No Pagination Specified. <https://doi.org/10.1037/men0000156>
- Plant, S. (2000). On the Matrix: Cyberfeminist Simulations. In B. M. Kennedy & D. Bell (Eds.), *The Cybercultures Reader* (pp. 325–336). London: New York: Routledge.
- Preetha, S. S. (2015, May 16). Digital Sexual Harassment in Digital Bangladesh. Retrieved January 20, 2019, from The Daily Star website: <https://www.thedailystar.net/in-focus/digital-sexual-harassment-digital-bangladesh-82480>
- Riaz, A. (2014). *Culture of Fear: The Political Economy of Terror and Violence in Bangladesh*. Dhaka, Bangladesh: Prothoma Prokashan.
- Rukhsana, S. (2018, March 7). Love-marriage-relationships in social media: How much the women are empowered? *BBC News Bangla*. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/bengali/news-43308304>
- Russell, B. (1996). *Power: A New Social Analysis*. London: Routledge.
- Sharp, A. M., Register, C. A., & Grimes, P. W. (1997). *Economics of Social Issues* (13th edition). Boston, Mass: McGraw-Hill College.
- Shibli, A. (2018, September 23). Why do women get less pay than men? Retrieved January 17, 2019, from The Daily Star website: <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/open-dialogue/news/why-do-women-get-less-pay-men-1637131>
- Spellman, J. W. (1964). *Political theory of ancient India; a study of kingship from the earliest times to circa A. D. 300*. Clarendon Press.
- Statistics of acid-attack. (2010, March 7). Retrieved March 20, 2019, from Prothom Alo website: <http://www.prothom-alo.com/detail/date/2010-03-10/news/47126>

- Stockard, J. (2006). Gender Socialization. In J. S. Chafetz (Ed.), *Handbook of the Sociology of Gender* (pp. 215–227). Boston, MA: Springer US. https://doi.org/10.1007/0-387-36218-5_11
- Tannen, D. (1990). *You just don't understand: Women and men in conversation*. New York: William Morrow.
- Taylor, S. E., Peplau, L. A., & Sears, D. O. (1999). *Social Psychology* (10th ed.). Upper Saddle River, N.J: Prentice Hall.
- TED.com. (2015). *Inés Hercovich: Why women stay silent after sexual assault* [Speech]. Retrieved from http://archive.org/details/InesHercovich_2015X
- UN Women. (2018). UN Women Bangladesh. Retrieved January 17, 2019, from UN Women | Asia and the Pacific website: <http://asiapacific.unwomen.org/countries/bangladesh>
- United Nations Development Programme. (2018). *Human Development Indicators and Indices: 2018 Statistical Update Team*. 38–39.
- Women aged 18 to 30 vulnerable to cybercrime: Study. (2018, May 20). Retrieved January 19, 2019, from The Daily Star website: <https://www.thedailystar.net/city/women-aged-18-30-vulnerable-cybercrime-study-1578969>
- Women elected for reserved seats to continue for 25yrs. (2018, January 29). Retrieved January 17, 2019, from The Daily Star website: <https://www.thedailystar.net/country/women-elected-parliament-reserved-seats-continue-25-years-1526773>
- World Bank. (2018, September). Unemployment, female (% of female labor force). Retrieved January 17, 2019, from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.FE.ZS?locations=BD>
- Zaytoun, K., & Ezekiel, J. (2016). Sisterhood in Movement: Feminist Solidarity in France and the United States. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 37(1), 195–214. <https://doi.org/10.5250/fronjwomestud.37.1.0195>
- Žegarac, V. (1998). What is Phatic Communication? In V. Rouchota & A. H. Jucker (Eds.), *Current Issues in Relevance Theory* (pp. 327–362). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing.
- Zyma, I. (2018a, October 19). Why #MeToo is not happening in Bangladesh. Retrieved January 21, 2019, from The Daily Star website: <https://www.thedailystar.net/star-weekend/opinion/news/why-metoo-not-happening-bangladesh-1648678>
- Zyma, I. (2018b, October 26). Illusion of Inclusion. Retrieved January 17, 2019, from The Daily Star website: <https://www.thedailystar.net/star-weekend/spotlight/news/illusion-inclusion-1651771>