

EDUCATION OF WOMEN AND TECHNOLOGY: BANGLADESH PERSPECTIVES

by: **Md. Aminur Rahman**

Lecturer

Department of Bengali Language and Literature

The University of Dhaka

Dhaka-1000

Bangladesh

Fax: 880-2- 865583

E-mail: acl@bdmail.net

INTRODUCTION

According to the UN report on female education (1985), at this fag end of the twentieth century, there are 637 million women in the world who can neither read nor write. There is not any lighthouse against their eyes, there is no hope about the change of their life status and there is no emancipation and power in their whole life span. And tragically truth is that most of these women are living in the country like ours. The UN report also unveiled that the number of illiterate is highest in Africa. Out of every three adult women two can not read or write. It is also known that in 1985 there were 427 million illiterate women only in Asia and the figure is alarmingly increased at this stage.

Bangladesh, an independent and sovereign state appeared on the world map on December 16, 1971 following the victory at the war of liberation from march 25 to December 16, 1971. According to Bangladesh bureau of statistics the population of the country was 111.4 in 1991 and assuming medium variant of declining fertility and mortality the country is expected to reach a population of 129.6 million by 2000 ad. So with a male female ratio of 109:100, which is little less than half of total population, but for every 250 male literate there were only 100 female literate aged 5 and above (Ahmed, 1985: 17).

If we consider this in different way then the scenario will be like this: the over all literacy is 39.7 per cent, of them 48.1 per cent men and 33.9 per cent women (report on sample vital registration in Bangladesh 1981-1993, Bangladesh bureau of statistics). Such unequal status between male and female population in the country exists at every stage of life.

Due to increasing trend of illiteracy among women they are being deprived of employment opportunities. As a result, they are unable to contribute to national economic development and to the welfare of the family. Nevertheless, illiteracy causes poverty, poor health condition, mal-nutrition and child mortality. Compared to the death of 6 thousand children per year in developed countries, 5 lakh children die each year in the developing countries and illiteracy of mother is believed to be the main cause.

Women constitute half of the population of Bangladesh. Therefore, equal participation of women in both social and economic development is necessary.

But due to social constraints, age-old tradition, illiteracy, lack of appropriate technical and employment opportunities, a large portion of women are unable to integrate in mainstream of national development.

Purpose and methodology of the study

The purpose of the study is to investigate the pitfalls and constraints of women education and how could technology bring about any change over the prevailing condition through a modern and different approach.

The paper will be divided into three sections. In the first section I will draw an out line of the present status of women and their education in Bangladesh. In the second I will consider the possible impacts of technology on women education which could be considered as way out from the present prevailing condition. In the third section I will endeavour to draw conclusions of my arguments regarding technology based women education.

Women in Bangladesh

On account of the structure of the society and set cultural values women traditionally have lower status than men do. Husband is dominant authority in a family and he possesses the superior positions to his wife. It is considered that women's sphere of activities has been her home. Like all patriarchal societies, in Bangladesh, it is considered that women's function is to give birth to the babies, nourish them up and manage the household works. Moreover, prohibition and superstitions of various kinds socially exploit women. They can not expose themselves as an independent mankind. So, before marriage they are dependent on father and brother and after marriage on husband. When the husband dies she becomes helpless.

Women education: an overview

The earliest survey of education is found in Adam's report, which gives a picture of the educational conditions in the early nineteenth century. Adam, a missionary, found only four women literate in Bengal as against 21,971 men in the total population about the year 1830 (Adam, 1941:578). Because of strict seclusion or *pardah*, enjoined by Islam the education movement for Muslim girls started at the beginning of this century.

If we examine the traditional education system that is offering in Bangladesh from primary to higher education, we can see most of them fulfilled the need of male student. This leads to disproportionately low level of female participation at different tiers of education system. Due to this, even on the verge of the next millennium the female enrollment at the primary level is only 44 per cent which is alarmingly reduced at higher levels due to educational expenses and other socioeconomic causes.

According to Statistical Year Book 1995 the number of primary school in Bangladesh is 66168 having an enrollment of 15.19 million and in secondary school got an enrollment about 4.9 million. In primary education the number of girls students increased from 5.4 million to 8.2 million while in the secondary level the number increased from 1.05 million to 2.4 million (Fifth Five Year Plan 1996-2001, GOB).

The dropout situation

It is known from a research study conducted by FREPD in 1983 that out of 5 million children of school age, 60 per cent do not go to schools and 2 million are dropouts. There is another micro-study conducted by the National Academy for Primary Education in 1990(3) showed that dropout rates were 29 per cent in class I and in class II 27 per cent.

The aforesaid study unveiled that from the age limit of 9-10 years, physical and mental changes take place among the girls. If the unhealthy and insecure situation prevailed in the school and in the society then it became impossible to send their girls to the said age group to schools. This is one of the reasons for high dropouts among the girl students at the primary stage.

BANBEIS report of 1987 mentioned following reasons for dropouts:

Reasons	Urban		Rural	
	Boys (%)	Girls(%)	Boys(%)	Girls(%)
1. Financial crisis	44	55	39	38
2. Financial support to parents	19	14	25	10
3. Lack of enthusiasm	25	5	25	18
4. Failure in examination	6	-	-	4
5. Lack of interests of parents	-	5	-	-
6. Marriage	-	9	-	15
7. Others	6	12	9	11

Source: BANBEISE, 1987 Table-13, and p11.

Though some recent available data indicates that the gap between the number of male and female enrollment at primary level is decreasing gradually but at secondary level the drop-out is not decreasing proportionately. Why this is so? The reasons are multifarious. Still, in Bangladesh, women are only involved in household works and they have to spend most of their time at home. Moreover, the prevailing norm of the family and social demands are largely responsible for abstaining women from

education. No attention is given to their personality development. Due to *pardah* system parents of lower and lower middle class families are not ready to send their girls to the male teachers. Other reasons are:

1. Inadequate number of seats/ benches;
2. Insecurity on the way to school;
3. Lack of toilets;
4. Lack of drinking water;
5. High cost of paper, pencils and other learning materials;
6. Non-attractive curriculum, method of teaching and text books (Fyzennessa, 1992: 33).

According to Statistical Year Book 1995 the existing teacher student ratio 63:1 in primary level and in secondary level it stands 35:1. In regard to the international standard we can not put this data as normal. On the other hand severely shortage of trained teachers is another constraints for education in general and female education in particular. In Bangladesh the number of secondary schools are 11019 and the average number of teachers per school is 12. So the total number of teachers stands 13,2228. But there are only 12 teachers training college in the country and every year they are capable to train up by and large 100 trainee. So it requires about 110 years to train them all. Which is ridiculous. If we want to classify the constraints of women education in Bangladesh then it will be like this:

- Lack of educational awareness of parents in backward societies;
- Poverty;
- Relative position of girls in the family;
- Seclusion / Pardha;
- Absence of proper supervision;
- Arrangement for students of different ages in the same school; and
- Repeated changes in the political situation.

Open learning: the alternatives

Education is a lifelong process and one of the human rights. But in traditional education system, sometimes, exploit these opportunities. Open learning by incorporating cost-effective, self-instructional system and towards learner-centers approaches have already achieved its both theoretical and practical considerations. These are the alternative institutions. At the new technological development that occurred in the present days, open learning tries to incorporate most of them for disseminating knowledge to the target groups in view of human resource development. As open learning is mainly based on the emergence of the technology, 'and will result in a significant shift from school-based to home-based education' (Stonier, 1987:15).

From the very beginning of its functioning, BOU has introduced B.Ed programme as one of its inheritances from the then Bangladesh Institute of Distance Education (BIED) and another one is CELP (Certificate in English Language proficiency). Secondary School Certificate (SSC) is the first programme that BOU launched by its own resource and own way.

BOU SSC programme

In 1992, for the first time in Bangladesh, student enrolled in BOU for the SSC programme. The programme was mostly media and technology based and a limited number of tutorial session (twice in a month) was offered. This programme was fulfilled the particular needs of the learner rather than to those of the educational based.

We have already noticed that in Bangladesh the number of the students enrolled in primary school (15.19 million) stands one third (4.9 million) as there academic life proceed into secondary level. This huge number of potential human resources can not join in the mainstream of the national development as they could if they had adequate education and training. Moreover, the ratio of the girl's dropouts is much higher than the boys. These huge number dropouts, specially the women, considered BOU's SSC programme as their second chance of their life long education. Data available to the SSC passed students (1995) shows that the dropouts were the main clientele group in SSC programme. See the table below:

Statistical report on SSC passed student (1995)

Age Group	(%)	Profession	(%)
14 to 20 yr.	68.73	Job Seeker	0.8
20+ to 25 yr.	16.94	Housewife	6.4
25+ to 30 yr.	6.95	Businessman	0.8
30+ to 35 yr.	4.50	Students	24.0
35+ to 40 yr.	2.58	Service holder	0.8
40+ to 45 yr.	0.26	Dropouts	67.2

Source: Student Support Service (SSS), BOU.

Women are in move

Where in traditional system, their unmatchable gap is prevailing, as the number of girl's student is sharply half of the male student. But here in SSC programme offered by BOU, the difference was 30 per cent in the year 1995 and in due course of time the difference is reducing significantly. See the table below:

Name of the Programme	Year	Number of Enrollment	Male (%)	Female (%)
Secondary School Certificate (SSC)	1995	16152	65	35
	1996	12757	60	40
	1997	15710	58	42
	1998	15486	54	46
	Sub-total	60105		

Source: Student Support Service (SSS), BOU.

The corresponding figure shows that women participation in the SSC Programme is increasing and that is significantly. Gradual development of women participation in open learning is a hope for women education in our country.

CELP is other programme offering by BOU. In this (in Bangladesh male female ratio is 106:100) programme, women participation is higher than its male counterpart. See the table below:

Name of the Programme	Year	Number of Enrollment	Male (%)	Female (%)
Certificate in English Language Proficiency (CELP)	1994 (F.S.)*	1156	60	40
	1994 (S.S.)*	3861	55	45
	1995 (F.S.)	3187	55	45
	1995 (S.S.)	2112	50	50
	1996 (F.S.)	1982	51	49
	1996 (S.S.)	1859	53	47
	1997 (F.S.)	1175	54	46
	1997 (S.S.)	1349	55	45
	1998 (F.S.)	1143	51	49
	Sub-total	17824		

*F.S. = First Semester; S.S.= Second Semester

Source: Student Support Service (SSS), BOU

If we look at recently published SSC result then we will get so many things to be hopeful for the women and their active participation in this programme. Out of the top 20 merit position there are 16 meritorious girls who has proved their capability and zeal by securing merit position (Source: SSS, BOU).

Technology: hope for women education

We have already encountered some of the basic constraints about women education in Bangladesh. Among them seclusion/*pardah* is one. Due to this restrictions women are not allowed to go outside of the home, and reluctant to learn from a male teacher. In this position, only through media and technology package learning materials could reach into their drawing room. On the other hand, it is the only possible way to minimize the shortage of trained teachers. Through electronic media and technology a trained teacher can reach to hundreds of student at a time, which, however, will reduce time, cost and space barriers.

Technology: which degree?

Recently published (Daily Ajker Kagoj, 17 November, 98) research findings on mass media, conducted by four renowned national and international organizations, unveiled that at present 42 per cent people watch TV and 39 per cent people listen to radio. But, before three years (1995) the corresponding figure was 31 and 21 accordingly. It is also known that the growth rate of radio listener is 18 per cent while for TV viewers it stands 11 per cent. These research findings could be considered as one of the source of our education in general and women education in particular. So, only through these two media we can reach to a huge number of people, especially to the rural people where there is not any other facility for traditional education. Though in European open learning, at present, are using electronic mail and conferencing, computer based learning and interactive video, satellites and many other advanced technologies but for Bangladesh it is a far cry to use all of them in the field of open learning. But nothing to be loss hope, we should have to find out the best possible alternatives.

At present BOU has 11 resources centers and about 80 local centers. If we could equipped them with the modern technologies, which will be viable to the students. They can have an easy access to them. Till then we have to use radio, TV, audio and videocassettes.

Conclusions

In an TV interview Jesmin Akter Khanum, stood second position in SSC programme (1995), said in response to a question why she has opted BOU as her choice that, 'I am a married women with three children. I was married off while I was a 13 years old girl and was reading in class seven. After long ten years gap I heard of the SSC programme offered by BOU, she continues with her nostalgic eyes, and I thought it could be my best choice as there is no mandatory class attending bar which was absolutely impossible for me. The media and the special kind of books helped me a lot. That is why I have chosen BOU.' This is the opportunity, which can serve women education in Bangladesh and technology is the key alternative for educating women in a developing countries like Bangladesh.

References:

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