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From Inequality to Diversity: Perceptions of Bangladeshi Grassroot Level Feminists on Gender in Education

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This research aims to understand the prevalent gender norms in the education system of Bangladesh through the perceptions of grassroot level feminists and therefore, seeks answers to two questions: a) How do grassroot level feminists perceive the causes for gender inequality in the education system of Bangladesh? b) How can the Bangladeshi feminist critique help to reformulate the norms of education in Bangladesh to better take into consideration diverse gender experiences? Following a theoretical framework of postmodern feminism, postcolonial feminism and decolonial theory, the study illuminates the notions of gender inequalities in education of Bangladesh.

The study used a qualitative approach to understand the views and experiences of the participants who were the grassroot level feminists from Bangladesh. In depth interviews with the particians worked as the main source of data and thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. The study found that the grassroot level feminists in Bangladesh perceive patriarchy as one of the reasons behind gender inequality in the education system of Bangladesh. Other reasons include religion, social values and family pressure, economic condition, outdated structure and curricula from the colonial period. However, these reasons are intertwined with each other making gender inequality a complex phenomenon. The research also suggested that government initiatives in terms of curriculum reformation, budgeting and enforcing strict laws are crucial to make the education system more diverse and along with that exposure to outside knowledge is also necessary.

This research can be used by the policy makers to reform the education system in Bangladesh through a feminist and decolonial lens and this can be a way forward to other research concerning gender and education in Bangladesh. Moreover, this research has tried to incorporate authors from Bangladesh and South Asia (or in general from Global South) mostly so that the western and colonial perceptions can be avoided.

Keywords: Inequality, Gender and Education, Colonialism, Feminism, Decoloniality

Acknowledgment

Contents

1 Introduction

Social science researchers have been trying to address gender disparities in education. However, there is not much research based on Bangladeshi context (notable exceptions Asadullah & Chaudhury, 2008; Asadullah, Islam & Wahhaj, 2018; Chisamya, DeJaeghere, Kendall & Khan, 2012; Haq, & Alam, 2010; Khaled, 2014; Menon, 2019; Salahuddin, Khatun, & Bilkis, 2014). The perceptions of feminists from Bangladesh, especially grassroot level, on the education system have not been discussed much and they are not consulted enough when making a curriculum. Therefore, based on the interviews with grassroot level feminists in Bangladesh, this research will demonstrate their views on gender in education.

The most basic gender segregated roles start to take shape within the family (Kandiyoti, 1988; Chowdhury, 2009). For example, the purpose of women's education in a Bangladeshi family could be different based on its demography (urban or rural), religion, and class. At times, they are intertwined with patriarchal prejudices and colonial practices which make the phenomenon more complicated. For instance, urban middle class daughters are observed to get education and make a career in comparison with rural people and urban working and upper class people (Ahmed, 1986). There is also a connection between the economic condition and early marriage in the rural and urban working class families. The earlier the daughter can be married off, the lesser the amount of dowry is for the parents (ibid) which makes them desperate to find a groom for their daughter as soon as possible leaving the daughters little to no opportunity to get educated. For the urban upper class of the society, the experience is quite different. The parents usually raise both their sons and daughters to be educated but they try to marry their daughters off earlier than their sons as a symbol of social prestige (Palriwala & Kaur, 2013). Even if a family invests in girls' higher education, the purpose is to make her eligible for marriage and find a suitable groom (ibid). After marriage, her career mostly depends on the decision of the husband or father-in-law.

In economic and political sector, women are not welcomed to take part as equally as men. For a long time, women were considered 'not intelligent enough' to make political decision or 'not interested enough' in politics (Kumar, 2002). Some religions, e.g. Islam, even suggest that a female political leader cannot bring prosperity for the nation (an Islamic Hadith narrated by Abu Bakr). Although Islamic practices encourage women to be educated and independent parallelly to men (e.g. Tablighi Jama'at), they do not ncessarily encourag women's equal

participation in public life (Metcalf, 1998). However, religious women have their own way of addressing gender inequalities and arranging movements which liberal urban feminists tend to ignore often (Mahmood, 2005). Meanwhile, being a Muslim majority country, Bangladesh has female Prime Ministers for decades even though the participation and representation of women in politics is yet not satisfactory. Besides, the economic contribution of women is often neglected and therefore, the wage differences between men and women are not mitigated. For instance, there is around a 5 percent gender-based wage gap in Bangladesh (Rahman & Al-Hasan, 2021, p. 27).

Similar to familial culture, politics and economy-oriented gender discriminations, the education system itself reflects gender stereotyping. Dropout of students, especially female students after primary school is a common scenario in the South Asian context (Menon, 2019). The major reasons of dropout for girls after the primary education in Bangladesh is 'child marriage' or 'the parents did not want their daughter to study' while the major reason for boys is that they themselves were not interested to study anymore (Education scenario in Bangladesh: Gender perspective, 2017, p. 22). Moreover, in Bangladesh, girls are not often encouraged and supported enough to pursue higher education and overall, a career due to the economic and social costs that the parents have to bear (Salahuddin, Khatun & Bilkis, 2014).

The scenario might be changing slowly because of the intervention from the government and other international organizations (White, 1992). For example, Reaching Out-of-School Children (ROSC), Secondary Education Quality and Access Enhancement Project (SEQAEP), various stipend projects targeting female students have increased the rate of their enrollment at secondary level from 46.23 percent to 51.96 percent between 2001 and 2011 (Salahuddin, Khatun & Bilkis, 2014, p. 1-6). However, the primary aim of these projects is to develop the nation economically and therefore, they tend to ignore the causes of gender disparities in overall education system (ibid; Parvin & Alam, 2016). Moreover, the duration of these projects varies from five to ten years which does not ensure assistance to every girl in need.

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to understand the perceptions of the grassroot level feminists in Bangladesh about the obstacles towards gender equality in the educational settings

and their views on the deconstruction process of the educational gender norms to incorporate diverse gender experiences. The research will also serve the purpose of shedding light on the colonial influence in academia since the data are collected from participants who have had the lived experience of Bangladeshi education system. On top of that, I will try to incorporate authors from Bangladesh and South Asia (or in general from Global South) mostly so that the western and colonial perceptions can be avoided. This research can be used by the policy makers to reform the education system in Bangladesh through a feminist and decolonial lens and this can be a way forward to other research concerning gender and education in Bangladesh.

1.1 Structure of the Research and Research Questions

There are six chapters in this research paper. Chapter 1 demonstrates the purpose and significance of this research and the main research questions for this thesis. Chapter 2 provides a larger picture of the context of Bangladesh starting with the development of the concept of feminism, then the colonial impacts on the Bangladeshi education system and lastly, the overall mechanism of the education system and its relation to gender inequality. Besides, the existing literature about the education system and the relation between gender and education in Bangladesh have been articulated in the same chapter. Chapter 3 illustrates a theoretical framework which has been used to do this research. The framework includes three main theories- postmodern feminism, postcolonial feminism and decolonial theory. After that, a description of the methodology of this research and its suitability has been demonstrated in Chapter 4. Chapter 4 also describes the data collection method (in-depth interviews) and analysis process (thematic analysis) and the ethical issues that were considered during this study. Chapter 5 discusses the analysis of the data and the core findings from the analysis. Future implications of the research and a summary of the paper can be found in Chapter 6.

The thesis will answer the following research questions:

a) How do grassroot level feminists perceive the causes for gender inequality in the education system of Bangladesh?

b) How can the Bangladeshi feminist critique help to reformulate the norms of education in Bangladesh to better take into consideration diverse gender experiences?

2 Background and Context

2.1 Feminism in Bangladesh

Advocacy for women's rights cannot be termed as a recent issue in Bangladesh. Although the country celebrated the Golden Jubilee of its independence last year, its struggle for equal rights for women can be traced back to the British Colonial period. The history of women's rights movements and feminist activism in the Indian subcontinent under British rule is different than that of the western world because they were part of social reforms rather than political ones (Azim, Mennon & Siddiqui, 2009). For instance, reforming the 'Satidaha' tradition where a wife had to sacrifice herself on her husband's funeral pyre (ibid). However, the initial days of these movements and activism can be marked by the presence of male frontiers who were also modernists (Burte, 2013). The social reforms raised awareness among women who belonged to economically solvent modernist families (Nazneen, 2017). The problem was that discourses about women's role and participation in the public and private sectors were still following the pattern created by mainstream men and their ideas of modernism (Azim, Mennon & Siddiqui, 2009). Therefore, the public voice that the women got was shaped mostly by their exposure to higher economic status, modernism and patriarchal notions.

There were some exceptional reformers too who thought outside the box. One of the prolific examples is Rokeya Shakhawat Hossain (also known as Begum Rokeya). Being born in a prestigious Muslim family, she realized how women are deprived of their rights for the sake of religion and decided to pen her critiques against it (Jahan, 1995). Unlike others, she analyzed and compared both Eastern and Western knowledge and incorporated them into her political philosophy so that women's education gets prioritized equally with men's. She also voiced her concern on women's subordination and dependency in the family which she believed was an obstruction to the growth of the family. Begum Rokeya pointed out the problems of female attitude to be confined at home and mental slavery of women through her writings, especially women belonging to a Muslim family (Rajan, 2015). In one of her famous novels named Motichur, Rokeya Shakhawat Hossain (1904) compared the family with a car and the husband

and wife as two tyres of the car; and she argued that if one tyre is bigger (in this case if the husband is educated) than the other one (in this case if the wife is not educated and dependent on the husband), the car cannot move much forward. The same reason works behind the lagging of the society.

While these events broadened the horizon of women's participation in public life, women's emancipation in private life was still lagging behind (Roy, 2010). For example, women started to take part in various national and political movements, namely the Swadeshi movement (a nationalist campaign against the British rulers that took place in 1905), the Non-cooperation movement (a more organized movement against the British government led by Mahatma Gandhi. It took place from 1920 to 1922 and also regarded as the civil disobedience movement) and Bengali Nationalist movements (movements related to the independence of Bangladesh, e.g. the Language Movement of 1952, the Mass Uprising of 1969, and the Liberation War of 1971) but they were not considered worthy enough to have equal rights in terms of marriages and inheritances. This unequal distribution of power in the familial relationships is still dominant in Bangladesh, Pakistan and India.

In 1971, Bangladesh earned independence from Pakistan and the newborn state was soon struggling to rehabilitate war victims and survivors of rape. Since the state could not provide sufficient support, some organizations for women and feminists came forward to help. Women did not have a strong position even in the new society and the discrimination against them became more and more prominent (Shehabuddin, 2008). As a result, feminist academics created a group named Women for Women (WFW). This group's main task was to collect data on women's situation and produce research for policy makers (Banu, 2015). However, there were a series of political disturbances, economic crisis and famine which compromised the security of the law and order of the country. To help women legally against violences, Bangladesh National Women Lawyer's Association (BNWLA) was formed. One of the most important feminist organizations was 'Naripokhkho' which means pro-women, and it introduced a feminist approach to criticize the state beyond the development paradigm (Azim, 2016).

Naripokhkho and other women's organization confronted the state and called for movements in favour of anti-dowry law (a kind of special law which would ensure deterrent punishment when somebody committed any violence against women (Jahan, 1995) and forming the Family Courts (Jahan, 1995; Mansoor, 1999). Moreover, the movements started to challenge the religious norms which were oppressive to women. One of the noteworthy examples is the movement to raise public awareness and support against 'Fatwas' (In Islam, fatwa is given by an Islamic scholar as an interpretation of some incidents or of verses in Quran or Hadith. However, Islamic preachers and mowlanas in Bangladesh give fatwas according to their interests of subordinating women which can be brutal in some cases and these fatwas are mostly implemented in traditional way of resolving disputes in rural areas (Shehabuddin, 1999). For example, punishments ranging from physically whipping and lashing women to ostracizing them and their families are common phenomena) (ibid; Bangladesh: Protect Women Against 'Fatwa' Violence, 2011). Not only this, but also, they were concerned about issues like women's and children's trafficking, acid attacks and rape and led movements to put an end to these brutalities. As a consequence, Nari o Shishu Nirjaton Domon Ain, 2000 (Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children Act, 2000) was created. By this time, the organizations started to be influenced by the Convention of Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and NGOs and came forward to make a draft for the uniform Family Code. However, this draft was not welcomed by the state as it could have triggered religious traditions and laws (Banu, 2015; Shehabuddin, 2008). Nevertheless, a debate about the inclusivity of these movements started to spread among these organizations and feminists. The major question was if the movements had taken into consideration class, ethnicity, or religious minority (Nazneen, 2017).

The ideological differences among the feminists and women's rights organizations could be distnctive in nature. For instance, organizations, e.g., Karmojibi Nari (Working Women), that were formed right after the independence followed Marxist thoughts and were connected with the left political parties (Banu, 2015). WFW and similar organizations had a liberal feminist notion while Naripokhkho had a radical pattern (Azim, 2016). However, they shared a common analytical position which was followed by Begum Rokeya's critical approach to patriarchy

11

(Nazneen, Sultan & Mukhpadhyay, 2011b). The chapter of feminism and women's right activities in Bangladesh has taken a turn in the recent decades. Due to regime change, stable economic growth and exposure to western media and culture, movements for women's rights have lost their separate entities and are facing challenges. Moreover, the development projects by the NGOs which served to empower women economically, to some extent, led to the depoliticization of the movements. This can be marked as a notion of neocolonial approach because the NGOs are funded mostly by global north and the funds bring conditions and liabilities with them. Therefore, the movements now act as a side-streamed agenda in other movements (Alveraz, 2009) although they have been successful to win some crucial legal battles namely the Domestic Violence Act of 2010 and invalidating two finger test for rape allegations (Nazneen, 2017, p. 11).

However, some threats are impeding the mobilization of the activism. For instance, the electronic media in Bangladesh are reluctant to advocate for feminist discourses compared to mainstream print media and social media. The rise of conservative religious parties in politics is intimidating the state to leave little to no room for matters related to women's rights. Moreover, feminists, women's right organizations and civil societies have been fallen victim to polarization of mainstream political parties because of the need to thrive and be heard. Unfortunately, this led them to lose their credibility, because their association with the parties demanded loyalty towards the parties' agenda. The movements and activisms started to slow down; however, the organizations are still working within the political sphere to make policies for gender equality (Nazneen & Sultan, 2014). But they are working more as 'interest or pressure groups' and not as a strong critical force (Azim, 2016) which blurs their purpose.

2.2 Colonial Impacts on the Education System of Bangladesh

When the East India Company came to power in 1757 defeating the last sovereign Nawab of Bengal (Islam, 1992) named Sirajuddowala, their primary intention was to do business (Mcleod, 2002). Therefore, they paid little to no attention to education until the last decades of the 18th century. They allowed European missionaries to build schools and colleges but soon

realized that they need to establish an educational institution too so that it can produce officials who will work for them. In order to rule the common mass, they understood the need to have officials from the continent with good knowledge of religious laws. Hence, 'Kolkatta Alia Madrasah' (1781) and 'Benaras Sangskrit College' (1792) were established, the former one being "the first government college in the Indian sub-continent" (Rahman, Hamzah, Meerah & Rahman, 2010, p. 116). However, arguments over the purpose of education started to divide the colonial officials and Thomas Macaulay grabbed this opportunity to redefine the need for western knowledge among the people of India. He was a "member of the Governor General's Council" (ibid). His plea to develop western schooling system in English language emphasized his support for educating the upper classes (Ghosh, 1993; Mukerji, 1957), creating a knowledge gap between the upper, middle, and lower class . This plea pushed towards making the administrative language English in 1837 (ibid; Rahman, Hamzah, Meerah & Rahman, 2010).

The introduction of English as an official administrative language paved the way for building a number of English schools and colleges rapidly in the region (Mukerji, 1957; Seal, 1968). It started to create a crisis for the local traditional educational institutions. Eventually, English became a language of elite class and a symbol of social prestige which sustains till today. Furthermore, high schools added English as a mandatory subject for matriculation exam and admissions for college or universities started to develop requirement for good knowledge of English (Mukerji, 1956). These processes were not challenged for a long time until recently and that is why most of the decolonized countries still uphold these practices, not understanding why. For example, nowadays in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, English is considered as 'the Elite Language' (Hossain & Tollefson, 2007) while the native languages are for people belonging to working class. The schools in these countries have English as a compulsory subject and knowledge of English language is an obligatory requirement for university admission. These colonial traditions work as a tool to reinforce social inequalities (Agnihotri, 2006; Rahman, 2006).

Controlling the contents in the textbooks promoted inequalities based on race, class, gender, and religion (Rahman, Hamzah, Meerah & Rahman, 2010). It also gave Britain the power to supervise all the schools in both public and private sectors. Under constant evaluation and

inspection, critical thinking did not have the opportunity to flourish. Moreover, the elite male class of colonial rule started to promote female education, but not for the sake of providing equal access to education for everybody. Female education was aimed at motherhood (Chanana, 1994). It implies the biased nature of gender norms in the education system; education for females was designed to make good mothers while education for males opened the doors of professional opportunities which did not include becoming 'a good father'. This concept of education for motherhood has a long-lasting effect when the women join the professional world. For instance, many women in Bangladesh choose teaching as their profession because they believe it is easier to teach children since they have been doing it at home too. Teaching also spares time for family and household which women are expected to take care of even if they are working like their male counterparts.

2.3 Context: Where Does Bangladesh Stand?

The education system in Bangladesh is driven by patriarchal forces and gender biasedness is prevalent in the classrooms (Khaled, 2014). Education is one of the basic needs and depending on the quality of education that people get during their childhood, their perceptions about the world shape up. Education should teach people how to distinguish between right and wrong, how to address social issues, how to think critically, and how to work towards social justice (Uddin, 2019). However, these purposes are obstructed due to various reasons of class, religion, demography along with the patriarchal notions.

The textbooks in Bangladeshi education system are designed to represent the gender segregated roles. For example, almost all the male characters have complex professions such as engineering, pilot, scientist and seem to be doing the 'masculine' tasks like changing the lightbulbs or fixing bicycles or cars whereas most of the female characters are either teachers or housewives (Haq & Alam, 2010). Even though the textbooks include working women, the household chores are done mostly by them. There is little involvement of male members of the family in doing the chores (ibid).

Although the Constitution of Bangladesh mentions that there should not exist any kind of discrimination against anybody because of their gender, it fails to ensure this right in reality. Article 28 of the Constitution of Bangladesh states that

> "(1) The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. (2) Women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the State and of public life. (3) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth be subjected to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to access to any place of public entertainment or resort, or admission to any educational institution. (4) Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making special provision in favour of women or children or for the advancement of any backward section of citizens." (The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Part III, Fundamental Rights).

Hence, the rights and opportunities should be equally accessible to all disregarding class, race and gender.

Although Bangladesh is a small country, it has a large population of around 160 million more than half of which consists of women (Population & Housing Census 2022, Preliminary report, 2022). There are three main genders- male, female and third gender. Around 7 percent of the population in Bangladesh belong to third gender who are called 'Hijras' in the South Asian context (ibid). They are different than transgender. Some of them are born intersex while some remove their genitalia as an offering (Rhude, 18). This group of people were named hijras long before the contemporary gender categories came into being. That is why they like to be addressed as a third gender instead of any other category. Apparently, patriarchal cultures subordinate people who do not possess the male identity and therefore, this massive portion of population are treated unequally. Most of the time, the unequal treatments start with the family (Rozario, 1992; Guhathakurta, 1985). They can take a turn to violence if somebody tries to speak against inequalities.

Moreover, the concept of shame is strongly associated with the notion of gender roles in society. Since people are still reluctant to think out of the binary concept of 'gender' (Ghoshal, 2020), a feminine boy or a masculine girl is shamed and bullied in the mainstream schools because of their personalities which can be contrasting to the societal expectations (Chisamya, DeJaeghere, Kendall, & Khan, 2012). These individuals are not able to make any friends in the schools because of their divergent appearances. As a result, most of them drop out of school after some time which ends their educational journey long before it should (ibid). Besides that, the third gender or hijras do not get access to mainstream education because they are shamed by the society.

Therefore, shaming and defaming somebody who does not abide by the gender norms is a common scenario in Bangladesh (Tarana, 2022). At times, there can be consequences like isolation from society or leading a dual life in fear of stigmatization in front of the family, neighbourhood and relatives (ibid). Stigmatization can be done using social media e.g., Facebook or TikTok nowadays. In Bangladesh, social media works as a powerful tool to appreciate or criticize people. Easy access to internet and technology in the past decade has made people from all walks of life regular users of social media channels. This has also led patriarchs to use these platforms to start campaigns against feminism in Bangladesh. Some misogynist people in Bangladesh also use social media in order to spread hatred against those who do not abide by the gender norms (Al-Zaman, 2021). For instance, there is a Facebook group called "Feminism is Cancer" where patriarchs spread negativity against women, LGBTQIA+ community and people who break the barriers of gender stereotyping. They argue that higher education for females has been one of the main reasons for the society to go in vain losing its cultural and religious values. These values include women not leaving home without emergencies, women clothing from head to toe or veiling, men providing for the family and women taking care of the household, early and heterogenous marriage, women being softspoken and always under a male supervision and so on (V, 2021). The misogynists tend to blame the female victims on social media through aggressive comments for the rapes or sexual violences caused by men (Al-Zaman, 2021). Victim blaming has become one of the most common weapons for patriarchs to reinforce the 'shame' culture.

However, there are exceptional scenarios too where the subordination and opression of women were mitigated through campaigns. During 1980s and 1990s, the government of Bangladesh campaigned for family planning measures to reduce the high fertility rate. The first slogan for this campaign was 'a small family is a happy family' (Case 13: Reducing Fertility in Bangladesh, p.5). Unfortunately, it did not catch much attention to all. Therefore, to reach a larger audience, the government asked to start a mass media campaign. Electronic media started to broadcast advertisements and minidramas where the print media started to print slogans on a daily basis to motivate people. One of the popular slogans was 'Not more than two children, better to have one'. It helped to reduce the population growth eventually and saved women from health hazards.

Another example of such successful initiative is the campaign against acid attacks in Bangladesh. The campaign initiated by Naripokhkho started to gain widespread attention in the state level. The campaign included developing workshops and support group for the victims, persuading state to make stricter laws to punish the perpetrators and control the buying/selling of acid, cooperating with NGOs for rehabilitating or reintegrating the victims (Chowdhury, 2005). There were billboards, posters, minidramas, advertisements and news about the law and punishment of the perpetrators and what steps to follow when somebody falls victim to acid attack (ibid). Moreover, the government of Bangladesh started to control the market of acid strictly with legislation and law enforcement agencies. All these helped reduce the number of acid attacks in the upcoming years (Chatterjee, 2011).

Recently, there has been another case. January 24, 2023- a date that has been marked with a success story, a victory for mothers, for women, for victims, for law and order against patriarchal culture, discrimination, and injustice. The High Court of Bangladesh made a verdict that day extending the legal guardianship of children to mothers which they did not have solely before (Rudro, 2023). Whenever a child was admitted to an educational institution, their admission was subject to their father's name as their legal guardian. The student information form (SIF) designed for board examinations, application for passports or national identity card (NID) also required this information (Moneruzzaman, 2023). Therefore, students who could not or did not want to mention their father's name faced massive difficulties and were deprived

of their basic rights to education (ibid). One such incidence in 2007 triggered a movement and a petition was submitted to the High Court against this type of discrimination in 2009 (ibid). Finally, after 12 years of fighting, the verdict was delivered stating that, instead of their fathers' names, citizens can opt for using either their mothers' names or other guardians' names if they wish (Rudro, 2023). Therefore, the official documents will provide three options in total from now on to record the legal guardian.

Some colonial laws are still prevalent and in dire need of reformation while some legislations have been reformed but lack successful enactment. For example, the rape laws in Bangladesh which are based on section 375 of the Penal Code 1860 (Anima, 2022; Lee, 2021) are amended and have added capital punishment as the highest level of punishment for a perpetrator (Lee, 2021). The law states-

> "A man is said to commit "rape" who except in the case hereinafter excepted, has sexual intercourse with a woman under circumstances falling under any of the five following descriptions: Firstly. Against her will. Secondly. Without her consent. Thirdly. With her consent, when her consent has been obtained by putting her in fear of death, or of hurt. Fourthly. With her consent, when the man knows that he is not her husband, and that her consent is given because she believes that he is another man to whom she is or believes herself to be lawfully married. Fifthly. With or without her consent, when she is under fourteen years of age. Explanation-penetration is sufficient to constitute the sexual intercourse necessary to the offence of rape. Exception. Sexual intercourse by a man with his own wife, the wife not being under thirteen years of age, is not rape" (Lee, 2021, para 3).

However, around 95 percent of male perpetrators did not face any penalties for rape due to the lack of strict enforcement (Fulu et al., 2013). The inability of the state to implement these penalties leads to more violence and injustice towards women, failing state's responsibility to protect its citizens (Guhathakurta, 1985).

Nevertheless, Bangladesh has been addressing gender issues to empower women in various sector. The problem is the policies focus on the development of women and at times overlook the involvement of men in this regard. This thesis lacked straight male perspectives for this reason and raised my concern on- how do we teach Bangladeshi men to deal with feminism and equal rights? It will be an interesting extension of the study to compare their perceptions with the feminists.

2.4 Research on the Educational System of Bangladesh

The education system of Bangladesh can be traced back to British colonial period (Ali, 1986, as cited in Rahman, Hamzah, Meerah, & Rahman, 2010). That means, as a colonized country, the education system and policies of Bangladesh are heavily influenced by the British colonial period and they have not gone through much reform since the decolonization. Institutional racism, class stratification, gender biasedness and stereotyping in textbooks, outdated curricula bear the proof of colonialism.

In order to understand the education system of Bangladesh, the levels and streams of education are important. The schooling in Bangladesh takes place in three levels- primary education (class one to five), secondary education (class six to twelve) and higher education (bachelor's and master's program) (Rahman, Hamzah, Meerah, & Rahman, 2010). However, pre-schooling is getting popularized nowadays which is not mandatory. Parents can choose this option depending on their demographic location, economic ability, and social security as the facility can be urban based and costly. Usually, the appropriate age to get admitted to primary level is 6 years.

There are three main but separate streams namely- mainstream education system (based on secularity and state language Bengali), religious system of education (based on religious texts and lifestyles) and an English-medium system of education (based on British curriculum and English as the main language of instructions) (ibid). They coexist parallelly in Bangladesh from the colonial period. Since Islam is the mostly followed religion in Bangladesh, the religious system of education is designed focusing Islamic texts, laws and way of living and this

pedagogical approach is known as 'madrasa'. The participation of female students in these streams has been increasing steadily, sometimes covering more than half of the student proportion (Salahuddin, Khatun & Bilkis, 2014). However, the presence of female teachers in these streams is yet not satisfactory, especially in madrasas (ibid).

Primary education can be obtained from two different streams- general and madrasa. The secondary level can be obtained from general education, technical or vocational education and madrasa education. Higher education level has similar notions like secondary level and can be achieved from general, technology and madrasa streams. The general stream usually consists of subjects ranging from science to applied science, commerce to business and arts to social science. The madrasa stream consists of Aliya and Qoumi where the earlier one has some subjects from general stream along with the subjects from Islamic studies (study of the Quran, Hadith and other religious texts, Islamic law, regulations and their interpretations) and the latter one teaches the Islamic subjects only. Although technical or vocational education can lead to a diploma, it is not the same as higher education in technology. Technology stream consists of "agriculture, engineering, medical, textile, leather technology and ICT" (Rahman, Hamzah, Meerah, & Rahman, 2010, p.115). Even though there are many divisions and streams, sometimes it is possible to switch between them from one level to another.

The textbooks designed for these levels and streams are not free from gender bias. The attributes that are used to describe a person in the textbooks are heavily influenced by gender stereotyping (Haq & Alam, 2010). Moreover, the number of women involved in writing and editing these texts is not equal to men and hence not satisfactory. For example, in a study of 2010, it came out that there were 111 writers for 33 textbooks among which 25 of them were women (ibid). This counts for only 25 percent of the total writers (ibid). The case of editors was worse where there were only three women out of 54 editors, and it counts to 6 percent of total editors (ibid). Therefore, the textbooks lack a feminist perspective to address the gender sensitive issues in the textbooks.

Moreover, the textbooks put examples of men in difficult and hardworking profession like "director, controller, money earner, distributor and lender" (Haq & Alam, 2010, p. 30) and

women in easy job like "preserving eggs" (Haq & Alam, 2010, p. 31) or in feminine roles like a loving mother. The representation of women characters always lacks a leading role which is not true in real life (Asadullah, Islam & Wahhaj, 2018). In mathematics book, unequal pay for women is a common scenario (Haq & Alam, 2010, p. 30).

Although reformations of the curriculum have taken place quite a few times, they were not successful enough to reduce the gender disparities in the education system. For instance, the curriculum of 1990 had around 30% female representation and the curriculum of 2012 has a similar percentage for female representation (Asadullah, Islam & Wahhaj, 2018, para 13). Moreover, changes in political atmosphere make it complicated to improve the quality of education. The rise of religious extremist groups in politics narrows the scope for civil societies and activists alternating the narratives for gender equality in education (Asadullah, Islam & Wahhaj, 2018; Hossain, 2012; Khan, Hussain, Parveen, Bhuiyan, Gourab, Sarker, Arafat, & Sikder, 2009). The most recent curriculum reform is in order from 2023 (Sakib, 2021; Billah, 2021). However, the focus of the reform is still lacking an equal and a feminist lens.

2.5 Existing Literature on Gender and Education: Summary

From Global South to Global North, one thing seemed to be common for the feminists and that is the fight against inequalities and discriminations. The reasons and ways can be different but feminists across the globe advocate for social justice. Four main themes came up while I was reviewing the literatures on the causes of gender bias in the education system of Bangladesh-family and religious duties, stereotyping discourses in the textbooks, gender oriented subject choice, and sexual abuse in the educational institutions.

Kandiyoti (1988) examines the patriarchal practices that exist in developing countries. She identifies that the functions of the family or household are the main causes for classical patriarchy where male members are the head of the family and therefore, the family structure opresses women (Rozario, 1992). Sangari (2002), Shehabuddin (1999) and Siddiqi (2006) explain the nature of subordination that family and religious duties comprise. In other words, patriarchal norms entangling with family responsibilities and religious (especially Islamic) texts

create gender inequalities. The societies in Bangladesh follow this kind of pattern (Chowdhury, 2009).

Following the patterns of gender inequality, stereotyping discourses can be found in the textbooks. For example, the textbooks designed for primary education in Bangladesh advocate that it is the duty of a male child to help his father in outside work and it is the duty of the female child to take care of the household chores in absence of her mother (Akhter, 2013; Haq & Alam, 2010; Asadullah, Islam & Wahhaj, 2018). However, Salahuddin, Khatun, and Bilkis (2014) tried to portray the scenario of the present education system and its female incorporation policies. For example, they mention that the government of Bangladesh had taken initiatives to popularize female education throughout the country. It introduced "allowances, stipend, and free education facilities" (2014, p.2) for the girls coming from a lower middle class and working-class family (Asadullah & Chaudhury, 2008). There is no doubt that the education system of Bangladesh has developed to a great extent, but, it has not been successful to establish a system which is equally accessible to all genders. Rather "it continues to manifest, reinforce, even create greater inequalities" (Ahmed & Williams, 2008, p.19). Pamelia Khaled (2014), in this regard, argues that the patriarchal society had designed classrooms in such a way where gender segregation is a vital focus. She also believes that the current education system needs to address the gender-sensitive issues more in order to stimulate participation of the female children (Khaled, 2014; White, 1992).

Kabeer (2005) argues that most parents and teachers are observed to give little to no attention to the achievements of the female students while they are seen to encourage male students to take up subjects related to science and technology. Moreover, the dropout rate of girls after primary education due to early marriage is still noteworthy (Layton, Lusk-Stover, Inoue & Sosale, 2021). However, Metcalf (1998) observes otherwise and considers that the participation of the female students have increased and they are motivated to go to schools. Bhan (2001) and Harber (2014) raise concerns on the matter of sexual assaults that take place within educational institutions. They argue that girls mostly fall victim to gender-based violence and assault in a patriarchal society which the education institutions cannot always prevent (Guhathakurta,

1985). There are victims of other genders too, even male students can fall victim to sexual abuse at times. However, the fear of stigmatization prevents these incidents from coming to light.

There is a need for further research on the importance of sex education and gender sensitivity in the curricula of Bangladesh, the success or failure of gender intervention programmes taken by the government or other organizations and impacts of different religions on gender segregated education. Future research on how diverse gender experiences can be implemented through reforming laws and curriculum is also required.

3   Theoretical Framework

In qualitative research, a theoretical framework works as a conceptual background for the phenomenon in question. It provides the researchers with tangible objectives while helping them formulating the research questions (Maxwell, 2013). The theories or theoretical frameworks can also help with providing the background knowledge and data collection process. Howerver, there can be another way of developing the theoretical framework by enabling the data to create the new theory. This research does not necessarily fall under the second category. However, it cannot be claimed that it fits entirely to the first category either. The theories discussed in this chapter have provided valuable insights and knowledge to the data while at the same time not influencing its course of analysis altogether. The leading theories of this research have been postmodern feminism, postcolonial feminism, and decolonial theory. This chapter will describe the notions of these theories that are the most relevant for this study.

3.1   Postmodern and Postcolonial Feminism

Butler (1995, as cited in Beasley, 2005), one of the prominent postmodern feminists, argues that the identity of gender is a fabrication created by social discourses and therefore she rejects the norms of identity. In other words, postmodern feminists contemplate that the concept of gender is developed through our conversations, imaginations, and representations in the society, and it is not the truth. Another prominent postmodern feminist is bell hooks who emphasized on the fact that feminism is for everyone. To her, sexist behaviour is the root cause of problems in every aspect of life ranging from family life to social life and she believed that feminist politics has an interrelation with race and class (hooks, 2000). Besides, hooks idea of postmodern feminism included the criticism on feminist ideas where the experience of Black women was ignored (ibid).

However, postmodern feminists like Butler neglect the experiences of non-western and post colonized women and the connection between gender, sexuality, class and religion (Al-wazedi, 2020). Postcolonial feminists adress these issues while demonstrating patriarchy as an opressive

structure. Moreover, postmodern feminists tend to forget the historical and cultural background associated with the inequalities in society which postcolonial feminists try to consider more (Mohanty, Russo & Torres, 1991; Quayson 2000). The concept of postcolonial feminism described by Spivak (1985), Mohanty (2003a) and Datta (2016) started to address the issue of the position of the non-western women compared to that of western women. According to them, mainstream feminist school of thoughts have been biased to white, western women.

There are some critiques on postcolonial feminism which state that postcolonial feminists seem to weaken the emotional bond of sisterhood among women from different parts of the world and its power to carry out movements (Weedon, 2007).

3.2 Decolonial Theory

Here, the concept of decoloniality stated by Mignolo (2011) has been used to formulate a decolonial lens to gender inequality in the education system of Bangladesh. According to him, the idea of decoloniality developed recently and has had broader impact on formerly colonized regions. Decoloniality refers to the idea of knowledge production and dissemination which aims to replace the hegemonic authority of western countries. Since the research has been done considering the authors from the South Asian countries mostly and Global South in general with a view to breaking the western hierarchy of knowledge, the framework itself can be referred to as a decolonial approach. Being a former colony, Bangladesh has had colonial practices in the education sector which prevails till date. In order to address and dismantle those practices, decoloniality is crucial. As a part of decoloniality, this study is going to address SDG 4 and SDG 5 through a critical lens.

To address social injustices and look for solutions, the United Nations (UN) has introduced Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Among other core issues, gender equality and quality education are noteworthy which are labelled respectively as SDG 5 and SDG 4. SDG 4 demonstrates that all people must get access to quality education equally whereas SDG 5 focuses to fight against gender-biasedness (SDG Guide Booklet, 2019). These two SDGs would mainly be taken into consideration while doing this research.

However, most of the SDGs fail to consider the cultural differences, diverse local knowledge and individual experiences. For example, SDG 5 states the goal of achieving gender equality where the term 'gender equity' would be more appropriate (Koehler, 2016). The course of empowering every woman and girl is not going to be similar in every context but the goal does not mention this kind of distinction. Most importantly, the goal is looking at the concept of gender from a binary point of view while there are more than two genders. In that sense, these goals cannot be set as sole standards for gender equality and quality education. But they can be a starting point for greater changes and their focus areas can be modified and culturally appropriated before implementation.

The SDGs can be interrelated as well. For example, SDG 4 is quality education and SDG 5 is gender equality. Quality education teaches us to think freely without any prejudices and to go beyond imagination to help each other grow and this cannot be attained by the states without making education equally accessible to all genders. This interdependency between quality education and gender equality can also be observed in the context of Bangladesh which implies that Bangladesh cannot achieve quality education if it cannot ensure gender equity.

The theory of decolonial feminism described by Lugones (2008) and Mohanty (2003a) are also important for this research. This theory distinguishes the notions of coloniality from that of Global South and provides voice to the unheard 'othered' community of women (Bhambra, 2014; Lugones, 2010). The women from the Global South are othered because of their feminine characteristics and their geographical location which are different from that of the colonizers or western or developed countries. Postcolonial and decolonial feminists try to challenge the discourses formulated by the western feminists where the women from the Global South are represented as a uniform entity who lacks education and development (Calás & Smircich, 2006; Mohanty, 2003a, 2003b). Therefore, they are not the same as the western women and they are othered. This has led to the generalization of women's experiences from the Global South countries ignoring their background, culture and history (Spivak, 1985, 1988, 1999; Mohanty, 2003a, 2003b). Moreover, the western feminists tend to speak on behalf of the women from Global South highlighting the fact that they are in dire need of economic development and

western aid which would help them achieve emancipation (Barker, 2000; Mohanty, 2003a, 2003b; Wood, 2001).

However, according to Espinosa Miñoso (2009), postcolonial feminism has a colonial tendency too creating a hirerchy among the 'othered' women where the privileged feminists tend to construct the 'othering' idea towards marginalized and/or vulnerable women. Therefore, decolonial theory suggests that gender is not only social but also a colonial construct (Lugones, 2010). Decolonial feminists also believe that the lived experiences of every woman can be different and there can be various way of doing things (Manning, 2021).

4 Methodology

This chapter aims to describe the methodology and methods used for this research. This research is a qualitative study which uses a data collection method of in-depth interviews followed by a thematic analysis. After demonstrating the definitions used in this study and justification for using qualitative research, the chapter will explain the methods, backgrounds of the participants and the settings for the interviews. The research process and ethical considerations are addressed by the end of this chapter.

4.1 Qualitative Research

As mentioned earlier, the research has been done following a qualitative research design because it explored ideas, perspectives and experiences of the participants which could not be measured with numbers (Hammarberg, Kirkman & Lacey, 2016). Qualitative research takes subjectivity into consideration and therefore does not opt for finding out one objective truth only (ibid). The purpose of my research was not to look for an objective reality, rather a subjective reality which helps to demonstrate and understand the complicated connections between patriarchy, gender discrimination and decoloniality in the education system of Bangladesh. Therefore, qualitative research design was adopted to match with the purpose of my study.

Since this research has considered both participant's knowledge and realities, the primary theoretical paradigm is interpretivism (Rehman & Khalid, 2016). Interpretive research implies that there is not only one fixed or objective reality, but rather there are several subjective realities which depend on the lived experiences and social realities of the participants and the researcher. Therefore, the research would be interpreted by the researcher (me), and always acknowledging the fact that the interpretations are value laden. The ontological assumption for interpretivism is concerned with diverse social realities depending on the backgrounds and contexts of the participants (Research Philosophy and Assumptions – SOBT). And the epistemological assumption is concerned with the fact that the researcher needs to comprehend

and develop meanings from the participants' perceptions and lived experiences and that is how reality would be defined (ibid).

Furthermore, this research is going to challenge the existing social and cultural pattern of gender discrimination which makes it suited for critical theoretical paradigm. For instance, it criticizes the patriarchal norms in the education system of Bangladesh and looks for ways to reconstruct them. The principal purpose of critical paradigm is to bring change (Patton, 2002) and the study could be a way forward for bringing a change in the education sector. Therefore, it will be based on the critical theoretical paradigm too. The ontological assumption for critical paradigm is that there are some aspects of society which influence each other in a constant manner and thus create multiple realities (Crotty, 1998). The epistemological assumption is that the power relations of those societal aspects shape our ideas, understandings, and realities (ibid).

The data collection method was in-depth interviews with open-ended questions. The interviews were semi-structured where "topics and issues to be covered are specified in advance, in outline form" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p. 353) which means that there were some themes without which the interviews could lose the flow and I would not have got enough necessary information for the research. Moreover, there could have been overproduction of data if I had unstructured interviews with the participants that I wanted to avoid.

For analyzing the data, a thematic approach has been used. Aronson (1994) states that the analysis which focuses on "identifiable themes and patterns of living or behavior" (p. 1) is thematic analysis. In qualitative research, thematic analysis is one of the most popular ways to analyze data. According to Braun and Clarke (2012), thematic analysis can be defined as "a method for systematically identifying, organising, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a dataset" (p.2). It helps the researcher to find meaning in collective data. However, thematic analysis does not focus on a theme if that is associated with a single data only. Therefore, it is about identifying those underlying patterns or themes in data that have some commonalities and organizing them systematically (ibid). After that, the data can be connected to theories. That is why I have analyzed my data following thematic analysis method.

Since almost all the interviews took place in Bengali, I translated them in English and transcribed them at the same time. This made me familiar with my data. The process got accelerated when I started to read the transcripts repeatedly which can be identified as the first step of my data analysis. In the next step, I started to code the data inductively to find the answers to my research questions. After that, I started to categorize the data into potential themes. Having done that, I reviewed the data for a better understanding which led me to identify subthemes and merge them into broader themes. Then I defined the themes and subthemes for the study in the final step. I found three main themes- conceptualizing patriarchy, reasons behind gender discrimination and diverse gender experience.

The themes were created according to my interpretation of data which can vary depending on the researcher's background and perception of the phenomenon. Being a part of the patriarchal society myself, I started to question the norms that were forced upon me. To begin with, I was born and raised in a patriarchal society and by 'patriarchal' I mean the conventional patriarchy where women are subordinated and not provided any opportunity to speak for themselves. From my childhood, I have always been asked to behave properly as an "ideal girl". For instance, it was obligatory for me to come back home before five o' clock in the evening because 'good girls' do not stay out of home in the evening. Furthermore, I always encounter with a common question, "When are you getting married and having children?" which clearly results from the patriarchal norms in the society. That is why I felt motivated to do research on reconstructing patriarchal norms, particularly in education.

4.2 Participants and Their Backgrounds

The participants for this study have been chosen using purposive sampling which means that the researcher has the authority to select participants on the basis of some common or specific characteristics (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Activists from different feminist and women's rights organizations and feminists from academia have been approached. While approaching them, a brief description of my background and research purpose was provided along with the semi-structured open-ended questions. This gave them time to process the

information and the importance of their contribution, and to prepare themselves for the interviews. Because of my research interest, the participants were chosen based on the following criteria:

a) they are Bangladeshis (currently living in Bangladesh or abroad)

b) they are feminists in academia or associated with any feminist and women's rights organizations, and

c) they have lived experience of Bangladeshi education system

Therefore, the participants who responded and were willing to interview, were listed down. There were eight participants in total-two academicians and six activists of different professions. Moreover, six interviewees were females while the rest two were males, but they all grew up in Bangladesh sharing the same education system. Interviews were taken via the online platform Zoom because I was not residing in Bangladesh during the time of data collection.

The participation of the interviewees was voluntary, and they had the option to withdraw their names from the research anytime. Their interviews were recorded and handled cautiously without anybody else's access other than me. Permission was taken verbally before the interviews began and in consent forms (Appendix A) which were provided along with the privacy notice (Appendix B) before the interviews. The participants were given sufficient time to read and sign it.

When I took the interviews, I maintained the direction of the interviews and modified the wordings of the questions when necessary. I tried to pose the questions in a way that the participants were comfortable with and could understand best. The interviews took a natural course, and no participants were observed feeling unsafe or restrained sharing their opinions. Since I followed the purposive sampling process, all the participants that were selected were equally interested in appearing at the interviews and discussing it.

4.3 Ethical Considerations

The ethical concerns regarding this research include my position as a researcher, the power relation that I shared with my participants, data handling and storage and the interpretation of data based on my own experiences.

Since the idea for this research study developed due to my personal motivations and experiences, I was concerned that my position as a researcher might not be neutral. However, qualitative research does not ask the researcher to be objective, rather it encourages researcher's involvement as an instrument of the research (Haipinge, 2013). I came from the same background as the participants which comforted them and helped to build the trust towards me. This enabled me to access information better and I believe this gave me a better understanding of the data. According to Schutz (1954, as cited in Richardson, 1999), qualitative research is "constructs of the constructs made by the actors on the social scene" (p. 68). The actors include both the researcher and the participants. Therefore, I would say that this research has contributions from both actors.

The power relations that I had with my participants is another issue I would like to address. I approached people who seemed to follow feminist ideology, which reflected on their actions in academia and/or their association with different feminist or women's rights organizations, and asked them whether they would like to participate or not. I sent a detailed email mentioning my background and research intent, the questions to be asked during the interview and the voluntary nature of the participation. When they agreed to take part, I provided them with the privacy notice (Appendix B) along with the consent form (Appendix A) and explained to them verbally what those documents mean before the interviews. Therefore, it can be assumed that no participant was forced to take part in the study, and they were genuinely interested. All of the data was stored in my personal computer and university account which are password protected. Each participant was given a number (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2….) while transcribing the interviews and the transcribed data was stored under that number. There was no mention of their names or identities while processing the data. Therefore, privacy and anonymity were maintained throughout the research prcoess.

In addition, interpretation of data can be subject to ethical concern. My experiences and observations of the phenomenon have worked as the basis of the interpretation of data which might question the credibility of this research. However, in qualitative research, a researcher acts as a part of the study and acknowledgement of his/her disposition helps maintaining the credibility (Shenton, 2004). Therefore, I tried to demonstrate it in the introduction part of this research. Moreover, a researcher from different background and experiences might have interpreted the findings in a slightly distinct way. Nevertheless, according to Creswell (2009), qualitative research is carried out as a naturalistic inquiry emphasizing the fact that every explanation is subjective and only a perfect one does not exist for the phenomenon.

5 Analysis and Findings

Three broad themes came up when analyzing the data. They are described below:

a. Conceptualizing Patriarchy

In order to comprehend the participants' views on patriarchy, they were asked to reflect their ideas on it. The participants argued that patriarchy is an authoritarian system which affects all genders by promoting inequality and injustice.

Participant 5 illustrates a detailed demonstration of patriarchy where males are the privileged of all genders. Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3 and Participant 8 share the similar views.

"Patriarchy is an authoritarian system where a certain gender gets privilege which is male. They are on the top of the hierarchical chain. When a child is born, s/he is identified as women/men looking at their sexual organs. But when a hijra (intersex) is born, they are killed sometimes because they are not eligible to be called a man or woman according to the binary norms of patriarchy. They are seemed to be a burden of the society." (Participant 5)

It can be observed from the data that the society is hierarchical in terms of gender identity and man is on top of that chain which gives them a privileged position. The binary notions of gender identity is also mentioned in the data.

"When a male says something or gives his opinion, that's the ultimate decision." (Participant 1)

Here, the positioning of male privilege can be analyzed from the aspect of male as the ultimate decision maker.

"To me, it is a system where the males get to decide everything. The women are seen as incapable of making decisions which is not true. Patriarchy maintains this notion of superiority of men over women in decision making." (Participant 3)

A resemblance of the male privilege can also be observed here from the decision making process where men is considered superior.

"When the father, brother or husband decides for the family" (Participant 8)

Participant 8 even mentions that father, brother or husbands are the decision makers in the patriarchal family and not the mothers, sisters or wives emphasizing the similar notion of male privilege.

Drawing similarity to Participant 5's comment on binary gender norms and Participant 3's male superiority, Participant 2 echoes male privilege by mentioning women as a second race and men as the superior race.

"Patriacrhy tells women that they are the second race or like kind of second, in a sense of superiority that somehow they are weak, that they are not able to take care of themselves and their own personal well-being, economic well-being whatever you want to say and patriarchy also tells men that they are the caretaker, the provider, and the more superior agenda group." (Participant 2)

Participant 2 also states that patriarchy is not only harmful for women, it is harmful for men as well because it burdens men with the expectations to provide for the family. Participant 4 mentions a parallel version.

"A man in Bangladesh, at least from the same economical background and the same family background like me, maybe my brother if I had one, they would have to provide for the family. They would have to take care of that. Like, you know, they have to be the breadwinner, and they can't just sit aside and say hey, I just want to do this, this is my passion project and it doesn't bring in money and I want to do that. The society won't allow it. So I think that patriarchy is a very harmful notion and it's harmful for all of us." (Participant 2)

From here, it could be understood that patriarchy puts different types of expectations to different gender roles and they can also vary depending on the economical background of the person in concern.

"It is a social evil in the sense that it hinders the progress of not only women, but also of men in many ways." (Participant 4)

However, this data reflects the notion that patriarchy obstructs the progress of both men and women without mentioning how. Participant 7 has a similar notion insisting on the inequalities that patriarchy might bring.

"Patriarchy is about inequality everywhere- inequality in the distribution of power, inequality in social rights, overall any kind of inequality and injustice is patriarchy, not necessarily these inequalities are on gender based. Because we can also see male victims of patriarchy." (Participant 7)

This data suggests a different kind of interrealted concept of patriarchy where gender is not the only one focal point. The economic dyanmics in class stratification, power relations in gender and sexual identity, historical background of cultural and religious customs, and colonial tendencies all these seem to work behind social inequality and injustice in Bangaldesh. Therefore, as the data highlights, they can be considered a component of patriarchy.

b. Reasons behind Gender Inequality in Education

Participant 1 sees religion along with patriarchy as the reasons behind gender discrimination.

"Patriarchy is responsible to some extent, of course. The tradition has been going on for years where the father or a male must take care of the girls and because of this, girls do not talk that much or give opinions usually. But don't get me wrong, I think religion is also very responsible." (Participant 1)

As it can be seen from the data, that religion seems to have a strong grasp over gender inequality in education besides patriarchy. However, Participant 2 and Participant 3 believe that social values and family pressure work more towards creating gender inequality.

"I think in Bangladesh, even now, girls are asked to, well not asked, girls are expected to be educated so that they can find a good husband. I feel that's the main motivation for education for girls. Of course, there are plenty of women in Bangladesh who are doing such good great

work, you know, in all the workplaces they are. But the family understanding is the more educated, well, you know, you don't want to be the very educated but a certain level of education is good for you to find a good husband." (Participant 2)

As illustrated by the participant, there exists a family pressure on girls to not aim for higher education but for education which will ensure a good husband. This implies the purpose of education being marriage for girls which is entirely different than the overall purpose of education (Uddin, 2019). When analyzed further, it can be found that this purpose of education was defined during the colonial period (Chanana, 1994).

"I think family pressure is a great obstacle. For example, I had a female friend who wanted to become a doctor in army. But her father didn't let her because a female army doctor is not a good suite for marriage. The trainings in army will take away her tenderness as a girl and moreover, she has to continue her duties even after getting married. According to the family, she will not get a suitable husband then. And there are a lot of cases like that, where the girls' education is prioritized unless it doesn't harm her marriage proposals." (Participant 3)

Here, the purpose of education for girls is articulating Participant 2's opinion with a real life example. Participant 3 also expressed concern on the gender segregation in the classroom.

"The classroom chores are clearly gender segregated. Female students are given the task of making arts and crafts and there is usually no male student taking part in these. Because according to the society arts and crafts are for women, not men. So the school sends the boys to do laboratory work or organize science fair which are more suitable for their masculinity. And there is a common misconception that girls cannot do well in laboratory and science." (Participant 3)

A similar type of concern was echoed in the responses of Participant 5 and Participant 6 where they used the notion of 'lack of co-education' in the classrooms.

"Since I was in a boys school, I didn't have much interaction with girls at that time. And our parents and society maintain a forbidden construct that girls and boys should not talk with each

other. So this type of segregation led me to think negatively about a girl's image." (Participant 5)

It can be concluded that there are forbidden contructs that prevent male and female students to study together. The forbidden constructs can develop from social and cultural traditions, religious norms, conservative and over protective mentality (Roodsaz & Raemdonck, 2018).

"Society thinks that girls and boys should not be in the same classroom, this is the greatest obstacle." (Participant 6)

However, Participant 7 had given a broader example of the phenomena drawing a closer connection to societal and patriarchal beliefs and teacher's behaviour.

"School norms still demonstrate gender segregation. For example, we can still observe that there are certain kinds of games that girls are not encouraged to play, there exists a barrier in dressing up for school and the quality of education varies for boys and girls. Societal beliefs reflect on the thoughts of teachers towards their students. When we were observing the classroom activities, we saw that the teachers were encouraging the male students to ask questions, to take part in activities while the female students are not included that much." (Participant 7)

As the data suggests, the school norms tend to maintain gender disparities in general. These can range from uniforms and games to teacher's attitudes towards male and female students. Participant 7 also argues that people's action as adults could be the reflection of their interaction with the teachers during their childhood.

"I have some misogynist thoughts still on the back of my mind and whenever I trace them back, I find my teachers have taught me these and that's why I am thinking like that." (Participant 7)

On the other hand, Participant 5 articulates that religion, social values and pressure, and economy in line with patriarchy maintains gender inequality but emphasizing mostly on the economic condition of the societies.

"See, everything is correlated. Patriarchy, religion, our values and customs, economy everything works behind the segregation. I think the economic conditions make us more prone to other issues. The madrashas are full of children from economically underprivileged families. If they had better economic support, the parents would choose mainstream schools, not the madrashas. Our economic position determines what education stream we are going to choose." (Participant 5)

As pointed out by the participant, the economic condition drives parents to choose the stream of education for their children. Since the cost of mainstream or English medium education can be expensive to bear for some parents, madrasas are the only cheapest option for them (Sattar, 2004). Therefore, children from an underprivileged background are sent to madrasas more than the mainstream schools. Moreover, mainstream schools usually do not enrol 'hijras' but there are some specific madrasas which do (Chowdhury, 2020). However, the agenda of madrasa education differs from that of mainstream or English-medium school which can be conflicting with the idea of gender equality in education (Sattar, 2004). The rise of conservative Islamic parties in Politics can also negotiate choosing madrasa education over the mainstream schools (Shehabuddin, 2008; Roy, Huq & Rob, 2020).

Participant 5 also points out the discriminative nature of the curriculum in the education system of Bangladesh.

"Another thing is, agriculture studies is for boys while home economics is for girls in the curriculum. But the rural women are constantly growing crops while the tailoring profession is chosen by many men. So why is this segregation in the curriculum? The curriculum also promotes gender norms through textbooks, e.g. the father is the government service holder while the mother is the housewife. Textbooks mention girls helping in the household chores when boys are playing outside. But I have heard, there are modifications happening, may be there will be more soon." (Participant 5)

There are subjects in the curriculum that are specific for only male or female students, e.g. agriculture is for boys and home economics is for girls and they cannot switch these even if

they want to. Moreover, the representation of male and female professions in the textbooks is discriminatory in nature.

"I didn't know there is a dinstinct bachelor's degree in home economics in our country targeted for women. Women learn child care, cooking, etc. under this degree. But why is that? In my school, there was a sewing class where no boy was seen to join. Only the girls attended that class. But isn't it disturbing? If sewing is important to learn, it is applicable to both girls and boys. These types of gender biased tasks are taught to children from their childhood." (Participant 4)

It can be observed that Participant 4 highlighted the similar kind of concerns like Participant 5 about the gender specific subjects.

"This resulted in the creation of two distinct subjects where on the one hand, agricultural studies was imposed on boys and on the other hand, home economics was imposed on girls." (Partcipant 6)

However, neither of the participants mentioned why these subjects are so gender specific.

The analysis suggests that there are some main reasons according to the grassroot level feminists of Bangladesh which work behind gender discrimination in the education system of Bangladesh. They are- patriarchy, religion, economic conditions, social values and pressure and political purpose. These reasons influence each other while acting as separate agents to reinforce gender discrimination in the education system of Bangladesh. Therefore, deconstruction of gender discriminatory norms in education is a work in progress.

Moreover, the source of curriculum and education structure can be dated back to British Colonial period where the purpose of women's education was to make them competent for taking care of the household and children which seems to have an impact still today. Critical thinking which was not appreciated during the colonial period due to the fear of revolution, somehow is still absent from the education system (Rahman, Hamzah, Meerah, & Rahman, 2010). These kinds of subtle colonial tendencies could be noticed in the whole education system

(Ghosh, 1993). This also leads to bullying and harassment of students who do not conform to the social norms of following binary gender identities blindly.

c. Diverse Gender Experience

When participants were asked about their opinions on how diverse gender experience can be taken into consideration, almost all the participants proposed government initiatives. The initiatives can promote and sustain gender diversity in the education system of Bangladesh. However, government initiatives tend to address the problems following foreign assistance which aims at the neoliberal agenda of women empowerment (Guhathakurta, 1985). Moreover, policies which could upset a larger audience or hurt religious practices are not prioritized enough, e.g. the rape law (Fulu et al., 2013).

Participant 6 demonstrated a detailed description on government initiative emphasizing on curriculum reformation.

"The subtle discriminatory things in the textbooks need to be changed at first. Mothers should also be presented in difficult professions and both father and mother should be presented sharing their household chores. Agricultural studies and home economics subjects should be modified and made open to both boys and girls." (Participant 6)

First thing the participant suggested was to modify the representation of gender specific professional roles in the textbooks and gender specific subjects in the curriculum.

"The origin of discrimination is our bodies. It's alright if our culture doesn't allow co-ed, but why is sex education not allowed? Sex education doesn't necessarily mean the action of having sex only. It is more about knowing the body, knowing yourself. It can mitigate the curiosity about bodies and make students realize that people's capability does not depend on their bodies only. It will teach them to not judge people based on their bodies." (Participant 6)

The second proposal was to introduce sex education to the curriculum so that all the students can have better ideas about their bodies and their capabilities. On the contrary, Participant 5 emphasized on the increase of budget from the government.

41

"As I said, it depends on the economy. The government has to increase budget for the education sector and provide well maintained governance there. There was a talk that all the educational institutions will follow the same curriculum? But where is that happening? So, these kinds of little steps are necessary." (Participant 5)

The data implies that a well regulated budget from the government could be a great initiative to promote gender diversity and it could be argued that the budget could be implemented in formulating an inclusive and same curriculum for all streams.

However, Participant 1 had little mention of government emphasizing more on the exposure to outside knowledge, especially meeting people of different identities.

I started to acknowledge the diversification more when I got exposed to people from different countries and cultures, and people who identify themselves as other genders. I realized that it's not a disease and I am okay with it now that my future child might be one of them (LGBTQIA+). I feel like I could change my perception due to my contact with them. So I believe, unless we go out of our bubbles to see the world, we are not ready for this kind of diversified education. May be if the government wants, things can change." (Participant 1)

Participant 3 had a similar insight like Participant 6 emphasizing that there should be more representation of women in different professional roles in order to motivate female students to study further.

"I mean, we don't see many women in different jobs, even some are still heavily male dominated. If the female students can see and meet women representatives from different sectors, it will encourage them to study further. Most of them grow up with the examples of women taking care of the house which they perceive as their destinations. But examples of women taking part in different professions should also be available for them. The government can try to include the information in the textbooks or curricula so that girls get enough motivation to study and voice their opinions." (Participant 3)

However, the data lacks the aspect of gender diversity due to its focus on only women representation. On the contrary, Participant 7 mentioned that both government initiatives and exposure to outside world are important.

"The scenario in Bangladesh is worse in some cases. But I think some things are changing, not from the teacher's side but from the student's side. Students are learning to think in a broader aspect because of the access to the internet. The exchange of information is easier nowadays among the young generation and the students are willing to know more. I took interviews of different stakeholders including teachers and students. So when I compared these two, I found out that students had more willingness for inclusive education followed by teachers and administrations. The parents had the least willingness because they do not perceive it positively". (Participant 7)

As illustrated by the participant, outside knowledge is more accessible to the students nowadays which can encourage gender diversity in education. However, the willingness from the students alone cannot bring any change. Teachers, schoool administrations and parents are also agents of the education system which makes it a complex phenomenon. Therefore, the participant suggests a government initiative at the same time.

"There must be a government initiative. And given our country, the law enforcement should also be very active because when somebody knows that there are consequences for their actions of inequality, they will be scared to do it. Without the implementation of law, it's not possible to change the mentality of older generations. But at least it can stop their bullying." (Participant 7)

Participant 8 expressed that the government should have strict law enforcement and punishment for those who do not abide by the law sharing a parallel thought of Participant 7. Participant 8 also mentioned a way by which government officers can make an impact.

"The government should enforce laws in the local level in order to create mass awareness. Local health workers can carry out this type of task of making people aware of the significance

of gender equality. I don't know if the law has a punishment for those who impede gender equality, but may be government can consider this." (Participant 8)

Nevertheless, government initiatives could face criticism or backlash and on that note, Participant 6 believed that the government can fight them.

"When we were kids, Bangladesh Television had this advertisement stating the importance of family planning. It was not welcomed by the conservatists but at the end of the day it worked due to the involvement of the government. Same kind of initiative is necessary for introducing sex education to the curriculum. It won't be welcomed by everybody, but if the government wants, it can happen." (Participant 6)

Indeed, the campaigns like family planning and controlling acid attacks (Chatterjee, 2011) can be reintroduced in order to spread awareness on gender equality and with proper involvement from the government's side, they will be fruitful. In contrast, a more critical notion was observed in Participant 7's view.

"Government doesn't want this because the support they want to get from common people, those common people do not want this. They don't want to evoke the mass. They want to rule as long as possible, and this has already impacted the textbooks and everything." (Participant 7)

Therefore, in short, in order to make the education system gender diverse, exposure to the outside world and knowledge is important as well as government initiatives. The former can be done on a personal level while the latter is an issue of national level. Willingness from the government can accelerate the deconstruction of gender norms in education by creating mass awareness, enforcing laws, reforming textbooks, introducing sex education, and teacher training on gender sensitivity.

6 Conclusion

Gender discrimination in education is not a problem to be solved overnight. Starting from textbooks, the classrooms, the institutions even the relation between a teacher and student is influenced by the gender norms. To some extent, the education system reinforces gender inequality. For instance, the textbooks portray the father in a difficult or hardworking profession whereas the mother in a caring profession (Haq & Alam, 2010). This kind of subtle installment of unequal treatment of female characters in the textbooks start to capture children's mind and eventually, children start to reflect on these in real life as well. Therefore, a loop continues.

The purpose of this study was to find out how feminist thinking can deconstruct the prevalent gender norms in the education system of Bangladesh. Hence, the research had asked two crucial questions- one is, 'How do grassroot level feminists perceive the causes for gender inequality in the education system of Bangladesh?' and the other one is 'How can the Bangladeshi feminist critique help to reformulate the norms of education in Bangladesh to better take into consideration diverse gender experiences?'. The answers were sought from grassroot level feminist who have had the lived experience of Bangladeshi education system.

In search of answer to the first research question, the study found that the grassroot level feminists in Bangladesh perceive patriarchy as one of the reasons behind gender inequality in the education system of Bangladesh. Other reasons include religion, social values and family pressure, economic condition, politics and outdated structure and curricula from the colonial period. However, these reasons are intertwined with each other making gender inequality in Bangladeshi education system a complex phenomenon and not just a result of one incident.

For the second research question, the study suggested that government initiatives are the most important and parallely, exposure to outside knowledge. Government initiatives in terms of curriculum reformation, budgeting and enforcing strict laws are crucial to make the education system more diverse while exposure to outside knowledge in terms of meeting people from diverse background and exchanging information is also necessary. Having said that, the

research considers that a critical and feminist approach is required to rethink the education system of Bangladesh.

Nevertheless, this research can be used by the policy makers to reform the education system in Bangladesh through a feminist and decolonial lens and this can be a way forward to other research concerning gender and education in Bangladesh. Further research can be done on gender intervention programmes in schools of Bangladesh funded by the government or NGOs. Another interesting turn can be taken by comparing gender sensitivity in rural and urban classrooms. The rural schools have different school cultures than the urban ones; while rural schools can be more conservative in general, they can have subtle norms promoting mutual respect for all genders. Therefore, it will be intriguing to know more about them. Another research to find out parents' views on gender diversity in the classrooms is feasible and would be helpful for curricular reformation.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Informed consent for participating in research

This informed consent form provides you as a research participant general information about the research, its purpose and your rights as a participant.

General information

I am a master's student in Education and Globalization, at the Faculty of Education, University of Oulu. As a part of my studies, I am conducting a research in 'How can feminist thinking reconstruct the patriarchal norms in the Bangladeshi education system: Through a decolonial lens'. The purpose of my research is to address the existing patriarchal notions in the education system of Bangladesh and how it can be reconstructed using the feminist approach. There has not been much research on this, especially from a decolonial point of view, therefore, this research is going to serve that purpose of filling in the research gap as well.

I kindly request your consent for collecting information from you for the research purpose by interviewing.

All information will be used anonymously, respecting your dignity. No personal details that enable identifying you will be included in the analyses and reporting. Systematic care in handling and storing the information will be ensured to avoid any kind of harm to you. After all the information leading to identification of a person has been removed, the information will be destroyed after six months the thesis has been assessed and approved by the Faculty of Education and published.

Voluntary participation

Your participation is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research at any time without any consequences. Observe that information collected before your withdrawal may be used. You have the right to get information about the research and may contact me/us, if you have questions.

Confirming informed consent (USE BOXES THAT ARE RELEVANT, DELETE OTHERS)

☐ I am willing to participate in the research.

☐ I allow the use of (INSERT HERE: type of data to be collected) for research purposes.

☐ I allow the information that I have provided to be stored and archived for further research use.

☐ I do not allow the information that I have provided to be stored and archived for further research use.

Date ___/___ 20___

_____

Signature and name (in capital letters)

Researcher

_Onnesha Morshed_____

ONNESHA MORSHED

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This thesis research is supervised by:

Johanna Hiitola

Gender Studies, University of Oulu

Appendix 2

PRIVACY NOTICE FOR THESIS RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

EU General Data Protection Regulation

Art. 13 and 14

Date: 21/10/2022

Information for Research Participants

You are taking part in a Thesis study organized by the thesis worker Onnesha Morshed. This notice describes how your personal data will be processed in the study.

Participation in the study is voluntary. There will be no negative consequences for you if you choose not to participate in the study or if you withdraw from the study. However, if you withdraw from the study, data collected prior to your withdrawal may still be used in the study. For more information on your rights and how you can affect the processing of your personal data, please see section 14 of this notice.

1.   Name and description of the study

Study name: How can feminist thinking reconstruct the patriarchal norms in the Bangladeshi education system: Through a decolonial lens

One-off study ☐   Follow-up study ☐

Duration of the investigation (how long personal data is processed): An approximate time would be February 2024.

2.   Data Controller

Contact person: Onnesha Morshed

Address: Tellervontie 2A 28, 90570, Oulu

Telephone: +358465730786

Email: onnesha.morshed@student.oulu.fi

3.   Description of the thesis / research project and the purpose of the processing of personal data

The research will be done following qualitative approach which means participants' perspectives, knowledge and experiences will be used as data to understand the existing norms of patriarchy in the education system of Bangladesh. These data will be collected through interviews and then translated and transcribed for the purpose of analysis. Nobody else other than the researcher herself will have access to these data and proper caution will be maintained when handling these data so that the participants do not face any harmful incident.

4.   Lawful basis of processing

Personal data is processed on the following basis, which is based on Article 6(1) of the General Data Protection Regulation:

☐   participant's consent

☐   performance of a task carried out in the public interest or in the exercise of official authority vested in the controller:

☐   scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes

☐   archiving of research materials or cultural heritage materials

☐   legitimate interests pursued by the controller

or by a third-party description of the legitimate interest:

5.   Sensitive personal data

☐   No sensitive personal data will be processed in the study.

OR

☐   The following sensitive personal data will be processed in the study:

☐   Racial or ethnic origin

☐   Political opinions

☐   Religious or philosophical beliefs

☐   Trade union membership

☐   Genetic data

☐   Biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a natural person

☐   Health

☐   A natural person's sex life or sexual orientation

☐   Personal data relating to criminal convictions and offences or related security measures will be processed in the study.

Sensitive data is processed on the following basis, which is based on Article 9(2) of the General Data Protection Regulation:

☐   Consent of the participant

☐   Scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes

☐   The sensitive data has been made public by the participant

☐   Other: Please clarify

6.   Types of personal data

Participant's name,

Contact information,

Occupation,

Observations/ Points of view,

Experiences.

7.   How and from what sources personal information is collected

By interviews

8.   Transfer or disclosure of the personal data outside the research team

Participants' personal data will not be disclosed or transferred.

9.   Transfer or disclosure of personal data to countries outside the EU/European Economic Area

Not transferred

10.   Automated decisions

No automated decisions are made.

11.   Safeguards to protect the personal data

☐   The data is confidential.

Protection of manual material: Will be stored in a safe place where nobody other than the researcher has access.

Personal data processed in IT systems:

☐　　　username ☐ password ☐ logging　　☐

access control

☐　　　other: (please specify)

Processing of direct identifiers:

☐　　　Direct identifiers will be removed in the analysis phase

☐　　　The material to be analyzed includes direct identifiers. Reason: (reason for retention of direct identifiers)

12.　　　Processing of personal data after the completion of the study

☐　　　The research material will be deleted

☐　　　The research material will be archived:

☐　　　without identifiers ☐ with identifiers

13.　　　Your rights as a data subject, and exceptions to these rights

The contact person in matters concerning the rights of the participant is the person mentioned in section 2 of this notice.

Withdrawing consent (GDPR Article 7)

You have the right to withdraw your consent, provided that the processing of the personal data is based on consent. The withdrawal of consent will not affect the lawfulness of processing based on consent before its withdrawal.

Right of access (GDPR Article 15)

You have the right to obtain information on whether or not personal data concerning you are being processed in the project, as well as the data being processed. You can also request a copy of the personal data undergoing processing.

Right to rectification (GDPR Article 16)

If there are inaccuracies or errors in your personal data undergoing processing, you have the right to request their rectification or supplementation.

Right to erasure (GDPR Article 17)

You have the right to request the erasure of your personal data on the following grounds:

a)   The personal data are no longer necessary for the purposes for which they were collected or otherwise processed.

b)   You withdraw the consent on which the processing was based, and there are no other legal grounds for the processing.

c)   You object to the processing (the right to object is described below), and there are no justified grounds for the processing.

d)   The personal data have been unlawfully processed, or

e)   The personal data must be erased to comply with a legal obligation in Union or Member State law to which the controller is subject.

The right to erasure does not apply if the erasure of data renders impossible or seriously impairs the achievement of the objectives of the processing in scientific research.

Right to restriction of processing (GDPR Article 18)

You have the right to restrict the processing of your personal data on the following grounds:

a) You contest the accuracy of the personal data, whereupon the processing will be restricted for a period enabling the University to verify their accuracy.

b) The processing is unlawful and you oppose the erasure of the personal data, requesting the restriction of their use instead.

c) The University no longer needs the personal data for the purposes of the processing, but you need them for the establishment, exercise or defence of legal claims.

d) You have objected to processing (see details below) pending verification of whether the legitimate grounds of the controller override those of the data subject.

Right to data portability (GDPR Article 20)

You have the right to request to receive the personal data you have submitted to the University in a structured, commonly used and machine-readable format and have the right to transmit these data to another controller without hindrance from the University, provided that the processing is based on consent or a contract, and the processing is carried out by automated means.

When exercising your right to data portability, you have the right to have your personal data transmitted from one controller to another, where technically feasible.

Right to object (GDPR Article 21)

You have the right to object to processing your personal data, provided that the processing is based on the public interest or legitimate interests. The University will no longer have the right to process your personal data unless it can demonstrate compelling legitimate grounds for the processing that override the interests, rights and freedoms of the data subject, or unless it is necessary for the establishment, exercise or defence of legal claims. The University can continue processing your personal data also when necessary for the performance of a task carried out for reasons of the public interest.

Derogating from rights

In certain individual cases, derogations from the rights described above in this section "Your rights as a data subject", and exceptions to these rights may be made on the basis of the GDPR and the Finnish Data Protection Act, insofar as the rights render impossible or seriously impair the achievement of scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes. The need for derogations will always be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

14.   Right to lodge a complaint

You have the right to lodge a complaint with the Data Protection Ombudsman's Office if you

think your personal data has been processed in violation of applicable data protection laws. Contact details:

Data Protection Ombudsman's Office (Tietosuojavaltuutetun toimisto) Address: Ratapihantie 9, 6th floor, 00520 Helsinki

Postal address: B.O. Box 800, 00521 Helsinki Tel. (switchboard): 029 56 66700

Fax: 029 56 66735

E-mail: tietosuoja(at)om.fi