Male Bias in Rural Bangladeshi Women’s Empowerment: A Comparative Analysis of the Jamaat-e-Islami Political Agenda and Microfinance’s Economic Freedom Agenda

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This paper sets out to examine male bias in the different approaches to women’s empowerment in rural Bangladesh. To understand a secular economic approach to women’s empowerment, the microfinance sector was assessed. For a religious approach, the Jamaat-e-Islami’s political agenda in Bangladesh was scrutinized. It was found that both efforts at improving conditions for women are heavily saturated within patriarchal norms and continue to operate within parameters established with male bias. Women’s autonomy, access to non-monetary assets, and mobility were restricted even within an empowerment context. Furthermore, the bias is sanctioned within the Bangladeshi constitution and the political parties that uphold it. This paper utilizes inferences from the study of Bangladesh as a tool for addressing male bias in women’s empowerment in other societies as well, particularly those with a patriarchal, religious hegemony such as the Mormon communities in the United States of America.

Introduction

The plight of Bangladeshi woman transcends contemporary academia and western feminism, and can find its roots in Bengali culture. Esteemed mystic and philosopher Fakir Lalon Shah (Ahmed, 1987) was a well-known critic of social structures including religion, gender, and class, and wrote songs and poems that addressed gender inequality in Bengali society. One of his most famous compositions entitled “Everyone asks, to which caste does Lalon belong?” tackles the question of class segregation through Islamic and Hindu enforced gender roles (Togawa, 2008). Shah asks for a feminine equivalent to the Brahmin Hindu man’s holy beads, and also asks if there is a circumcision requirement for Muslim women in the same way there is for Muslim men. Through this discussion, he tackles the difficult question of how women are treated throughout Bengal societies that are rigidly embedded in both the Hindu caste system and the Islamic concept of purdah, which is a culturally specific pattern of exchange between the sexes that has particular stipulations for segregation in the division of labor (Feldman & McCarthy, 1983). Lalon Shah wandered Bengal through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and spread an oral tradition of challenging social hierarchies imposed on him not only through religion, but also through the British Empire, which, over the course of his life, imposed further restrictions on gender and class mobility throughout Bengal.

Although his words of humanism and spirituality were geared toward the lower classes and castes, they left a resonating impact on Bengali society as a whole and have provided groundbreaking room to discuss feminism and economics in contemporary academia today.

The words of Fakir Lalon Shah, and many other secular and humanist philosophers, continue to resonate across Bangladesh and deeply influence social, political, and economic thought. Religion, policy remnants of the British Empire, and conflicting interpretations of nationalism have wreaked havoc on these ideologies. As a result, there is much confusion and lack of decorum in how to facilitate social mobility in present day Bangladesh in a way that retains secular and humanist philosophies, as well as these other ideologies without creating contradictions and ineffective policies. Of particular importance is the plight of the Bangali naari, or the Bangladeshi woman, and her ability to lead her life with the same autonomy, dignity, productivity, and humanity as her male counterpart. Today in Bangladesh, life for women is challenging in every respect. This paper will specifically focus on rural Bangladeshi women and two specific channels to economic and holistic empowerment that are presented to them. The first of these is through the controversial Jamaat-e-Islami political party (JI) and the second is through the secular concept of microfinance, brought to Bangladesh through Dr. Muhammad Yunus. Both channels have worked in their own right to bring differing levels of autonomy to rural Bangladeshi
women, but also rigidly locking them within the constraints of patriarchy. Likewise, both options face problems under the Bangladeshi constitution, which has been unable to delineate between the contradictory patterns of secularism and religion in Bangladeshi societies. While the JI wishes to create an Islamic State where women are given public and private autonomy through Sharia law, proponents of microfinance wish to empower women strictly through economic freedom in a society that continues to be largely influenced by the purdah and male-biased economic policies. Subsequently, this has further complicated the political and economic circumstances faced by the primarily rural Bangladeshi women. This paper will compare and contrast the different methods of women’s empowerment and analyze them within the framework of Bengali culture, nationalism, and identity.

**Background**

Women’s empowerment, as understood through western feminist movements, does not have strong applicability to rural society in Bangladesh. Mahmud, Shah, and Becker (2010) discuss the challenges in understanding women’s economic empowerment in Bangladesh with cultural sensitivity, largely because there are so many dynamic quantifications used that are not cohesively examined. Prior to discussing how the JI and microfinance work to empower women in more depth, the actual issue of women’s empowerment needs further explanation. This is a broad field, which is quantified and categorized in many different ways. From an economic perspective, women’s empowerment is effectively discussed through terms of labor supply, non-land asset accumulation, family planning, primary education, and household expenditure per annum (Chowdhury, 2011).

The JI political party incorporates women into their ideal Islamic state by categorizing them as a crucial component of the labor supply, both productive and reproductive, but also strives to implement greater freedom in their family planning and non-land asset accumulation for the purpose of furthering their children’s educations and bettering their lives. Their main priority is to ensure that women follow a strict Sharia-influenced role in society.

In contrast, microfinance focuses much more on women’s empowerment in terms of the household expenditure and primary education, their priorities centering on lifting the women’s family and children out of poverty. According to Mahmud, Shah, and Becker (2010), many studies have been conducted to determine causal relationships between the implementations of microfinance in Bangladesh and women’s empowerment in terms of their families’ and children’s wellbeing. Many of the studies were insufficient in explaining women’s agency and freedom of mobility independent of these familial factors, as demonstrated in Mahmud, Shah, and Becker (2010). Their critique of women’s empowerment strategies in Bangladesh concluded that complex regression analyses of microfinance frequently did not account for the effect on a woman’s self-esteem and confidence in asserting herself within her own household. This sentiment is further confirmed in the study conducted by Bajracharya and Amin (2013), which examined how selection bias in such empirical women’s empowerment research methodologies can lead to conclusions that do not adequately explore wellbeing of rural Bangladeshi women outside of her relation to her husband or children. Their usage of a propensity score matching method questions the causal relationship between membership with micro lending institutions and a rise in domestic violence. This suggests that gender-based selection bias in how these data are determined may actually impede more enlightening discoveries about female autonomy and safety within her own household (Bajracharya & Amin, 2013).

The study conducted by Mahmud, Shah, and Becker (2010) indicates that there are additional dimensions of women’s empowerment in the private sphere that are more difficult to determine, but must be viewed with more legitimacy and given more importance. These dimensions are self-esteem, control of resources, decision-making, and mobility (Mahmud, Shah, & Becker, 2012). Because of limitations in how microfinance can work in Bangladesh under the constitution, implementation of these credit policies have no agency in a woman’s private sphere of empowerment. Under the purdah, many women are likely to view themselves as the secondary decision-maker in the home, whether purchasing furniture or determining what school their children attend. It is also important to remember that there are sizeable minorities in the country coming from Hindu, Christian, and Buddhist backgrounds that still exist either under the purdah, or similar patriarchal structures from their own religions (Mahmud, Shah, & Becker, 2012). Understanding these thought processes and what their purposes are within economic life requires a fuller understanding Bengali culture, which restricts women’s mobility much differently than in the west. This is an especially salient point because so often the econometric models and interpretations used to study this field come from academics and institutions in the West that lack this fuller understanding.

**The Jamaat-e-Islami Political Party**

The main centrist parties are the cultural nationalism based Awami League (AL), and the homogenous Islamic nationalism based Bangladesh National Party (BNP). Both parties have waged political battles against one another since the country’s independence from Pakistan in 1971 in the form of military coups, constitutional amendments, and economic upheaval (Nazneen, 2009). This battle is purely for political power, however, as neither party is particularly different from the other in their macroeconomic policymaking. Both of these parties practice centrist approaches to economy and social structure, borrowing from the country’s original command-based economic model created by founding father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the trade liberalizing market-based model implemented by his successor Ziaur Rahman. This misguided economic decision-making has led to 15 confusing and contradictory amendments in the constitution, which was allegedly founded on four primary principles that are supposed to be humanist and all-inclusive: secularism, socialism, democracy, and nationalism (Shahid, 2013). It is amid this confusion that the JI has found its newfound support in rural Bangladesh women. Sohela Nazneen (2009) has conducted an in-depth analysis of feminist rhetoric in the Bangladeshi constitution and associated political parties, resulting in challenging and conflicting views on religion and secularism at a legal level.

While the AL and BNP both mention women as viable economic resources in Bangladesh and as deserving of equal representation, the JI views women strictly within the realm of an Islamic society. This mentality has brought outcry from secular feminists who believe that the key to women’s empowerment across all facets of family is to create a society where the public sphere of a woman’s livelihood is void of religion (Kabir et al., 2012). Unfortunately, because of their persistent reexamination of “imaginary lines of secularism and Islam” (Shahid, 2013) in the constitution, these parties’ fight over the constitution does not actually address women’s
empowerment. This is especially true in terms of the aforementioned areas of labor supply, non-land asset accumulation, family planning, children’s education, and household expenditure per annum, which essentially comprise the public sphere that women exist within.

The JI’s original gender ideology was not inclusive of women in any aspect outside of the household (Siddiqui, 2010). The JI founder Maulana Maududi had a vision for a ‘working activists’ model who would “ultimately create an Islamic society and lead a worldwide Islamic revolution” (Siddiqui, 2010, p. 324). This ideal Islamic society would be deeply entrenched in a patriarchal understanding of Sharia law and would likely implement strict gender segregation across all facets of society that are seen by much of the Bengali population as unrealistic and regressive. Because of Bengali cultural roots in the intersection of Islam and Hinduism, and with additional Christian elements from the British Empire, it is extremely difficult to apply such rigid Islamic contexts to the dynamic and humanist-oriented society. However, Maududi stipulated in a few of his texts, including purdah, the Status of Women in Islam, and specifically the final chapter entitled “Divine Laws for the Movements of Women,” that women should not be permitted to leave the four walls of either their father’s or their husband’s home unless absolutely necessary (Siddiqui, 2010). In the cases when they actually were permitted to leave the house, they must wear a full burkha so that they could appropriately restrict free social interactions with men outside of their families. These texts prescribed strict distinctions between a woman’s role in the public and private spheres. The texts also strongly emphasize that empowerment of women could be envisioned not through western ideas of economic progress and feminism, but through a stronger presence of Islamic law in all societies. For example, the segregation of ‘natural labor duties’ by both biological and social aspects of gender would provide women more effective economic rights and mobility. This could lead to results because it would embrace femininity on a more Islamic level and give women the freedom to exist in their own bodies with autonomy (Siddiqui, 2010).

This convoluted logic has successfully worked on a small fragment of Bangladesh’s population, particularly in the rural areas where purdah had already been implemented for centuries prior to the JI’s establishment. However, the JI developed a negative reputation in post-independence Bangladesh. Many of JI’s leaders were complicit in the genocide used against Bengali people to keep them unified under a common Islamic identity also associated with Pakistan. The party’s popularity decreased even in the most right-wing households, and though it has survived by affiliating itself with both the AL and BNP, the party required a complete overhaul in order to be accepted again into Bengali culture (Nazneen, 2009).

To counter these harmful effects on their party and its political representation in the country, contemporary JI scholars have begun to incorporate women into their political sphere. For example, they now speak more about women’s needs and rights. They also work to empower women using both political representation and increased mobility—as long as they maintain gender-segregated social activities. Many women in rural Bangladesh, wary of gender neutral spaces that could place them in harm’s way, have been tempted to join the party to enjoy safer working conditions that women who are assisted by organizations such as the Grameen Bank, microfinance policy remain largely male-biased to appear controversial within the purdah (Shahid, 2010). Working within the limits of Bangladesh’s constitution, microfinance cannot infiltrate a woman’s empowerment past the public sphere. This means that although it can lead to better health and sanitation, better childhood education, and access to income, what happens at home between a woman and her family is outside of the institution’s hands (Bajracharya & Amin, 2013).

One reason why the private sphere is inadequately assessed is because of how microfinance and women’s empowerment are approached at the institutional level. According to Kabeer (2001), there are conflicting positive and negative results in the literature regarding lending to women in rural Bengali communities and their empowerment potential. Often, these discrepancies result from the various methodological approaches used in research, and are complicated further by removing them from their important cultural context. For example, many studies that examine empowerment in terms of domestic violence and acquisition of independent assets do not include individual testimonials from the women in question, without supervision from their husband or other male household members (Kabeer, 2001). As a result, much of the work in women’s empowerment that microfinance has contributed to can be viewed as uncontroversial in the Bengali society status quo; the work is complicit with both the AL and BNP centrist political ideologies that utilize both men and women productively for nation building. It does not, however, move past articles 27–29 of the constitution, which only address women’s rights outside of the home. Thus, in the Bangladeshi women’s private sphere of empowerment, obstacles remain that are unaddressed through the normal channels that microfinancing tends to afford to rural female populations elsewhere.

Despite this, Bangladesh has seen steady growth in its microfinance programs. The demand for credit has increased particularly among the women who are assisted by organizations such as the Grameen Bank. Previous research has incorrectly conflated these two ideas to suggest that there is a causal relationship between the increased demand for credit and women’s empowerment (Chowdhury, 2011). In fact, empowerment through economic autonomy in microfinance places women at a greater risk for domestic violence and sometimes even death (Bajracharya & Amin, 2013). Mahmud, Shah, and Becker (2011) postulate that although women in rural Bangladesh now have more control over their fertility, and have achieved success in maternal and child health goals, this is not necessarily an accurate indication of women’s empowerment. Unfortunately, according to another

**Microfinance**

Much more popular in western feminist and economic rhetoric, and certainly more publicized across party platforms in Bangladesh, is women’s empowerment through microcredit and microfinance. Made popular by Dr. Muhammad Yunus from Grameen Bank, microfinance initiatives have become the backbone for anti-poverty initiatives in rural Bangladesh (Kabeer, 2000). It has become so popular that more than 23 million microloans are now in effect across the country and each is being repaid at high interest rates and creating successful microeconomics. However, there are many problematic elements to the way microfinance has evolved in rural Bangladesh. Ideally founded upon the Good Mother Thesis and facilitated through primarily married women in rural areas, the outcomes of microfinance policy
study from the Population Association of America, selection bias in microfinance analyses has a tendency to confuse women's empowerment with poverty alleviation (Bajracharya & Amin, 2013). These issues are related, but they are not the same. Although a woman can use microfinance and membership with the Grameen Bank to pull her family out of poverty, provide her children with a better education, and bring stability to her life, she is not necessarily empowered. In fact, with an increase in the woman's well-being comes an immense challenge by way of access and control over money, a woman's self-reliance, and her status in the household.

Political Empowerment of Rural Bangladeshi Women

Proponents of microfinance argue that these aforementioned issues can also work in the woman's favor, when leveraged against the dangers of not paying back a loan. Women who are in control of livelihoods and entrepreneurial ventures pay back microloans at a constant rate, meaning they do not apply for loans only for seasonal and trend purposes, and they are more likely to leverage their economic power over their husbands in a way that can actually protect them from domestic abuse and other forms of violence, according to a study conducted at Northwest A&F University in China (Kabir et al., 2011). This becomes particularly important in rural Bangladeshi society, where the purdah is often used as a tool of subjugation and power leverage for men even though it is in blatant violation of Islamic Sharia and the Bangladeshi constitution. Shahid (2013) argues that Article 15 in the Bangladeshi constitution gives all Bangladeshi citizens the right to practice their religion and its associated practices in private, which includes the purdah. This has proven an immense challenge to microlenders and the various NGO affiliates that work towards women's empowerment (Kabeer, 2000). Arguably, the public sphere of empowerment that rural Bangladeshi women receive has no place in a patriarchal home, unless the woman is able to use her financial authority and dependence on the lender against her husband to prevent him from acting out against her. However, this is a clear matter of what Nazneen (2009, p. 1) calls, "something is better than nothing" and does not challenge the male-bias in Bengali economic structures. A woman may have greater mobility and access to facilities for her children's education, but it remains very likely that her husband and his family, whether Muslim or Hindu, will assert their patriarchal dominance over her in the home.

To address this dilemma, the JI political party claims that if women return to the path of Islam specifically prescribed by their party, Sharia law will work in their favor to protect them in the private sphere (Shahid, 2013). The AL and the BNP, who are more likely involved with microfinance initiatives than the JI (who view high interest rates as usury), continue to battle through the Constitution by adding and removing amendments to resolve an "imaginary line between secularism and Islamism" (Shahid, 2013). This is a political conflict that stems from their different understandings of nationalism and truly has nothing but detrimental impacts on women (Shahid, 2013). In fact, the amendments on secularism that are either added or removed based on whether the BNP or AL are asserting their powers over the government have not addressed how such amendments create provisions for the betterment of women and their representation in the republic, as detailed in articles 27-29 (Shahid, 2013). As a result, the inequality between men and women remains largely unaddressed.

Although the JI has not mentioned the importance of women's empowerment in their party manifesto, the AL and the BNP have done so. Still, the JI has taken more dramatic steps to incorporate women into their political sphere and to vocally advocate for their suffrage. Although their attempts at empowering women are inherently patriarchal and work only within the parameters of an Islamic state, they directly tackle the private sphere that is omitted in more mainstream discussions of microfinance, which are often led by the AL and BNP. Seeking respite from repressive in-laws and abusive partners, many devout Muslim women will be more inclined to work at a garments factory or otherwise unskilled labor field run and operated by those in the JI party. Many women are led to believe that working in such an environment will provide them with the type of empowerment in their private lives as detailed by Kabeer (2000), but sanctioned through Sharia and not through the constitution or other governmental institution. This is because, according to Nazneen (2009), the JI's approach to development and incorporating women into its labor force comes with a religious stipulation for men to respect and protect women as outlined by Sharia (Nazneen, 2009). This would not only forbid domestic abuse and violence against women whose families belong to the JI, but also require their husbands to provide them with non-land assets including money in a separate bank account, autonomy of movement within the purdah, the freedom to work outside of the home, and the ability to use the money earned for herself and her children as detailed by Islamic law (Siddiqui, 2010). Although the BNP and the AL both have explicit stipulations for development and women's empowerment, they are unable to achieve this spiritual link with both their male and female constituents, because their policies come from a place of government institution and not religious obligation.

Moving past Maulana Maududi's original views on women and how they should fit into a societal framework, this approach to women as equal but separate players in the economy is comparatively progressive, and even radical within the conservative right in Bangladesh. By using rhetoric in the Quran and drawing from Islamic scholars that exist outside of the Bangladeshi framework, families with political involvement in the JI or economic affiliation with them are required to address women's self-esteem, control of resources, decision-making, and mobility in ways that are not specified in the Constitution, yet are still required for true female empowerment. This is not only necessary to ensure that women will not be inclined to leave the party, but also to ensure that the JI receives newfound respect and solid representation in parliament in post-independence Bangladesh (Siddiqui, 2010; Shahid, 2013). Because the other 17 Islamic parties in the country do not directly mention women as viable economic resources for nation building and family building, cultural Bengalis who are still deeply influenced by the secular, humanist philosophies of mystics like Fakir Lalol Shah are less likely to give them recognition. Even more likely is the possibility that these people will need to accept the JI as a source of women's empowerment.

Comparative Analysis

Although the individual struggles for women's empowerment differ largely across cultures and societies, understanding how methodologies behind these movements must be critiqued is critical at a universal level. External validity exists in comparing the secular and religious approaches in Bangladesh because the results are applicable to any society examining women's empowerment under patriarchal religious hegemony. From an economic standpoint, Bangladesh remains low on the Human Development Index (HDI), at 146 out of 187 countries (UNDP, 2013). The struggles that women face for representation are life-threatening and severe in a way that may not exist in the developed world. For those countries that are much

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higher on the HDI, the realities are much different. Despite this, women still face obstacles, particularly in rural communities where happiness, self-esteem, access to basic education, and ownership of non-monetary assets continue to pose a major threat to autonomy (UNDP, 2013). There are larger scale benefits to be gained from comparing these seemingly disparate societies, because at a macro level they all continue to deal with similar nuances in women’s empowerment initiatives.

In terms of the Jamaat-e-Islam, reconsidering the ways that Muslim women exist within an Islamic understanding of Bangladeshi society may have some important commonalities to the way Mormon women exist within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS). There is literature that shows, overwhelmingly, that dialogues emerging within religious institutions are a powerful outlet for improving the status of women in each respective society. According to Mihelich & Storrs (2003), many women in the LDS church are actively challenging their prescribed gender roles whether informally at weekly Young Women’s meetings or during more formal meetings such as the General Conference (Mihelich & Storrs, 2003). A recent dialogue has also triggered discussions on accepting Mormon women into the priesthood, something that is not explicitly outlined in LDS doctrine. These experiences are not all that dissimilar to the way that Muslim women were not accounted for as members of the labor force or as autonomous entities in Maududí’s original writings. Mormon communities can take inference from how the Jamaat-e-Islam reinterpreted a woman’s presence in their society as an autonomous entity, not just for her own good, but for the overall benefit it brought to the greater community. Recently, Mormon activist Kate Kelly was ex-communicated from the LDS church on the grounds of promoting false interpretations of Mormon doctrine for the purpose of allowing women greater autonomy within the church and community (Goodstein, 2014). The aftermath has created a polar division between Mormons, but also demonstrated that the empowerment of women within the church has many biases and methodological problems that require attention. Rather than ex-communicating voices of dissonance, this can be paralleled to the Muslim woman’s experience behind the purdah in Bangladesh and how society was able to accommodate a change in mentality toward her autonomy, freedom, and permanent presence.

Aside from prescribed gender roles, the economic status of women in LDS societies is also in need of reevaluation. Within the United States, Utah is the most prominent state in which the LDS has established hegemony on culture, thought, and economy. Utah is listed as having some of the highest gender-based wage gaps in the entire country (Ciaiaza, Shaw, & Werschkul, 2002). Whether or not this is a direct result of the LDS cultural hegemony is a question that needs to be addressed. Utilizing comparative analysis for both secular and religious approaches to women’s empowerment can provide an outlet for this discussion, much in the same way critiques of microfinance initiatives are generating discourse in Bangladesh. Understanding the different effects between secular economic factors and religious social factors, and how they are construed together under a patriarchal mindset to restrict women’s mobility, freedom, self-esteem, and wage potential, is of utmost importance in the struggle to reduce the alarming wage gap and to bring a greater sense of gender equality to the state.

It is no longer sufficient to promote a move toward secular governance in Utah as the answer to challenges faced in women’s empowerment initiatives. The move for secularization and the motivations behind it within the Bangladeshi Constitution and individual political party manifestos is a testament to the limitations of this mindset. In places like Utah where gender roles in both the public and private spheres are heavily influenced by a religious authority, finding incentives for improving the economic and social status of women in a way that will be accepted within the religious mindset is more productive. There has already been research conducted on where Mormon women fit in regarding the priesthood, the family, and their communities (Mihelich & Storrs, 2003). However, there has been less research on examining the methodologies behind this research, and how the studies may be conducted from a perspective that is steeped within Mormon patriarchy. It is possible to step outside of the patriarchal mindset and still cater to the religious needs of both men and women in the community. This can be paralleled with the way purdah and the Bangladeshi constitution steep women’s empowerment in patriarchy, and open up an entire framework for comparative analyses across religious and social demographics.

This type of comparative analysis could prove highly useful in understanding women’s empowerment across different religious communities in Utah. For example, a woman’s autonomy in a rural area that operates under Fundamentalist Latter Day Saints norms could be understood better by viewing similarities with communities occupied under the Jamaat-e-Islami interpretation of Sharia in rural areas of Bangladesh. Similarly, by understanding feminist initiatives in other parts of Utah where more centrist Republican- and Democrat-based ideologies work alongside LDS doctrine, issues surrounding gender equality can be made easier by utilizing observations from the Awami League- and Bangladesh National Party-based ideologies in Bangladesh. Together, a more holistic conceptualization of women’s issues may help to shed light on these important, but complex matters. Regardless, male bias in how societies implement women’s empowerment initiatives must continue to be criticized and accounted for in order to achieve true equality and freedom.

Conclusion

In spite of the powerful rhetoric of Fakir Lalon Shah and Bengali philosophies on equality and freedom, Bangladesh continues to face many obstacles in liberating women in rural communities from the throws of patriarchal economic decision-making. Because of the unclear division between secularism in the public sphere and religious authority in the private sphere of society, economic initiatives such as microfinance are ineffective at promoting women’s empowerment across all boards. Likewise, due to their problematic history and poor political representation in Bengali society, the JJ also faces obstacles to women’s empowerment that have not deterred them from such mobilization in the private sphere. However, in order to actualize the paradigm shift necessary to make these changes functional for women in Bangladesh, both of these spheres will have to ultimately be addressed. As a consequence, Bangladesh will need to allow women into the public spheres of labor supply, non-land asset accumulation, family planning, children’s education, and household expenditure per annum, while also encouraging their empowerment in the private spheres of self-esteem, control of resources, decision-making, and mobility. Without this, Bangladesh will continue to see conflicting results regarding the causal relationship between initiatives for women’s empowerment and the actual establishment of women’s freedom and autonomy in rural communities.

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