

MEN IN A MATRILINEAL SOCIETY: CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINITY AMONG GARO MEN IN BANGLADESH

Naveed Ferdous¹, Subah Samara²

ABSTRACT

To analyse the social dynamics between men and women in a society, it is very important to understand masculinity and precisely how masculinity is constructed. Generally, we have discussed about masculinity from the lens of a patriarchal society. However, this paper, with support of the relevant theories, aspires to understand the masculinity from the perspective of a matrilineal society. It endeavours to examine how construction of masculinity is being shaped up and influenced in a matrilineal society – the psycho-social construction of men living in a matrilineal society. It then emphasizes how the social norms and practices, including interaction with some factors shape up the masculinity construction of a man.

Keywords: Matrilineal society; Garo; Masculinity

INTRODUCTION

Academics and researchers through their previous studies suggests that there is no single defined form of masculinity that can be found across different culture and societies. Different cultures, and different periods of history, construct masculinity differently (Connell, 2001).

Our world mainly follows the patrilineal lineage of family. Almost all the societies, except a handful number, existing in the current times traces family lineage from the father. From our findings and review of numerous literatures, the previous studies which focused on the construction of masculinity among men, were mainly analysed from the perspective of a patrilineal society. The patrilineal kinship system promotes patriarchy (Maseno and Kilonzo, 2010). Wably (1990), defined patriarchy as a social system, identifying the practices of a society, where men dominate, oppresses and exploits women. It provides a clear indication, that within a patrilineal society, men hold a superior position. Connell (2009), discussed about patriarchal dividend – the advantage that men, as a group, experiences within a society, allowing them to practice and promote unequal gender order. These, social and cultural, norms and practices define the attributes of the men with the society – shapes us and constructs their masculinity.

In this study, to understand the construction of masculinity, we shift our focus away from the majority of the societies which are patrilineal; and emphasise on a matrilineal society – the Garo, from the Birisiri union of Netrokona, Bangladesh. The Garo maintains the matrilineal family lineage.

Intiaz (2009) asserted how masculinity remains to be an under researched area across the world and Bangladesh. We should prioritise more on this issue since masculinity defines the traits what the society imposes on the men and thus gives us the understanding of the gender discrimination prevailing in any

-
1. Project Coordinator, British Council in Bangladesh
 2. Lecturer, Department of Public Administration, Jaganath University.

society. The existing studies and literatures on masculinity has been discussed from the perspective of a patriarchal society. But in this paper, we tried to analyse masculinity and its construction in a matrilineal setting. Based on the findings, we will be able to comprehend that whether construction of masculinity differs in different societies – i.e., influenced by different social web of thoughts and practices. The study will enable us to understand how men’s values and behaviour are influenced by social settings and how do we address the change. The difference in masculine traits in different cultural settings will pave the way to establish that patriarchal dividend which men exercise are not universal, and change can be brought if we can promote fair practices within our societies. This study will therefore be important to contribute to key understandings that will help to eradicate men’s perpetration of violence and discrimination against women and increase support for gender justice.

Morell (1998) termed masculinity as a fluid concept. By the concept fluid, he emphasised that there is no single form of masculinity rather it changes, depending on the social contexts, i.e. masculinity is a plural concept which can be explained in different forms, in different contexts. Criticizing the conventional definition of masculinity, Collision and Hearn stated, “The concept of masculinity is blurred, is uncertain in its meaning and tends to deemphasize issues of power and domination” (Connell: 2005). Connell (1995) discussed and defined every man as equally masculine but internalising different forms. She brought into light, four different forms of masculinity:

- Hegemonic Masculinity
- Complicit Masculinity
- Marginalised Masculinity
- Subordinate Masculinity

Hegemonic Masculinity is the most appreciated and expected form of masculinity in our society. A hegemonic masculine man is a person who is powerful in all aspects, who inherits the leadership qualities, who is successful. According to Imtiaz (2009), a hegemonic man is also heterosexual. Whereas complicit masculinity comprises of the people who appreciates the hegemonic qualities but doesn’t perform all the tasks required to be hegemonic. Subordinate masculinity is defined when one man is dominated by another man. Since hegemonic masculinity is heterosexual, a gay man is not accepted by the society and thus dominated by other heterosexual men of the society and thus the gay man automatically internalizes the subordinate masculinity. Marginalized masculinity is comprised of men from different ethnic group or race.

The major objective of this paper is to analyse the forms of masculinities found among Garo men living in a matrilineal society. In the process, the study will try to explore the living realities of Garo men and will make an effort to assess the construction process of masculinities among Garo men. The paper also takes an attempt to analyse the enactment of masculinities among Garo men living in a matrilineal society.

To achieve the research outcome, focusing only on the concepts of masculinity will not suffice, rather concepts and theories related to social learning and identity shifts needs to be taken into consideration.

Albert Bandura (1977), theorised the social learning theory in which he asserted that human beings' behaviour is shaped up from the surrounding environment through the process of observational learning. He discussed how our behaviour is shaped up by our surrounding influential models – family members, peer groups, print or electronic media etc. Our learnings are also influenced through the observation of punishment and rewards, i.e. the acts which are appreciated by the society and the acts which are disregarded.

Kearney and O Sullivan (2003) discussed how identity shift occurs. Their theory is helpful to understand the behaviour pattern of an individual and aids to explain the change in behavioural pattern of an individual. Their theory proposes that change or shift identity is initiated by dissatisfaction with the current situation.

METHODOLOGY

The first step of the study is to understand that construction of masculinity varies in distinct social settings. This part of the study was backed by numerous literatures. Some of the studies are discussed below, as conducted in patriarchal societies, which asserts that masculinity construction is completely contingent on different cultural and social settings.

Robert Morell (1998) in the article 'Of Boys and Men: Masculinity and Gender in Southern African Studies', evidently acknowledged that masculinity construction is completely built on the cultural and social norms. Supporting which, James W. Messerschmidt (1999) in the article "Making bodies matter: Adolescent Masculinities, the body, and varieties of violence" discussed how school had played a major role in building two completely different forms of masculinity. On the other hand, Debbie Epstein, Mary Kehily, Martin MacanGhaill and Peter Redmen (2001) in their article 'Boys and Girls Come out to play: Making masculinities and femininities in school playgrounds' discussed how playgrounds in school can be effective in constructing one's masculinity or femininity. Also, Pounting and Donaldson (2005) in their article Snakes and Leaders Hegemonic Masculinity in Ruling-Class Boys' Boarding Schools highlighted how small institutions in a society can be enough to construct one's masculinity. Interestingly, David Gadd (2003) in his article Reading between the lines: subjectivity and men's violence discussed how men masculine construction varies depending on specific situations. Finally, Robert A. Nye (2005) in the article 'Locating Masculinity: Some Recent Work on Men' displayed some interesting facts about how different places and different cultures construct masculinity in a different way.

After getting a grasp of the concept that, masculinity construction is dependent on social settings, now comes the turn of revealing the construction of masculinity among the men, living in a matrilineal society – for this study, it is to get an insight of the Garo men and their life experiences.

There are few areas in Bangladesh, where the Garo people lives in cluster. This study was conducted in a village of Birisiri union under Durgapur Upazila, in Netrokona district, Bangladesh. The rationale to choose to work in this village was because here we had Garo men from diversified background. Some of them were farmers, some were day laborers, while we also had men running businesses and among others were educated working men etc. To add on, in the same village there were Bengali families residing – which gives easy access to the Garos to mix with people from traditional patriarchal societies.

As this study will emphasise on analysing the construction of masculinity among Garo men, the nature of the study demands a complete qualitative approach. Adopting the qualitative approach helped us to understand the reality of the individuals of their society. Construction of masculinity of every man is different. Conversations with our respondents, helped us to o generate picture of individual life experiences of the population in our study area.

Before travelling to our study location, we spent hours to find out information in the online sources and printed versions of existing literatures of journals, news, research papers etc. The available information helped us more to understand the social settings of the Garo society, the norms and rules of the society and the cultural variables of their society. The fact that surprised us the most was that there were almost no indicative work about the construction of masculinity of men living in the matrilineal society.

From the very beginning we knew that our respondents come from Garo population. We tried adopting the Participatory Rural Appraisal tool in this research and before conducting the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions we had done a social mapping of the village and also did try to locate some key informants for the study. The sampling was initially a purposive sampling but in the course of the field work we dealt with respondents who were founded through snowball sampling method. Our initial source of the respondents was a tea stall that seemed to be quite popular among the residents of the village which we observed during the village transact walk.

Being a qualitative study, initially the research adopted purposive sampling for conducting the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. But before that, the research team tried to develop a social map of the village and also did try to locate some key informants for the study. The sampling method though initially was purposive, but during study, it had to adopt the snowball sampling method as well. Altogether, there were twenty-three (23) respondents – where four (4) were female respondents while the rest nineteen (19) were male respondents. Though the study dealt with men and masculinity, to ensure the validity of the findings, some women were interviewed too. This also enabled us to get a more detailed picture of the society and the social dynamics. These women helped us to understand the situation and socially expected roles of men and also gave us a glimpse of their opinion on their social system about men.

For the purpose of the research, the two basic tools of qualitative data collection were adopted – focus group discussions (FGD) and in-depth interviews. In all, there were two (2) focus group discussions sessions – one with local youths and the other with NGO officials, and fourteen (14) in-depth interview sessions.

One of the focus group discussions was with the youth of that region. The discussion session was conducted with six (6) youths from the same village who were all students. They were enrolled either in a college or university. None were from school. Thus, the age of the respondents of this focus group discussion session was from 17-23 years.

Our last FGD was with the officials of the INGO (international non-government organization) Compassion. The FGD was conducted with three officials of Compassion who belonged to the Garo Community.

Among the 14 respondents of the in-depth interview session, 10 were male while 4 were female. There was only one respondent who was present in both FGD and the in-depth interviews. For effectively conducting the interviews, we adopted snowball sampling method or purposive sampling to ensure that we get respondents from diversified background. We interviewed people of different social status – including local and religious leaders, political figures, doctor, government officials, businessperson, farmers, day labourers etc.

KNOWING THE GAROS FROM BIRISIRI

Before the paper discusses about the construction of masculinity, it presents about the Garo people living there and their social settings which the researchers understood while conducting the field work of the study, from the Garo people residing there.

A brief history of Garos and Birisiri - In the present days, not only the Garos are residing in Birisiri but we also find the Bengali people here. But situation was not the same even few decades back. According to people there, during the ruling years of the British Empire in this region, they ensured that the Garos clustered in a single region since they have a complete different social setting and they also felt that the Garos might demand a land of their own. But the Garos did not get a land of their own since their leaders' voices were not that much strong and effective. When the British left they divided this region into Pakistan and India. This division led to a boundary in between the area of the Garo society. One section of the Garos then resided in India while the rest resided in Pakistan, now Bangladesh. Then in 1965 a huge number of Muslims were deported from India to Pakistan who then had to live in the Garo area of Bangladesh. This was the aftermath of a riot between India and Pakistan. Thus Muslims, got into the areas of Garo community, and since they belonged to the major religion of the country, they started to have a powerful voice in these areas.

The social system - The Garo people of Birisiri follows the matrilineal system of family lineage. But this society is not matriarch. The individuals take their clan titles from their mothers. Traditionally, the daughters inherit the property from her mother. According to Garo rule the sons are not entitled to own any property. After getting married, the man leaves his parental home and permanently resides in his wife's house. The traditional religion of the Garo's is SANGSARIK.

The practiced religion - Currently at Birisiri the population of the Garos is now around 25,000. Here majority is Garo people with almost all of them practicing Christianity. Previously, the Garos had a religion of their own named "SANGSARIK". But over the years they accepted Christianity as their religion. Currently only a handful families of the study village are still practicing the SANGSARIK religion.

The scenario of the Educational Sector - A completely different scenario prevails among the population of Garos compared to the rest of Bangladesh. In the Garo society of the Goraith village women are more educated than the men. Approximately 65% of the population who availed higher education is female while the rest of the 35% is the male. This information was provided from one of the officials working in an international NGO in that area. But with time the situation is changing and this gap between male and female availing higher education is decreasing. Moreover, during the course of my research, it has been found that males in this society faced severe obstacles in case of receiving higher education.

The pattern of livelihood - We find people of diverse professional background. There are people who are engaged in the government sector, the non-government sector, the business sector and also in the agricultural sector. The NGO based jobs seemed to be the most popular among the Garo men who are educated. Some are involved with government organization. There are also farmers and day laborers. The educated women are involved mainly in the NGO sector or some run small businesses. The rest are usually involved in the domestic affairs of the household.

The inheritance of property according to the Garo Laws - The inheritance of the property might be a bit complicated. From the responses of the residents and local leaders we understood that the Garo laws are established in such a manner that is very difficult for males to inherit or own properties. Usually, the females are entitled to all the properties. The properties bought by males, will be entitled to their female family head or spouse. Usually only daughters inherit properties from their mothers. If one family does not have any girl child, the sisters of the female head of that family will inherit her properties, in her absence.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

To understand the construction of masculinity among men from a matrilineal society, more specifically - the Garo community of Birisiri, we need to analyse the in-depth conversations with the 23 respondents of this study, in light of the theories and concepts related masculinity and its construction, social learning, identity shifts etc. (Pseudo name is used in the discussion process) Also, we need to recall the four types of masculinity discussed by R W Connell – Hegemonic masculinity, Complicit masculinity, Subordinate masculinity and Marginalised masculinity. The patriarchal society and its social setting support the practice of hegemonic masculinity. This is ensured by the patriarchal dividend which also ensures that hegemonic masculinity if practiced is associated with uncountable number of privileges form the society.

The Garo society promoting the practice of non-hegemonic masculinity

Garo society is a matrilineal society. Therefore, without the desired patriarchal social setting and the unavailability of patriarchal dividend, it becomes quite tough for a man to practice the hegemonic form of masculinity.

We can start the initial phase of discussion based on the lack of economic independence. Previously, we discussed how properties were solely inherited by the daughters of a family only. According to the rules of the Garo society men are not entitled to own any property. Only females are legally entitled to own properties.

“In the Garo Society men are not legally entitled to own any property. In the recent years it has been found that the parents are preparing will paper of their assets and distributing these assets among their daughter as well as son. But if the daughter, at any point claims her brother’s assets which he inherited according to the deed of their parents and calls for the Garo rule then he will need to hand over his assets to her since according to the Garo rules only females will inherit the property. In the society when the Garo law is enacted the deed will not remain effective” Tony (ex-member of union parishad)

Not that only the women are only entitled to property but in some cases, it has been found that the husband needs to hand over the money he earns to his wife. Therefore, we also need to take a look at the economic resource distribution pattern prevailing in the society.

“I need to hand over the money I earned to my wife. She then determines the expenditure of the family” Debashish (farmer)

“The men usually misuse the money. They waste a lot of money behind alcohol and playing cards. Therefore, I prefer to keep the money with me and not my husband” Ranu (housewife)

According to the concept of hegemonic masculinity, a hegemonic man needs to economically solvent enough to be self-dependent and also win bread for his family. But in case of the Garo men it is being found that they do not have access to any wealth and under certain circumstances they even do not have control over their income. These are contradictory to hegemonic masculinity.

Then if we take into consideration the aspect social security for men, we will find that they even lack the social security. Being unable to own any piece of property, the men here highly lack security. Before marriage they reside in their mothers’ home and after marriage they reside in their wives’ home. After

marriage, if they are forced to leave his wife's residence the man might not have anywhere to go.

"If a man's wife dies before him there might be situation when his wife's family members might force him to leave his wife's residence. Again, if there is any dispute or divorce had occurred between the husband and wife the husband will automatically be thrown out of the wife's residence. Under such circumstances, the man might not have anywhere to go. If his mother is alive then he could go to his mother's house, but if his mother is already dead then he might face huge problems. Because he does not have anything, and his mother's property now belongs to his sister." **Rakha (Businessman, furniture business)**

These feelings of helplessness arise in men particularly among those who had moved to their wives' residence permanently after their marriage.

Then if we take into consideration the decision making power, initially, majority of the respondents stated that the decisions of the family are taken after discussion between the male and female member of the household, i.e. the husband and wife both consults over the matter and then finalises a decision. But when we tried to dig deep into this particular scenario, in the daily matters, the men might take decisions on their own, but the major and important decisions are taken by the women. In this case the men try to convince the women in their favour as far as possible. Women plays the most vital position in terms of determining the future of the family since they are the one who decides how things will go on. In some cases, it has been found that if a man feels the need to buy anything then he should take permission from his wife.

"If I feel the need to buy a fan for the home, first I need to take permission from my wife." **Tony (ex-member of union parishad)**

Then again, if there is any dispute between the husband and the wife, it will be settled by the wife's family members. The husband's family members are never involved in these situations. Thus, the decision in majority of cases might turn out to be biased, favouring the wife.

"A serious dispute among the husband and wife is settled in a meeting which is held with the couple and the wife's senior family members. The decision that these family members take will be the ultimate decision" **Rakha (Businessman, furniture business)**

When we take a look at the basic facilities that one should avail as a human, availing education is one of the vital issues. Getting access to proper education is considered to be one of the universal human rights. But in the Garo society, for men, availing education was tough. The society before did not give much importance to education.

"In the recent time there are men and boys who are now getting educated, but our father or grandfathers were never into it" **Niranjan (Sociologist and researcher)**

But with time the situation had changed. Now people are aware about the importance of education in our life. Therefore, the Garos, in the present days are now much more involved in education. But during the course of the field work, in case of availing education and higher education we found out that males experience more bars from the society compared to females.

"I had faced some serious obstacles in the course of completing my higher education. My parents had to sell-off their lands to bear my educational cost. My parents were always discouraged by the members of the society. They said that that my parents' investment will go in vain. The struggle they are putting up to continue my education is completely a loss since after marriage, I will go to my wife's residence and reside

there permanently and serve that home” **Dr. Deb (Doctor)**

“In our society the number of women who have completed higher education is far more than the number of men who completed the higher education” **Antony (INGO official)**

These above discussed features of the Garo society clearly are against the traditional patriarchal norms. In any patriarchal society male domination over the females are promoted and expected. According to Mahtab (2012) under the circumstances of the patriarchal norms a man holds the supreme power in the society. Then Connell went to define the patriarchal dividend which the patriarchal society offers to the men in the society. Connell (2009) dividend – the advantage that men, as a group, experiences within a society, allowing them to practice and promote unequal gender order. The patriarchal dividend, of course, promotes the practice of the Hegemonic form of masculinity since it creates the opportunity to avail the traits of the hegemonic man (some of the basic hegemonic traits includes establishing authority, control over one’s own life, affluent in terms of money, safety and security, etc.)

From the above cited quotations of the respondents of the study it is now quite evident that the Garo men, being unable to inherit property, lacking security, lacking the authoritative and decision making power and encountering obstacle to flourish in life, does not possess the hegemonic masculine trait since their society is not offering the scope to practice it.

But it will be unwise to conclude the masculinity based on the pre-determined social settings of this indigenous group. It is very important to take into account some other relevant factors and the current situation and trend in the society. This will help us to determine the exact pattern of the construction of masculinity here.

The Garo society promoting the practice of Hegemonic Masculinity

In a Garo society, family lineage is traced through the mother, female owns the properties and to a great extent has complete control of the economic resources, which makes the females the head of their families. The society, at the same time, demands the males to look after these properties, work on these properties and earn the living for their families. The social norms expect the men to earn the money for the family and use his muscle power to ensure the protection of these properties and assets.

“ I need to work on the land and earn the money for living of my family. Also, I need to look after these lands and maintain it” **Debashish (farmer)**

According to the defined characteristics of hegemonic masculinity by Connell, earning the money to run the family and using the muscle power to ensure protection are the traits of a hegemonic masculine man. Thus, only under some specified circumstances the traditional Garo society expects the men to be hegemonic.

The rise of the Contradictions

In the broader horizon, the Garo society, demands their men to perform non hegemonic and at times, also hegemonic masculine roles. This leads to a contradiction and a confusing situation for the Garo men which affects their identity.

J. W. Scott (1986) emphasised how certain factors influence to shape up one’s gender construction. The social norms, social symbols, social institutions and one’s own learning process are some of the factors that

influence one's identity construction. Connell in 1995 discussed how masculinity in a society influences the gender relations. Therefore, to understand the construction of masculinity it is very important to take into account the factors that shapes up one's gender construction since this eventually leads to the construction of one's masculinity. Previously we had discussed about the social norms prevailing in the Garo society and how it defines the roles of the men in their society. While dealing with the social institutions and its impacts, we mainly focused on two major social institutions that has an extremely vital role in shaping up one's identity - Religion and Educational Institutions. The impact of media was also considered.

Religion: According to Kamla Bhasin (1993) all modern religions are patriarchal which defines the male authority as supreme. According to Oxford Dictionary (2002) Religion is the belief of existence of a God or Gods and the activities that are connected with the worship of them. From this we can infer that religion defines the way of life which is believed to be the way that God orders.

Previously the Garos had followed a religion of their own, the SHANGSHARIK. But in the last few decades the majority of Garo of Birisiri has converted into Christians. Only a handful number of families are still practicing the SHANGSHARIK religion. Therefore, it can be stated that this region is Christian dominated.

One of the local religious leaders from Birisiri stated that "Christianity as a religion prefers males as the head of the families". He believes this as an order of life set by God. The rules of the Garo society contradict with the religious belief.

Educational Institution: Kamla Bhasin (1993) discussed how the control over the educational institutions has always belonged to men. They promoted patriarchal practices in it. She believes that these institutions shared knowledge from men's perspective where the writings are also written by men. Here the men are shown in the dominant and supreme position and the women are either absent or shown in the subordinate position.

We found that the only school operating in the area is Saint Xavier School, a Christian missionary school which is governed according to the Christian norms. There is no college or university for the locals in the area. So, if a person wants to avail higher education then he/she has to move out of the community. Once they move out of their community they enter into the patriarchal settings. Here the curriculum is patriarchal, the environment is patriarchal, and their classmates are even patriarchal in nature.

"While I was enrolled in the medical college most of friends were the Bengali people" **Dr. Deb (Doctor)**

Media: According to Kamla Bhasin (1993) media plays a vital role to promote ideology and she asserts that the media is also controlled by men, which promotes the male supremacy. The films, the programs in the televisions, magazines, newspapers, radio, etc. everywhere the male supremacy in the society is highlighted.

"The exposure to the media is leading to the change in our society. We are basically trying to adopt the western culture" **Abhishek (undergraduate student)**

According to one of the respondents they are trying to adopt the western culture. Basically, the change is being brought about by the patriarchal thoughts that are highlighted. The media being patriarchal in nature promotes the supremacy of the male.

J. W. Scott (1986) discussed how social institutions influences gender construction and leading to construction of masculinity among me. Our findings affirm that the social institutions are patriarchal in nature, whereas the Garo society is upholding its matrilineality. The teachings of the social institutions encouraged the Garo men to attain the hegemonic masculinity but at the same time their social setting enforces them to perform the non-hegemonic roles. Again, as discussed before, according to the need of the society and social norms, under specific circumstances only, the Garo society expects their men to perform the hegemonic roles.

According to the social learning theory of Albert Bandura (1977), we act according to the things we learn and observe from our surroundings. The socialization process tells us to follow the social norms that are being practiced, to learn the practices of their institutions and also to observe the surrounding and then act accordingly. But in case of the Garo men, their social practices and teaching of the institutions are in conflict. The social practices and the observed behaviour of individual at these institutions or with the outer world also contradict.

The concept of Real man

Previously we have discussed how the traditional social norms and the social institution in this particular area differs in their ideology. The study area is a matrilineal society while all the institutions revolving around this area are based on patriarchal norms. The social norms bar the men from performing the hegemonic masculine acts while the social institutions promote the hegemonic masculine acts. The difference in the ideologies gives rise to a contradiction which affects the construction of masculinity of the Garo men. Therefore, during the course of the study we tried to explore their perception about “real man”

“A real man is someone who is well educated and is respected by all. He needs to have enough money for ensuring a comfortable life. A real man should work to bring about positive change in the society” **Abhijeet (NGO staff)**

“A real man is someone who has a beautiful wife and earns a lot of money” **Mark (College Student)**

“A real man is someone to whom people will look up to. He should be well educated and earn a lot of money. He needs to be someone that will influence others. He should possess the leadership qualities in him” **Anirban (INGO official)**

“Real man is someone who is well educated and have a good job so that he can earn a lot of money. He needs to be an influential person so that everyone listens to him. He should fight to establish his rights. He should be involved in acts so that he will be considered as an Icon” **Abhishek (undergraduate student)**

From the above responses about the idea of a real man, it is evident that the majority of the respondents believes in a similar set of characteristics that a real man should possess. Again, when we look back to Connell’s idea about a hegemonic masculine man, we will find that the hegemonic man inherits all these desired characteristics that the respondents highlighted. Therefore, it can be stated that the idea of the “real man” is highly influenced by the patriarchal thoughts which promotes and celebrates the practice of hegemonic masculine men.

The feeling of being devalued

The male respondents developed a strong sense of being devalued by their society. This sense of being devalued is constructed from one’s own consciousness. This devalued sense of feeling is being generated because of the learning of the patriarchal society and the interaction with patriarchal society.

“We feel like we are slaves. Before marriage we need to serve and work for our parents in their home and after marriage we need to work and serve our wives’ home. But in return we do not get any reward. After all the hard work we do, we cannot even own a single piece of property. We have nothing that is ours. All we get is food and shelter in return of our hard work.” **Abhijeet (NGO worker)**

“The bengali men are in a far better condition than of ours.” **Rakha (Businessman, furniture business)**

“During my medical college years, my friend made fun of me and said in the future will become a GHOR JAMAI (GHOR JAMAI= a husband who permanently resides in his wife’s residence) why are you working so hard with medical. Under that circumstances it really hurts” **Dr. Deb (Doctor)**

This sense of being devalued arose primarily because of the interaction with the patriarchal society and learning of the patriarchal institutions. In the last cited quotation, had the respondent not interacted with the outer world, there could have been a chance that he might not have any problem to go to his wife’s residence. The second last quotation clearly implies that he is feeling devalued compared to the Bengali people. In the first cited quotation it is quite clear that he is disturbed since he is not getting any value for his works. In the patriarchal society the men get rewarded and is valued for his works and contribution.

Frustration leading to Aggressive acts

The Garo men admires the characteristics of a hegemonic masculine men which they confirmed while they were asked about their ideas of a real man. But in reality, they are not able to practice hegemonic masculinity. Their social norms do not allow them to inherit property and the stereotyped ideas of the society bars them from availing higher education. The social system of the Garo society makes women the head of the family. Thus, the social system bars the Garo men to become the men they desire to be.

“We can live on our own, we earn money, we are educated, we should get the respect we deserve” **Abhijeet (NGO worker)**

“In our society we cannot exercise the freedom of life. We cannot accept this situation; it hurts our ego” **Dr. Deb (Doctor)**

“In our society, the men are being victims of exploitation and are holding a subordinate position in the society. Our condition can be termed as PURUSH NIRJATON, the complete opposition scene of the patriarchal society.” **Rakha (Businessman, furniture business)**

The men of this society feel that they are not getting the respect they deserve; they are not getting the value of their work. Inheriting the title of the mother is not an issue but the way the society treats the men is not acceptable. They resent the fact that being the only earning member of the family they are not entitled to own any property. They also find it hard to accept the fact that they are forced to live in their wives’ residence permanently. If unfortunately the wife passes away before the husband, the husband becomes homeless and my have to live on the street. All of these possibilities contribute to the frustration of Garo men. From the frustration-aggression theory coined by Dollard, et. al. 1939, we understood that frustration leads to aggression and aggressive acts.

The prevalence of committing violence against women is significant with the study area. The violence usually follows a similar pattern. After men return home from their informal on the street drinking socializations, inebriated men take their frustration on their wives. Consuming alcohol is part of daily life of

Garo people. *“It is usually found that quarrel between men and women usually start after the men return home after consuming alcohol. They quarrel at times turns into fight. The main reason of these fights are about the property issues or difference in thoughts”* **Srizan (Local religious leader)**

Shifting identities, shifting masculinities

The feeling of being devalued in the society, lacking the decision-making power, or being deprived of economic resources sparks dissatisfaction among the men. This is even more intensified when these men interact with their peer groups and other social institution ensuring male supremacy and patriarchal dividend. These frustrated men are desperate to bring about a change in their lives.

The social system of the Garo society gives rise to a certain level of dissatisfaction among the Garo men. According to the Identity shift theory of Kearney and O’Sullivan (2003) a rise of dissatisfaction is followed by some actions to bring about change in the situation. The Garo men due to the dissatisfaction with their social setting are taking initiatives to get over these social norms that are hindering them to flourish in life.

There are some men in this village who went against these social norms. The most common action in case of rejecting the social norms is not going to the wife’s residence after marriage.

“In the present days there is a common trend among the Garo men. After marriage they are not going to their wives’ residence rather, they are now forming a neo local residence. That is after marriage the wife and the husband neither resides permanently in the wife’s residence nor in the husband’s residence rather they are forming a complete new residence of their own” **Niranjan (Sociologist and researcher)**

Few of the male respondents even reported that they had brought their wives to their parental residence. Among all the male respondents, there were a strong stance against men moving to their wives’ residence after marriage. Those who had moved to their wives’ residence plan to ensure that their sons do not move to their wife’s residences rather they will bring their son’s wife in their home.

“For my son, I will definitely bring his wife to my home. For my daughter, it is up to her whether she wants to move to her husband’s residence or bring her husband in my home” **Srizan (Local religious leader)**

A major reason behind the dissatisfaction of men with the traditional Garo society is that it does not allow the men to inherit properties. None of male respondents inherited property from their parents while all four female respondents inherited property from their parents. The Garo men are now trying to overcome this obstacle.

“I did not inherit any property from my parents. I do not want my son to experience the same situation. Therefore, I will distribute all the properties, I will own, equally between my son and my daughter” **Dr. Deb (Doctor)**

“Now more men are availing higher education compared to the past. In the past, more women availed higher education. But the situation is changing. This gap is narrowing. I hope in the near future there will be no gap at all.” **Antony (NGO Official)**

The change is being introduced by those men who are involved in the service sector and had availed education. Since they are self-dependent, they know they can lead a life on their own. They are now forming nuclear family where they try to establish their decisions and gain control over their earned money. Ensuring

that men are not living in their wife's residence is quite a freedom from being subordinated. Getting the opportunity to avail higher education, gives them a secure future. They are practicing a way of life where their thoughts are important; even they are earning money and owning property. They are trying to change their situation in which they are admiring the hegemonic masculine traits.

Though these acts are against the social norms of the traditional Garo society but we still find that these traits are getting the acceptance and turning into the modern trends of this society. It is quite obvious that men will readily accept these changes. The women in the Garo society are losing their upper hand due to this transformation but still they are accepting this change. The only reason behind the acceptance is that the broader society of Bangladesh follows this social system.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The traditional Garo society expects that women will only inherit the properties. Men will go to their wives' residence and reside there permanently. These men will earn money by working on the land owned by their wives and also ensure the protection of that land.

But at the same time in Birisiri, the social institutions that are prevailing in that village are dominated and surrounded by the patriarchal thoughts, which defies men being in an inferior position within the society. To add on, interacting with the outer world and their peer groups, the Garo men encounters a sense of dissatisfaction with their traditional practices. This frustration and dissatisfaction lead to certain actions which they undertake to bring about a change.

Connell (1995) classified that the men in the ethnic minority group possess the marginalized masculine traits. But the scenario of the Garo community in Birisiri at time challenges this classification of Connell. In the previous section of this paper we discussed how the Garo men lacks economic independence, lacks the decision-making power, the lack of social facilities and privileges, etc. Taking these into consideration, it is justifiable to state that the men here possess the marginalized traits of masculinity. But the society, at times demands its' men to perform hegemonic traits. Adopting different form of masculinities at different circumstances, proves that masculinity is fluid.

The social institutions surrounding the locality follow the patriarchal way of life. The villagers here internalize the patriarchal thoughts which they learn from these social institutions. The patriarchal norms promote the practice of hegemonic masculinity. Thus, the Garo men also admire the practice of the hegemonic masculine man which promotes them to bring changes in their way of life enabling them to practice hegemonic masculine traits. Though, the men here are appreciating the hegemonic masculine traits and are also internalizing some of its traits while due to social barrier they are being barred from certain practices of the hegemonic traits. It can be summed up that in the recent time, the Garo men in Birisiri are possessing the complicit masculine traits.

To wrap up, we should realise that the construction of masculinity and masculine traits are not universally same. It is moulded and influenced by the culture, the society and the practices we are part of. To address the gender-based injustices, we need to capitalise on this concept. We need to discard the thought and belief that complements the traditional masculine traits which the patriarchal society urges to be believed as universal and natural. To promote change, we need to promote and imbibe the practices which promotes the type of masculinity that appreciates the contribution of women in our society and believes in establishing a fair and equal society. This can significantly help us to build a society which will be appreciated by people at different levels.

REFERENCES

- Bandura, A., 1977. *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Bhasin, K. 1993. *What is Patriarchy*, New Delhi, India: Kali for women
- Connell, R.W, 1995. *Masculinities*, Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Connell, R.W., 2002. Understanding men: Gender Sociology and the new international research on masculinities, *Social Thought and Research*, Vol 24, 1 &2.
- Connell, R. W. and Messerschmitt, J. W., 2005. Hegemonic masculinity: rethinking the Concept. *Gender and Society*, Vol 19 (6) p 829-854
- Connell, R. W., 2009. *Gender: In World perspective*, Cambridge and Malden, Polity
- Dollard, J., Miller, N. E., Doob, L. W., Mowrer, O. H., & Sears, R. R. 1939. *Frustration and aggression*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press
- Epstein D, Kehily M, MacanGhaill M. and Redmen P., 2001. Boys and Girls Come out to play: Making masculinities and feminities in school playgrounds, *Men and masculinities* Vol. 4 (2), p 158-170
- Gadd D., 2003. Reading between the lines: subjectivity and men's violence, *men and masculinities* vol. 5(4), p 333-351
- Imtiaz, S. S., 2009. *Understanding masculinities: Men's Perspectives and Gender Studies in Bangladesh*. Dhaka, Bangladesh: Department of Women and Gender Studies.
- Kearney, M. & O'Sullivan, J. 2003. Identity Shifts as Turning Points in Health Behavior Change. *Western journal of nursing research*. 25. 134-52.
- Mahtab N. 2012. *Women, Gender and Develop: Contemporary issues*, Dhaka, Bangladesh: A.H. Development publishing house
- Maseno, L. and Kilonzo, S.M., 2011. Engendering development: Demystifying patriarchy and its effects on women in rural Kenya, *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* Vol. 3(2), p 45-54
- Messerschmidt J.W., 1999. Making bodies matter: Adolescent Masculinities, the body, and varieties of violence, *Theoretical Criminology*, vol 3(2), p 197-218
- Morell R, 1998. Of Boys and Men: Masculinity and Gender in Southern African Studies, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol 91(4) p 605-630
- Nye R. A., 2005. Locating Masculinity: Some Recent Work on Men, *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol 30(3) p 1937-1956
- Pounting D., 2005. Snakes and Leaders Hegemonic Masculinity in Ruling-Class Boys' Boarding Schools, *Men and masculinities* Vol.7(4), p 325-344
- Scott J.W., 1986. Gender: A useful category of history analysis, *The American Historical Review*, Vol 91(5), p 1053- 1074
- Walby, S. 1990. *Theorizing Patriarchy*. Blackwell Publishers Ltd.: Oxford, UK and Cambridge USA.

AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHY

Naveed Ferdous

Naveed Ferdous has around 6 years of professional experience in different national and international development organisations working around themes related to Gender, Maternal and Adolescent Health, Education and Skills. He is currently working as a Project Coordinator at the British Council. Prior to entering into his professional career, he completed his graduate and post graduate degree from the University of Dhaka, where he majored in Women and Gender Studies and Public Policy.

Email: naveedferdous@gmail.com

Subah Samara

Subah Samara is involved in the field of academia for around 4 years. She is currently working as a Lecturer at the Department of Public Administration in Jagannath University, Dhaka. Prior to joining Jagannath University, she was a faculty member of Daffodil International University in its Development Studies department. Her research interest revolves Public Policy, Women Empowerment, Social Policy. Subah completed her Bachelor of Social Sciences and Master of Social Sciences from the University of Dhaka under Public Administration department. Email: subahsamara@pad.jnu.ac.bd