

# The Place of Women in Public Space

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## A Case Study of Street Harassment in Bangladesh

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## **ABSTRACT**

Sexual harassment on the streets is a prevalent issue worldwide and most of it takes place in the cities. The issue has been addressed by various international agencies and governments. However, the problem still persists and affects the daily lives of people, especially women and girls. It affects their daily commuting patterns and it has impact on their decisions about whether to be present in public spaces or not. This thesis is about sexual harassment on the streets of Bangladesh experienced by women while they travel by bus and on foot. The theoretical part of this qualitative case study undertaken as a desk study consists of feminist theory on sexual harassment and explanation of the relationship between participation and patriarchal gender norms. The main arguments presented in this work are that street harassment against women in Bangladesh results partly from the patriarchal norms and gender inequalities present in the society. It is also argued here that the low involvement of women in the planning and decision-making processes affected by patriarchal structures of Bangladeshi politics constitutes a potential barrier to elimination of sexual harassment on the streets.

Keywords: street harassment, eve teasing, patriarchy, gender, physical mobility

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## **List of Abbreviations and Acronyms**

BGMEA – Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association

BNWLA – Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association

BPFA – Beijing Platform for Action

BRAC – Building Resources Across Communities

CEDAW – Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

ILO – International Labour Organization

SDG – Sustainable Development Goal

UK – United Kingdom

UN – United Nations

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

WBB Trust – Work for a Better Bangladesh Trust

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In this study the transportation-related practices of women in Bangladesh and the street harassment they experience while travelling on foot and using public transportation, i.e. buses will be examined. The main focus of the thesis is to explain the issue of street harassment through the lenses of patriarchal gender norms prevalent in the Bangladeshi society. In addition, the impact of patriarchy on political participation of women and its potential effects on the possibility of elimination of street harassment will be assessed.

### *A definition of 'street harassment'*

The gender-based street harassment is often referred to as sexual harassment. In South Asia, a common euphemism for sexual harassment of women in public areas by men is called 'eve teasing' where Eve alludes to the very first woman, according to the Biblical creation story (Faruq 2011).

It is, however, discouraged by various NGO's and feminists to use the term 'eve teasing' as it actually signifies that it is a women, 'Eve', tempting or provoking males for vulgar behavior (Talboys et al. 2017; Misri 2017; Baxi 2001). As according to Baxi (2001, p. 2), the term perpetuates a "culturally sanctioned practice" that "normalizes and escalates violence against women in public spaces" and legitimizes "harassment by positioning the very presence of women in public spaces as 'provocative' ". Using the term 'eve teasing' can lead to ignorance of the issue within society, including those who have the power to fight the issue. In addition, naming issue in this particular way might compel women to believe that harassment is caused by them as well as make them accept that it is and it should be a part of their daily lives.

As according to United Nations (nd.), examples of sexual harassment, also referred to as sexual violence or gender-based violence include, among others, deliberate touching, leaning over, cornering, pinching, actual or attempted rape, sexual looks, whistling or sexual comments. Sexual and gender-based violence can also include child marriage and sexual abuse, female genital mutilation, commercial sexual exploitation, and trafficking of girls and women. It can take place in private as well as public spaces. However, this study should not be seen as covering all forms of sexual violence. The definition of sexual violence in this study is based on the

definition of the non-profit organization the Stop Street Harassment and relates only to public space. The organization has compiled a list of definitions of street harassment from scholars, community organizations and other people through an informal online survey. According to the definition, “gender-based street harassment is unwanted comments, gestures, and actions forced on a stranger in a public place without their consent and is directed at them because of their actual or perceived sex, gender, gender expression, or sexual orientation” (Stop Street Harassment 2015).

### ***A brief introduction of the study area and transportation practices of Bangladeshi women***

The People’s Republic of Bangladesh is a country in South Asia. It is bordered by India and Myanmar (Burma). Around 90 per cent of the Bangladeshi people are Muslims (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics 2015). In 2015 Bangladesh ranked 139th out of 188 countries of the UN Human Development Index (UNDP 2015). According to the World Bank, the population of Bangladesh exceeds 163 million people (World Bank 2016). Bangladesh is one of the countries of South Asia that are experiencing very rapid urbanization (World Bank 2015; Bangladesh Urban Forum 2012). The cities of Bangladesh are growing more than twice the rate of rural areas, and this rapid urbanization is expected to continue until Bangladesh will transform from a low-middle income to a middle income country.

Female migration is seen as one of the defining elements of rapid and transformational urbanization of Bangladesh (ActionAid 2014). According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), the female labor force participation rate in Bangladesh increased significantly from year 2000 being at 23 per cent to 33 per cent in 2017 (World Bank 2017). It is estimated that the garment industry employs 4 million people while around 80 per cent of them are women (Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association 2014).

Gross enrolment ratio of women in education is also increasing year by year, e.g. in secondary education from being at 47,5 per cent in 2008 to 72,5 per cent in 2018 and in tertiary education from being over 6 per cent in 2008 to over 14 per cent in 2016 (UNESCO 2016).

As argued by some authors, the multiple roles of women have increased their demand for transport (Tilley & Houston 2016; Shefali 2000).

It is known that within the available spectrum of modes of transportation choices, the use of certain modes is often heavily dependent on income (ActionAid 2016). The most predominant mode of travel for women of low income group in Dhaka is walking and riding a bus as it is cheapest among public transportation (Tilley & Houston 2016; Rahman 2010). Although lower-middle income female commuters can afford to spend more on transport services than lower income groups, their main mode of transport is also bus (UK Economic and Social Research Council 2017). Besides walking and riding a bus, rickshaw and taxi are other available modes of transportation for women but these are often much more expensive than formal public transport.

Due to the fact that women's labor participation and education enrolment rate increased, they are frequent users of public spaces. As a consequence they are exposed to different problems in public spaces, such sexual harassment that, in turn, affects their mobility while they are performing their leisure activities and responsibilities such as social, educational and economic (Islam 2012). However, other groups of women are also affected by street harassment since, as argued by Bowman (1993), the target of street harassment is every woman from the age when her body is sexually developed to the point when she is no longer considered attractive. According to ActionAid (2017) violence against women in public spaces particularly affects poor and excluded women, and their experiences intersect with their race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, disability, marital and parenthood status and socio-economic status.

### ***The scale of street harassment in Bangladesh***

As observed by some authors (Faruq 2011; Nahar et al. 2013), street harassment was not a severe problem in Bangladesh until 1980s. However, with the rise of modern era and free market economy, when involvement of women and girls increased in education and employment, especially in garment industry, street harassment started raising and affecting the society (Nahar et al. 2013). In Bangladesh, a highly conservative and traditional country, where women were assigned to a large extent to domestic spheres with limited rights, the new image of women and their presence in public spaces, so different from the social expectations, caused certain issues, such as sexual harassment in public spaces, not present in the society before (Ali 2012). The current situation of women's physical mobility in Bangladesh is that while they are in public

spaces such as the streets and while they travel by buses, they face different types of harassments and insecurity (ActionAid 2014).

According to ActionAid (2014), harassment on the streets and in other public spaces means that many Bangladeshi women living in cities feel continuously unsafe and anxious for their own safety. According to the recent survey of Thomson Reuters Foundation (2017), Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh, was found to be 7th worst city for women to live in the world. The city was ranked as 4th worst for women facing the risk of sexual violence and harassment and 3rd most dangerous for women facing harmful cultural practices such as forced marriages.

Women report that they experience sexual harassment and assault when they are on their journey to and from public transport and on-board (ActionAid 2014; Islam & Amin 2016; Rahman 2010). 57 per cent of women respondents reported that they suffered physical contact such as sexual advances and a deliberate push, and 84 per cent said they experienced derogatory comments and sexually colored abusive language (ActionAid 2014). 53 per cent of these crimes were done by public transport operators and 43 per cent by male passengers. A recent study conducted by Building Resources Across Communities (BRAC) (2018) revealed that the problem might be much more prevalent as according to them even up to 94 per cent of women commuting in public transport in Bangladesh have experienced sexual harassment in verbal, physical and other forms. They found that 66 per cent of such incidents were done by males belonging to age group of 41-60 years.

The safety of female pedestrians is also a serious issue. Many women use walking as their main transportation mode and it would appear to be a good solution to local transport issues. However, safety and security issues and attitudes towards women impede this (UK Economic and Social Research Council 2017).

The baseline survey of ActionAid (2014) conducted in seven cities of Bangladesh found that while walking on the streets, the harassment most frequently reported by women is derogatory comments reported by 86 per cent. In addition, 24 per cent of women reported that they were victims of some form of physical violence such as sexual advances or deliberate push.

There are few seats reserved for women in buses but often those are occupied by men demanding equal rights (Rahman 2010; Islam & Amin 2016). These seats often create misunderstanding between passengers and lead to argumentative situations. In addition, the public transport operators do not try to help women and they often announce that there are no seats for women available to avoid women passengers. In some cases the bus conductors are reluctant to give changes to the women while purchasing tickets (Rahman 2010).

A Bangladeshi NGO, Work for a Better Bangladesh Trust (WBB Trust) (2016), found that around 13 per cent of women avoid using public transport due to sexual harassment.

Although almost every woman becomes victim of sexual harassment in her lifetime, the adolescent girls are among the most affected. As many as 90 per cent of Bangladeshi girls aged 10-18 years are thought to have experienced street harassment (Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWLA) 2008).

### ***Importance and relevance of the topic***

Despite the evidence showing that conception, experience, and use of public space is different for men and women, one of the elements often ignored in urban planning and design is the gender dimension (Beebejaun 2017; UN-Habitat 2013; van den Berg 2017). The needs of women related to their mobility are significantly different from those of men as both use different modes of transport for different purposes and in different ways, depending on their social, reproductive, productive and community-related gender roles (ActionAid 2016; FIA Foundation 2016). The literature also shows that women are usually more concerned about personal safety, security and quality of service and their interpretation of these is different from that of men (FIA Foundation 2016).

According to Rahman (2010) research on gender aspects of urban transport in developing countries is both less extensive and less conclusive than in developed countries. The data on causes and consequences of street harassment is limited (Islam 2012; Sullivan 2011; Osmond & Woodcock 2015). In addition, although violence in the private domain is now widely recognized as a human rights violation, violence against women and girls, especially sexual harassment in public spaces, remains a largely neglected issue, with few laws or policies in place to prevent and

address it (UN Women, nd). In addition, most of the literature does not include a gender perspective when it comes to the issue of safety in the public spaces (FIA Foundation 2016). There are several recent empirical studies and surveys done about the street harassment in Bangladesh. This material is important for the analysis as it allows grasping the scale of the problem. However, although street harassment is a pervasive phenomenon, there are very few studies on street harassment that try to identify the root causes of the problem. Most of the existing studies contain surveys on the scale of violence. There are several studies on gender inequality and domestic violence, partner violence or violence at the work place but the issue of street harassment remains neglected. Thus, this research aims at contributing to the understanding of the topic by connecting the issue of street harassment to the concept of patriarchal gender norms and arguing that this social structure is one of the root causes of street harassment and, at the same time, it acts as an obstacle in the eradication of this problem.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 11 places responsibility on UN member states to “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” (UN 2015, p. 14). The point 11.2 emphasizes the need of providing access to safe, affordable, and sustainable transport systems for all with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons.

The problem of street harassment requires attention because according to UK Economic and Social Research Council (2017) the inability of the existing transport system to address the specific needs of women places additional constraints on their mobility. It hinders women’s and girls’ freedom of movement and their ability to participate in school, work and public life (Islam et al. 2016; ActionAid 2014; UN Women, nd; Weisfeld-Adams 2008). It limits their access to essential services and their enjoyment of cultural and recreational opportunities. It also negatively impacts their health and well-being. The crime of street harassment is often invisible and dismissed, especially by those who do not feel its effects and thus may be blind to its prevalence, severity, and damaging effects (Stop Street Harassment 2013). For instance, many men who engage in street harassment see the behavior as harmless (ibid.).

In addition, in the case of Bangladesh, the problem of violence and unequal power relations between men and women is addressed by numerous policies, laws and programmes. The 1972

Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh formally guarantees equal rights to women to participate in all aspects of public life (Zaman 2012). Bangladesh is a signatory to many international conventions and agreements for women's rights, equality and development. To mention some of them, the country ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1984, endorsed the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) in 1995 and Bangladesh committed itself to the goals and targets of the SDGs (Begum 2014; Ministry of Women and Children Affairs Bangladesh 2009; ActionAid 2016). Some of the most important laws, policies and programmes in place to address violence against women are the following: the Penal Code of 1860, The Suppression of Repression against Women and Children Act, 2000 (amended in 2003) and the Acid Crime Control Act 2002 (Manjoo 2014). Despite their existence, the issue of street harassment is widespread and gender inequality affects different spheres of life in Bangladesh, such as politics.

All the above mentioned aspects led me to the conclusion that studying the problem of street harassment is of a great importance for women as well as for men and the overall development of the whole society, in this particular case, of Bangladesh. Thus, the thesis will be guided by following two questions:

*How do patriarchal gender norms affect experiences of physical mobility of women in Bangladesh?*

*How does patriarchal structure of politics hinder the possibility of elimination of street harassment in Bangladesh?*

## **2. PATRIARCHAL GENDER NORMS AND STREET HARASSEMET – CONTEXT AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

### *Sexual harassment in the context of South Asia*

In the context of South Asia, mainly in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, street harassment is commonly referred to as ‘eve teasing’, and as already mentioned in the ‘Introduction’ section (p. 5-6 of the thesis) it defines sexual abuse, harassment or assault of female by male in public spaces (Islam & Amin 2016; Talboys et al. 2017). ‘Eve teasing’ is an Indian-English term that came first in discussion of public and media around 1960 (Islam 2015; Misri 2017).

The term was first used in India to refer to the behavior of male university students towards their female counterparts (Misri 2017). Mirsi (2017) observed that post-independence decade saw the growing presence of middle-class women in higher education and consequently in public space. Thus, this new phenomenon may have led to a particular variant of harassment targeted at these newly-mobile young women, as a way of reinforcing public space as men’s space. However, as further argued by Mirsi (2017), it is unlikely that the practices of harassment encompassed by the term were entirely new and thus started appearing only in the post-independence period. The more likely scenario is that perhaps the issue received particular attention because middle-class, upper-caste women were now the targets, often of men from a lower socio-economic class and rural areas (Misri 2017).

It is argued by, for example, Bishwajit et al. (2016) and Solotaroff & Pande (2014) that all kinds of violence against women and girls in South Asia are related to historical, social, cultural and political context. It is considered that the structures and functioning of government, social institutions, and the law may contribute to the persistence of the problem.

The same socio-political-historical-cultural factors lead to low status in the social and familial hierarchy of girls and women in South Asia (Solotaroff & Pande 2014; Oxfam 2004). Due to their low status, lack of power, and a host of other social and economic challenges, many girls and women in South Asia are exposed to some forms of violence throughout their lives. Different types of violence can occur across the physical spaces such as home, public settings, and in institutional settings, for example, schools and workplaces. Violence can take many forms

in and across these spaces and can be committed by any type of intimate or non-intimate perpetrator.

Violence against women and girls in South Asia is pervasive throughout their lifetime. Different acts of violence are persistent part of women's lives from childhood through adolescence, adulthood, and eventually to old age (Solotaroff & Pande 2014). Although domestic violence is perhaps the best known and most widely researched, it is not the only kind of violence experienced by women on a daily basis. Rather, women and girls in South Asia face many forms of violence such as intimate partner violence, child abuse, sexual harassment, child marriage, and dowry-related violence and all these are perpetrated by a range of men, other women, family, community, and the state. Thus women are constantly vulnerable, not just to the threat of violence by individual intimate partners or family members, but also by strangers such as in the case of sexual harassment or trafficking.

All countries in South Asia have specific constitutional provisions addressing gender equality and they have signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, although as admitted by Solotaroff & Pande (2014), some with reservations. All of these countries also have some legal protection against different forms of gender-based violence. However, legal systems struggle with significant barriers to reform and structural deficiencies that inhibit women's access to justice. In the countries of South Asia the law implementation is poor, and legal awareness is limited.

Despite the pervasiveness of violence that women and girls face in public spaces, research on this topic continues to be limited in case of, for instance, India (Bhattacharyya 2016; Satija & Datta 2015) and Bangladesh (Islam 2012; Sullivan 2011).

Most widespread quantitative and qualitative analysis is in the realms of intimate partner violence, sexual violence in the work place, child marriage, and female child mortality. Solotaroff & Pande (2014) argue that reliable quantitative statistics and qualitative analysis that would enable programmers and policy makers to track progress in addressing violence are lacking for other forms of violence. Nevertheless, in spite of large gaps in available research, the existing data presents a severity of the issue of violence in general and sexual violence in public

spaces in particular, that South Asian women and girls face, hampering their full potential as equal citizens.

### ***Patriarchal gender norms in Bangladesh***

Patriarchy refers to male domination and to the power relationships where men dominate women, and where women are kept subordinate in a number of ways (Venny & Rahayu 2014; Yusuf & Yusufu 2014; Sultana 2011). As further explained by Sultana (2011), it implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and that women are deprived of access to such power.

As argued by several authors, the social system in Bangladesh is largely based on patriarchy (Chowdhury 2009; Kabir & Chowdhury 2014; Islam 2014; Adams 2015). Because of the tradition and cultural norms, women have a much lower status compared to men. Due to these patriarchal traditions present in most of the parts of Bangladesh, gender discrimination prevails in the country and affects all spheres of life (Ferdaush & Rahman 2011).

The domination of men is present in, inter alia, politics of Bangladesh that are largely male dominated and women have a limited access to decision-making process (Kabir & Chowdhury 2014). Structural oppressions such as child marriage, polygamy and dowry are present in the country (Islam 2014). Violence against women remains a pervasive social phenomenon (Adams 2015).

Another dimension of seclusion and subordination of women is described as ‘purdah’ system (Islam 2014, p. 239). It restricts women from presence in public spaces (Asadullah & Wahhaj 2016) and it limits their interaction with non-kin men (Adams 2015). Some argue that purdah is a mean to limit women’s social agency (Amin 1997; Adams 2015).

Chowdhury (2009) addresses the questions of patriarchy in private and public arena of Bangladesh and explains how it affects women’s lives. According to the author (Chowdhury 2009), women in the family are considered as passive dependants and property of their husbands and they are excluded from economic and political power. Chowdhury (2009) argues that men, by beating women, express their superiority and rape is for them a way to control women. The author also touches upon the problem of fear of sexual harassment by arguing that in the public

arena women are only considered as sexual objects and that this prevents them from participation in paid labor force, politics and education. The author (Chowdhury 2009) claims that women are oppressed by men through misinterpretation of Islam and improper religious education. Adams (2015) on the other hand argues that Bangladesh's family codes that deny women equal rights in divorce, inheritance, and other legal matters are based in religious scripture.

### ***Barriers to elimination of street harassment in Bangladesh***

A review of the existing literature shows that the main factors that hinder the possibility of elimination of street harassment in Bangladesh are related to the lack of the gender-responsive design of the cities, unreliable and incompetent justice system, poor law enforcement, the absence of women in planning and decision-making process and conservative culture and social exclusion.

#### *Designing cities without women*

The lack of accessible, good quality and gender-responsive public services such as street lighting, sheltered waiting areas, sanitation, public transport, and violence response services are considered to contribute significantly to increased incidents of violence against women in public spaces (UK Economic and Social Research Council 2017; ActionAid 2017).

According to the study conducted by Islam et al. (2016), the conditions that frequently lead to acts of sexual harassment during traveling are overcrowded buses. Thus, in order to prevent violence in the buses their number should be increased to meet the demand, especially during the peak hours when many people travel at the same time. Islam et al. (2016) argues that pick and drop service system could be a good option to avoid harassment. In addition, there should be strict rules for the conductor's behavior towards women while collecting ticket fees. As they are the primary authority in the bus, conductors should maintain a firm standpoint in any argumentative situation regarding reserved seats for the female passengers. Another solution is that a female conductor can be assigned to limit or stop harassment by male conductors.

Women are not part of decision-making structures in cities (Kabir & Chowdhury 2014; ActionAid 2017), and this possibly explains why cities are not designed with women needs in mind. The public-private divide assigns women to domestic sphere while men's roles are in the

public sphere. However, in reality women play a dual role, but their work is often poorly paid or/and related to informal sector, so their public presence might not be considered as important. The lack of gender-responsive public services also impacts the degree to which women have time to get involved in public planning and enjoy leisure activities (ActionAid 2017). Thus, women's engagement is essential in consultations, project planning, and the decision-making process so that they can convey their particular needs (Islam et al. 2016). According to ActionAid (2016), it is also very important to conduct gender training for transport sector policy decision-makers and implementers in order to improve their gender awareness.

#### *Unreliable and incompetent justice system and poor law enforcement*

Bangladesh has some of the necessary laws on violence towards women already in place as mentioned in the 'Introduction' section of the thesis (p. 10-11). However, there are challenges in the enforcement of the existing laws (Faruq 2011; Manjoo 2014; Human Rights Committee 2017). There are also gaps in laws regarding the elimination of the specific challenges that women and girls encounter while commuting by public transport, in particular violence, gender discrimination and marginalization. Although Bangladesh is signatory to international and regional commitments on gender equality and women's empowerment, there is limited state involvement in promoting gender equality.

Therefore, ActionAid (2016) calls for the review of the existing laws and policies in order to develop accountability frameworks that conform to the respective international and regional instruments on gender equality. The deliberate efforts should be made to promote women's access to formal justice, equal opportunities to participation and representation in governing bodies and management of public transport. Moreover, delivering gender responsive urban public transport requires a multi-sectoral approach involving transport sector, legal and security sectors, urban planning, women's organizations and the private sector, as well as user feedback. According to ActionAid (2016) this is not the case in Bangladesh.

UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (2016, p. 5) turned its attention towards the fact that in Bangladesh "existing rules, policies and plans addressing gender-based violence against women are rarely implemented due to stereotypes and gender bias, and lack of gender sensitivity on the part of law enforcement officials, and lack of capacity

among judges and lawyers”. Therefore, more attention should be put towards gender-equal and gender-friendly planning and the issue of proper implementation.

Manderson and Bennett (2003, p. 9) state that in South Asia, “shame is equated with both female sexuality and social deviance”. Thus, the fear of bringing shame on the family discourages women from sharing and reporting their experiences of violence (Gill 2004). This attitude leads women to the acceptance of victimization, discrimination and unequal treatment. Islam et al. (2016) commented that women in Bangladesh are bounded by religion and social seclusion and this discourages them from protesting while being harassed and after being offended. Due to gaps and lacks in existing policies and judgment system that are there to prevent harassment and give punishment to the culprit, women have to face financial and social obstacles in seeking justice as the legal process is lengthy, costly and complicated (Citizens’ Initiatives on CEDAW Bangladesh 2016; Islam et al. 2016).

As found by UN Women (2017), less than 40 per cent of women worldwide who experience violence in the private or public sphere seek help. The survey of ActionAid from 2015 from Bangladesh demonstrates that women respondents do not trust police, with 95 per cent reporting that various problems would arise from seeking police help. Reasons were related to, among others, the police blaming women rather than taking action against the perpetrator (65 per cent) or police taking the complaint but not trying to solve the issue (57 per cent).

There is a need, therefore, to invest in physical as well as social infrastructure in order to recognize and apply in practice women’s interests and their needs and thus remove the obstacles that are preventing the elimination of street harassment in Bangladesh.

### **3. AIMS OF THE STUDY**

This study aims at gaining the deeper understanding of the problem of street harassment against women while they travel by buses and on foot. The empirical findings about the transportation practices of women and street harassment from secondary sources are connected with the theoretical exploration of the linkages between street harassment and patriarchal gender norms in Bangladesh.

Second aim of the thesis is to analyze the main obstacles on the path to elimination of street harassment in Bangladesh. The political participation of women in the decision-making in Bangladesh is looked upon. The analysis of the second part focuses on how political participation of women is affected by patriarchal structure of the society and how it potentially impacts the persistence of the sexual harassment on the streets.

#### **4. DELIMITATIONS**

It is important to mention that there are many different reasons behind street harassment. In this thesis, however, focus is on explaining one of the socio-cultural reasons and the study is not intended to explore the detailed reasons behind sexual harassment but it aims at providing a general understanding of some of the motivations of sexual harassers. Patriarchal gender norms are only a part of explanation of causes of street violence in Bangladesh. As explained by Dahlberg & Krug (2006), no single factor explains why some individuals use violence against others or why it is more prevalent in some societies and not in others. Violence results from complex interplay of individual, relationship, social, cultural and environmental factors. The theory concerning street harassment is not well developed yet and not much material is available on the specific causes of it, especially in Bangladesh. Thus, this study explores the existing concepts and theories on sexual harassment that are partially explanatory of this type of violence in Bangladesh. It can be perhaps said that since the issue of sexual harassment on the streets is a very complex issue, no one theory will be sufficient to explain the pervasiveness of the phenomenon.

The suggestion is that, in order to understand the issue better, also in the context of the feminist approach, extensive and detailed field studies may be required to completely explain the existence and persistence of street harassment.

There are also many obstacles in the path to elimination of street harassment. They may differ along space and time. In this particular study, due to the limited space and time, the focus is directed only towards the obstacles related to governance and involvement of women in planning.

It is worth noting that this study focuses on street harassment as a form of gender-based violence against its prime victims, women, although it is acknowledged that they are not the only targets as for example gays and bisexual men also experience street harassment.

## 5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section is aimed to describe the theory and concepts used for analyzing this study. In order to understand the issue of sexual violence against women in public spaces of Bangladesh a feminist theory which considers patriarchy and gender norms as explanatory to sexual harassment will be used. The concept of patriarchy will be described with its relation to participation in order to investigate how such norms affect political participation of women and, as a consequence, the possibility to eliminate street harassment in Bangladesh.

### *Feminist theory on sexual harassment and access to public space*

Sexual harassment has been the subject of research of feminists since the 1970s (Samuels 2003; Listerborn 2015). The feminist theory is distinguished by the fact that it does not see sexual harassment as simply abnormality or as individual misconduct but as a form of women's oppression that is rooted in a deeply gendered and patriarchal society and patriarchal structures of power (Samuels 2003; Montesanti 2015; Sanday 1981). The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (UN 1993) advocates that view. UN (1993) points out that violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women. The attention of feminist's scholars is focused on male-dominated social structures and socialization practices that teach men and women gender-specific roles that eventually influence violence and abuse against women (Montesanti 2015; Lisak 1996; Henry 2017; Rozee & Koss 2011). This can be explained by the available data showing that it is men that are responsible for the vast majority of interpersonal violence. In addition as observed by Lisak (1996), research demonstrates that certain aspects of masculine gender socialization process are a part of the motivation behind violence against women. During childhood boys and girls are exposed to socialization and they learn the appropriate behaviors, roles and attributes for their sexes (Sultana 2011; Sharma 2014). The term "masculinity" refers to the roles, behaviors and attributes that are associated with male and maleness and the term "femininity" refers to a society's ideas about women and femaleness (UN Women 2016). Ideas about and practices of masculinity and femininity are fluid, they differ from one culture to another, and change from one historical moment to another. Sharma (2014) points out that the

behaviors derived from such values based on masculinity and femininity cause institutional discrimination against women in education, health and in the labor force resulting ultimately in socio-economic and political deprivation.

According to Bowman (1993) and Khan & Khandaker (2017), men are socialized to use aggression against women as an acceptable way to demonstrate power and male dominance, and females are socialized to be victims. As a consequence, the violence against women becomes a social mechanism by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared to men (UN General Assembly 1993).

It is important to notice that socialization carries the assumption that all females are vulnerable and socialized to comply and all males are violent and dominant. While this is true for many women and men, it is not true for all.

Dahlberg & Krug (2006) hold the position that violence is culturally determined. Some people harm others but, based on their cultural backgrounds and beliefs, they do not perceive their acts as violent. Following this line of thought, Lisak et al. (1996) argues that men with rigid gender norms are more likely to use violence against women.

Tuerkheimer (1997) presents the argument that objectification is fundamental to being a woman and central to harassment on the street. The author (Tuerkheimer 1997) explains that street harassment captures women's construction as objects for male pleasure. A man, by harassing women on the street and commenting on her body, defines her as an object and himself as subject with power over her. In this particular way, street harassment perpetuates women's sexual subordination. The author defines a sexual subordination of women as a way "to assert that women are oppressed based on gender and men are not" (Tuerkheimer 1997, p. 172). In their book Phadke, Khan & Ranade (2011), based on their research in Mumbai, conclude that the freedom and access to public space is about control and exclusion and it is conditioned by gender of a person. Due to traditional notions of private-public divide, street harassers create a hostile environment on the street in order to show to women that they are not welcomed.

Davis (1994) observes that street is yet another forum that perpetuates and reinforces the gender hierarchy. The author explores street harassment and argues that it can be understood as an

element of a larger system of sexual terrorism. Sexual terrorism and violence play crucial roles in the ongoing process of female subordination by making women afraid of rape and other acts of terrorism. Similarly, Faruq (2011) perceives the issue of sexual harassment in public spaces of women and girls as a gendered crime, which is associated with sexual obsession. By being about sexuality, the street harassment reminds women of their vulnerability to violent attack. The street becomes 'genderized' by distributing power in such a way that perpetuates male supremacy and power and female subordination and fear (Davis 1994, p. 162).

Christ (2016) suggests that the concept of patriarchy as a system of domination is enforced through violence and the threat of violence which are products of war. The author (Christ 2016) suggests that it is a system developed and controlled by powerful men, in which women, children, and other weaker men are dominated.

Another aspect, criticized and questioned by feminists, that affects women presence in public spaces is private-public dichotomy. According to the dichotomy of public and private spheres, productive work, including income-generating activities is regarded as primarily men's work, and reproductive work at home such as caring for families, is considered to be women's work (Sugranyes & Mathivet 2010; McDowell 1983; Massey 1994). Such gendered division of labor affects equal use of the city already designed in favor of economically driven productive work, and can be very unfriendly to reproductive work activities, usually undertaken by women (Sugranyes & Mathivet 2010, p. 60). Moreover, women have to negotiate their entry into public space (Phadke, Khan & Ranade 2011; Bari 2005). Women can access public space legitimately only when they can provide a purpose of their visit out (Phadke, Khan & Ranade 2011).

According to Phadke (2007, p. 1511) there are certain possible risks in relation to women presence in the public space such as physical assault, "the risk to "reputation" of accessing public space against a normative order that defines women's proper place as being in the private spaces of the home", and "the risk of being blamed for being in public space at all if a women is assaulted, particularly sexually assaulted". Phadke (2007) also identifies aptly one risk related to not accessing public space, namely, by not going out women accept their gendered status in the hierarchy of access to public spaces and, in doing so, they contribute to reinforcing this hierarchy.

### *The relationship between participation and patriarchal gender norms*

The concept of political participation is defined by scholars in many different ways. For the purpose of this particular study, the definition of Verba et al. (1995) is used. Verba et al. (1995, p. 38) state that political participation is an “activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action - either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies”.

According to Sultana (2011), patriarchy implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and that women are deprived of access to such power. Makama (2013) advocates this view by stating that patriarchy is a system of male domination that shapes women’s participation and role in politics. It redefines male and female as men and women and constructs the hierarchy of gender relations where men are privileged.

Yusuf & Yusufu (2014) also hold the view that patriarchy is a cause of exclusion of women from the decision-making processes. It operates at the economic and socio-cultural structure and creates disparities of social capital and political capacities between women and men (Venny & Rahayu 2014). Patriarchy has a negative impact on empowerment of women as this structure permeates all aspects of life making it an impossible task for women to increase the quality as well as the quantity of their engagement and participation in politics.

Bari (2005), Sultana (2011) and Venny & Rahayu (2014) agree that in order to keep women away from power systems, patriarchal ideology is based on the division of private and public realms for women and men respectively. Patriarchy uses the gender role ideology to place women within the private arena of home as mothers and wives and men in the public sphere. This divide, however, does not reflect the reality. The boundaries between public and private are often blurred in the daily lives of women. Thus, the concept of gender roles ideology is not static but women association with private domain results in their exclusion from politics.

## 6. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

### *Design, methods and sources*

This is a qualitative case study undertaken as a research overview employing secondary data as the empirical foundation. The case study method is appropriate as it will allow for deeper understanding of the context of Bangladesh.

This qualitative study is a form of inquiry helpful in analyzing information conveyed through language (Berkwits & Inui 1998). It is used to obtain culturally specific information about beliefs, opinions, values, feelings, motivations and social context.

In order to support the arguments of the thesis, the secondary sources will be used, such as academic articles, books, reports and research studies. In order to achieve a more critical analysis with different perspectives, the study will be based on empirical and theoretical materials.

When writing about sources used in this study, it is important to mention and explain the reason why the research papers and reports of ActionAid are frequently used in the entire thesis, including analysis. The non-governmental organization ActionAid came to Bangladesh in 1983 (ActionAid nd.). ActionAid and its partners have been working to safeguard women's right to the city for many years, primarily through the Safe Cities Programme to address violence against women in urban public spaces. They have drawn attention to the specific issue of women's lack of safety and the suppression of their mobility and expression in cities and urban spaces. Their goal is empowering, building capacity and also campaigning and mobilization of public pressure in order to lead to political change at the national and international level. Thus, since ActionAid has experience in the field of women's safety in Bangladesh and can provide reliable data for the study, especially when it comes to empirical material, it is considered that their research is a very useful source and therefore used frequently in this thesis. While there is also a number of other organizations in Bangladesh working with women's issues in general and with street harassment in particular, such as Steps Towards Development, Naripokkho or Bangladesh National Woman Lawyer's Association, during the research it was possible to find some sources only from the last among the above mentioned organization.

There are various limitations related to secondary data that one should be aware of. These include, for instance, lack of familiarity of the researcher with the data, the amount of data and ability to select the most appropriate materials or lack of control over the quality of data (Bryman 2012). The secondary data has some other limitations such as the one explained by Flowerdew and Martin (2005), namely inflexibility. It is not possible to fully control the material and in some cases find all needed information. In addition, due to the long distance to the subjects of the study it will not be possible to use surveys or interviews to triangulate. In order to overcome this problem, many different sources will be used concerning the same subject to verify data. This will hopefully increase the reliability and validity of the study (Creswell 2013).

It is also important to be aware that one's own perceptions and opinions might also have impact on the study. In addition, because of the limitations related to the Bengali language of Bangladesh that is unknown to the researcher, it might be unavoidable to use the reviewed literature or the one that is translated to English. It is understood, however, that there may be flaws and biases in translations which may affect reliability. Thus, the solution to that will be to use many different sources to cross-check the data.

### ***Justification for conducting a desk study***

It is important to be aware of the fact that the questions asked in this research could also have been a good material for the field study. However, the reason why this topic was chosen for a desk study is that there is a sufficient number of studies already done, especially those related to the scale of street harassment in Bangladesh, and hence some of the issues considered in the thesis can be covered with the help of the existing data. Most of these studies are quite recent and conducted by well-known institutions and academia and thus valid for using as secondary data. It is well known that the issue of street harassment is quite widespread in Bangladesh. The main focus of this research is not to find out precise numbers as slight differences in percentages would not have made any difference in this particular analysis. The main goal is to analyze the existing problem through the lenses of the concept of patriarchal gender norms. By studying this problem, the attention will be put towards it, and perhaps it will make the issue more visible and important. Obviously, in order to understand different motivations behind sexual harassment in

public spaces it is necessary to conduct extensive field studies with the victims and with the perpetrators as participants as that will provide much more detailed picture.

The time frame of the thesis also plays here an important role. Gathering the data of a good quality could be difficult due to the lack of resources. Studying the issue from secondary sources will thus allow the author to spend more time on the analyses and the interpretation of data (Bryman 2012).

## 7. ANALYSIS

This section draws on the research overview and it is meant to discuss and analyze the arguments of the thesis. The section contains two parts. The first part will be about how patriarchal gender norms deeply embedded in the Bangladeshi society affect the way men perceive women and, in turn, how women are treated by men on the streets. In the second part of this section it will be attempted to explain how the lack of involvement of women in planning and decision-making, affected by patriarchal structure of the society, potentially affects the possibility of elimination of sexual harassment on the streets of Bangladesh.

### *The socio-cultural factors affecting experiences of physical mobility of women*

There are several studies (Islam 2012; Faruq 2011; Nahar 2013; Islam 2015; Doneys et al. 2013) that directly or indirectly hold the position that it is the socialization process and upbringing that has strong impact on how boys and men perceive and in turn treat girls and women in Bangladesh.

Islam (2012) holds the position that the problem of harassment starts with the issue of how boys are taught to develop an attitude towards girls and understanding of them. Her study conducted in Sylhet city of Bangladesh reveals that boy-respondents consider girl as an object with weakness and vulnerability. During the socialization process boys learn that they need to be so called 'macho' proud of their masculinity and girls are portrayed as a conquest to prove their manhood. As a result boys think that girls are weaker compared to them, and thus anything can be done against them. The fact that girls are portrayed as weak and vulnerable also indicates that even when harmed they will not be able to protect themselves and therefore can be considered as easy target.

Faruq (2011) also observes that in Bangladeshi society men are generally portrayed as strong and hence powerful, while the reverse, the weak and powerless image is preserved for the women. Due to power imbalance, the social structure and its relations are determined by male domination (Shohel et al. 2014). This unequal power relation between men and women leads to discrimination and subordination of women by men. As argued by some authors (Faruq 2011; Nahar 2013), sexual harassment is a mean of reinforcing that subordination. As a consequence,

the street becomes 'genderized' and power is distributed in such a way that perpetuates male supremacy and power and female subordination and fear (Davis 1994, p. 162).

In a male dominant society, gender segregation from the childhood and the domination of the male members in a family over the female members is responsible for negative view about women (Faruq 2011; Nahar 2013; Islam 2015). In their study, Doneys et al. (2013) found that this segregation contributes not only to a physical distance between women and men but it also removes opportunities to humanize relations between women and men, fostering a view of a women as exotic, and for some, as unequal beings. Not allowing boys to get a better understanding of girls develops in many adolescent boys a feeling of incomprehension and resentment towards girls eventually leading to harassment.

Doneys et al. (2013) examined the practices and lives of two groups of men in Bangladesh: 'gender equitable' men who see women and men as equal, and men who are identified as perpetrators of violence against women. They found that the respondents who had mothers working or making important decisions for the family and fathers who were more accepting or supportive of their wives practicing less traditional gender roles gave them an early view of gender power relations that was more equal and thus they became 'gender equitable'. On the other hand, when it comes to perpetrators, most of them believed in a strict gender hierarchy. They saw this order, with man as decision-makers, as both natural and traditional, and that the breakdown of this order was what led to problems, including gender-based violence. They considered public presence of women as inappropriate and in case of breaking that rule women can be punished, in this particular case by being sexually harassed.

The type of traditional thinking mentioned above relates to the concept of hegemonic masculinity. In such case, when men are strongly convinced about the righteousness and importance of hegemonic masculinity, they try to resist women's empowerment by discouraging them from any type of public presence and hence keeping their lower position in the power hierarchy. According to this idea, women should be confined to the house in order for male supremacy and power to sustain. If such order is broken and women deny accepting the conventional gender norms, they are the ones to be blamed and hence punished by, for instance,

being sexually harassed. As a result, free movement of women is controlled and their mobility constrained.

Thus, as argued by Shohel et al. (2014), the social structure based on patriarchy gives more autonomy and freedom to men, and confines women into some particular boundaries, physical and/or mental.

Nahar et al. (2013), Weisfeld-Adams (2008) and Shohel et al. (2014) argue that gender inequality and patriarchy, leading to sexual harassment, are deeply embedded in Bangladeshi social structure. The authors consider street harassment of Bangladeshi girls as a gendered response which objectifies girls. Tuerkheimer (1997) explains that objectification is fundamental to being a woman and central to harassment on the street. A man, by harassing women on the street and commenting on her body, defines her as an object and himself as subject with power over her. The author explains that street harassment captures women's construction as objects for male pleasure. The research of Nahar et al. (2013) conducted in Jessore, a city in the northwest of Bangladesh, confirms this view. According to the study, when boys were asked why they harassed girls, some said they enjoyed it and got pleasure from it and some said it was to show their masculinity in front of their peers.

The issue of street harassment is embedded in the culture of Bangladesh and as a consequence the root causes of the problem are usually ignored and even normalized restricting women's mobility and security. Islam (2012) explains that almost all of the respondents of her study viewed that the issue of sexual harassment is ignored within social system seeing it as part of typical behavior of a male. Thus, it can be argued that the problem goes back to the issue of socialization process and portraying men as strong and women as weak. In this case it is considered that men has right to harm women just because she is a women.

The common understanding of the issue is that women who suffer problems on the street are directly responsible for it (ActionAid 2014). It is up to them to efficiently and effectively manage their mobility by adjusting to purdah and being dressed in the appropriate way. Nahar et al. (2013) supports this view and argues that in Bangladesh, patriarchy, gender norms and the custom of purdah result in girls being discriminated even from birth, and these are predisposing factors for their experience of sexual harassment.

## *Patriarchal norms as an obstacle on the path to elimination of street harassment*

### *Women's active participation in politics – why it holds potential for change*

Women and men experience and use the urban environment in different ways, and have different priorities in terms of services and infrastructure. It is understood and accepted that improving women's safety and thus reducing the level of sexual violence and harassment they face is dependent on gender-sensitive urban planning (UN Habitat 2012; ActionAid 2014; Jagori 2011). Sexual harassment and intimidation that women face on the streets and in public transport is a form of denial of women's right to live safely in cities and it is underpinned and facilitated by various forms of discrimination and isolation such as exclusion from political participation and decision-making (ActionAid 2014). Moreover, researchers have consistently identified the fact that the planning, provision and operation of public transport and infrastructure is primarily undertaken by men and it demonstrates women's exclusion from politics (Beebejaun 2017; Fainstein & Servon 2005; McDowell 1983; Peters 2013; ActionAid 2014). Hence, it is agreed that cities are not designed with women's needs in mind, leaving women and girls impacted by poorly planned urban spaces, infrastructure and services and, as a consequence, thriving environment for the harassers.

One can however ask whether women's involvement in politics makes any difference to the outcome of planning and decision-making. Nearly a century and a half ago John Stuart Mill argued for intellectual and social diversity in government, including giving the franchise to women (Reynolds 1999). He argued that exclusion of opinions hinders the striving for truth since if the excluded opinions were correct, then the opportunity would be lost to realize this, and if they were wrong, then the ability to justify already held theories would not be possible. In fact both conflicting views generally hold grains of truth and thus they should be combined. Therefore, women should have the same voice as man in order to seek for the solutions that will satisfy both groups.

Another obvious reason why women should have voice is that they constitute half of the total population. The act of denying voice to half of the population means undermining the idea of democracy.

A parliament without or with very few women may fail to recognize and understand issues that are of great importance to women and, as a consequence, be questioned in terms of accountability, responsiveness, and alienation. “Absence is not merely a sign of disadvantage and disenfranchisement, but the exclusion of women from positions of power also compounds gender stereotypes and retards the pace of equalization” (Reynolds 1999, p. 549). When women are excluded, the already existing stereotypes are strengthened and promoted and the problems faced by them are ignored.

Women have their own unique perspective and different interests. They have different values and ideas and behave differently. Thus, for example, as in case of street harassment, women routinely experience sexual assault or risk of it in such ways that have no similar consequences for men. Thus, they should be able to act not only while they are harassed or after it but also they need to be involved in the prevention of such incidents.

These are just some of the reasons why women’s voice should count and why it has potential to help in eradication of street harassment.

*“Women in politics remain a matter of tolerance, not acceptance” and its impact on prevalence of street harassment*

As already mentioned, Bangladesh has numerous laws, policies, international conventions and programmes and Constitution that guarantee equal rights to women to participate in all aspects of public life and address the different needs of women in general, and violence against women specifically (Manjoo 2014; Zaman 2012). However, as argued by Odhikar (2012), some of these laws and policies were enacted without popular opinion, and with little proper consultation from women's rights groups. The existing laws also have some gaps and therefore their interpretation and application often allows the street harassers to use the loopholes to escape appropriate punishment for the crime (Islam & Amin 2016; Faruq 2011; Manjoo 2014). Not only are there some serious flaws in the present laws protecting women, but also there is a lack of proper implementation which causes continuation of violence against women. The victims rarely get any assistance and thus they are reluctant to report the crime and to seek help from the justice system. As a consequence, the problem of street harassment remains invisible and thus ignored.

In addition, as argued by ActionAid (2016), when it comes to delivering the rights of women and girls in the area of public transport, there is a clear absence of any legal or policy framework at the national and local levels which could ensure women's safety and equal access. ActionAid (2016) asserts that since there are very few women within decision-making bodies for public transport planning and provision, women's perspectives are not heard and their safety is often overlooked.

The socio-cultural, structural and attitudinal problems in Bangladesh are considered to be the major obstacles to the greater participation of women in the political processes (Panday 2008; Sharma 2014; ActionAid 2017; Zaman 2012). Their seclusion within the home, subordination rooted in patriarchal culture and social attitude prevent them from entering the political arena. Panday (2013) points out that most of the social institutions in Bangladesh permit and even encourage the demonstration of unequal power relations between the sexes. Due to such restrictions, taking part in the public arena is more of a dream for the women members than a reality. As according to Rahman (2014), patriarchal norms are strongly rooted in the politics of Bangladesh and women's participation in politics is extremely limited. In Bangladesh "political positions of women is an advantage rather than a right" (Rahman 2014, p. 27). In practice it means that even if women are present to some extent in the political life, it does not demonstrate equality in participation. It perhaps means that, by gaining political positions, women get privilege from men and thus they should be grateful.

One of the factors that limit the participation of women in the political arena of Bangladesh is stereotypical gendered assumption regarding the division between private and public worlds (Panday 2008; ActionAid 2017; Zaman 2012; Sharma 2014). As a consequence, when women attempt to negotiate in the public domain, they are often criticized and patronized by men. As a matter of fact, public-private division in Bangladesh starts in the private domain where women seldom have the upper hand due to their lack of access to and control over resources outside the home, low self-esteem, low skills and education, restricted physical mobility, and, eventually, by having less power in society as compared to men. From early age boys and girls are socialized based on the cultural values and norms prevailing in the society. Zaman (2012) noted that already from childhood occupations assigned to girls are nurse, receptionist, school teacher or personal secretary, while the field of politics is highly considered as male-dominated. Such

imbalanced gender division from such early age at the household level mirrors the situations outside the home and reaches to the state level (Panday 2008). Thus, even if women want to become active in politics, the stereotypical thinking that they were exposed to affects their way of thinking and acting. Consequently, women believe that they are not capable of taking part in political life. Men, similarly, are convinced that politics is not a place for women and women are not competent enough to take part in it.

In Bangladesh the family constitutes the basic unit of social organization and control, and it sets the norms for male and female roles (Panday 2008; Sharma 2014). Within this system the head of the household is father or in his absence the next male kin. In result, both decision-making powers and economic control are vested in the hands of men (Panday 2008). Women are in the position of dependency and their lack of power begins at the family level and continues through community to state level.

As recently argued by some authors (Sharma 2014; Zaman 2012), the kinship culture strongly affects politics. It is worth to admit that Bangladesh is a unique example of women leadership in politics. However, as argued by, for instance, Sharma (2014) and Zaman (2012), political presence of women in Bangladesh in the form of Sheikh Hasina (inter alia the leader of Bangladesh Awami League in the past and Prime Minister in the past and in present) and Khaleda Zia (the leader of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and former Prime Minister) represents a paradox in a patriarchal culture that is best explained by their kinship linkages to male authority. Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia have inherited their positions. Zaman (2012, p. 82) points out that “such individuals were groomed in a political family atmosphere, are politically socialized and thus structurally privileged to claim and hold positions of leadership”. Thus, it is undeniable that they had considerable achievements in politics of Bangladesh. However, it can be argued that their gender did not matter as much as in case of women who have no family-political connections.

As noted by Panday (2008), Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia have performed their duties and responsibilities with great success. Nevertheless, their political advancement did not ensure any particular privileges for other women in political sphere as the field is monopolized by men (Chowdhury 2009; The Asia Foundation 2012; Panday 2008). Women, having no kinship

relations in political arena, might be able to reach higher positions only through decades of extensive political involvement and sacrifice, if at all (Sharma 2014). Thereby, it can be concluded that significant positions of some women did not bring significant changes for others.

As a mean to achieve gender equality, Bangladesh has quotas for women in public service and reserved seats for women in the Parliament (Alston 2014; Panday 2013; Manjoo 2014). The Fifteenth Amendment Act of 2011 increased the number of seats reserved for women in Parliament from 45 to 50. Women have been appointed, for example, as a Minister to strategic ministries, such as Foreign Affairs, Home Affairs (2009-2012) and Agriculture, and hold important positions such as Speaker of National Parliament and Deputy Leader of the House (Alston 2014). Many women in Bangladesh play leading roles in fields like education, development-related fields, grassroots movements and NGOs. However, as suggested by Zaman (2012), the higher position in political hierarchical structures in Bangladesh, the more limited female involvement and more difficulties faced by women. Despite the fact that women's participation is slowly increasing, they are still treated as subordinate to men in many respects (Zaman 2012).

Manjoo (2014) observed that once in office, female representatives often face discrimination from their male counterparts. Additionally, various cultural factors do not support women's involvement in politics. Different obstacles rooted in patriarchal and social attitudes discourage women from being enthusiastic about political participation because male candidates are considered as a norm and female candidates are portrayed and treated as 'others' (Alston 2014, p. 250). For instance, as according to the research of Shamim & Nasreen (2002) women were not assigned any specific responsibilities at the local level, their voices were not heard, male colleagues used to behave negatively towards them, and they faced other problems when they did not have any family members in politics. "Women in politics remain a matter of tolerance, not acceptance" (Zaman 2012, p. 88). Thus, while women might have some access to political participation, that particular presence is just accepted but it is not followed by their ability to influence planning and to be truly present in the decision-making processes.

The patriarchal society does not provide opportunity for women to develop their authority and agency. As a result, women play only a symbolic role in the decision-making process (Panday 2008) and thus are unable to affect the status of their safety in public spaces.

As a matter of fact the reservation of seats for women has increased the number of women in politics. However, the greater participation of women has not ensured their full representation in decision-making process yet. Panday (2013) believes that there are reasons to be optimistic about this, as the imposition of quotas is helpful in gradual changing of the popular political culture and women's participation in politics. The path towards women's active participation in the political arena has just opened, and elected women members need to struggle in order to become present not only physically but also contribute visibly to the decision-making and, in turn, be able to change their negative experiences that impede their physical mobility.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the impact of patriarchal gender norms on the acts of sexual harassment taking place on the streets of Bangladesh. The study focused on two aspects of this issue.

The first aspect was related to analyzing how the physical mobility of women is constrained by certain ways of thinking and, as a result, behaving of men towards women. It was found that patriarchal structure of the society has significant impact on how men perceive women and, in turn, how they treat them, in this particular case in public spaces. One of the main factors contributing to sexual harassment of women was found to be the socialization process. In Bangladesh, internalizing boys and girls according to the norms and ideologies based on patriarchal structure and gender inequality affects the way they interact with each other. Thus, since girls are portrayed as weak and vulnerable and boys as strong, they consider girls as easy targets and harassing them as amusement. By examining the concept of private-public divide, this study found that women in Bangladesh are considered to be responsible for home related activities and their presence in public spaces is unwelcomed. Thus, their increased presence outside homes, on the streets and travelling by public transport affects the way they are treated by men who strongly believe in traditional family model. Once this order is broken, women risk being sexually harassed as a way to show them that they do not belong to public spaces. As a consequence, this power imbalance that defines the social structure and the relations of Bangladeshi society leads to discrimination and subordination of women by men. This domination and subordination affects private as well as public sphere.

The second aspect of this study aimed at examining how patriarchy affects participation of women in Bangladeshi politics and how that, in turn, potentially hinders the possibility of elimination of street harassment. It was found that presence of women in planning and decision-making has significant impact on how cities are designed and, as a consequence whether they are safe for women or not. In case of Bangladesh, despite the existence of a legal framework ensuring women's rights and their equality, their presence in political life is negligible. The country has history of famous women-leaders. However, they reached their position through kin relationship and hence did not ensure greater participation and improvement of the status of the rest of the women in Bangladeshi politics. The patriarchal structure of politics, gender-bias and

stereotypes are obstacles to political participation of women in Bangladesh and, as a consequence, they constitute barriers to elimination of sexual harassment on the streets. It was emphasized in this study that since women are absent in politics, their voices are not heard and their perspectives are not taken into account, and as a result the cities are not designed with the consideration of their needs leaving them vulnerable to sexual harassment.

Thus, it can be concluded from this study that the presence of women in planning and decision-making can have a crucial role in ensuring their safe movement in cities. Perhaps, increased involvement of women in politics is not the only way to combat the issue of street harassment. However, it is a way to put forward their needs from the top-down perspective. The cities designed by both, men and women, have potential to ensure that their particular needs are reflected in how infrastructure, facilities and transportation system is built. That, in turn, can significantly decrease the opportunities of the harassers to abuse women and lead to overall changes in their perception and hence treatment of women. Change of the way of thinking of men and treating women must take place in order to change women's status in the society and lead to improvements of their safety on the streets.

As mentioned in the study, there is a need to analyze the issue of street harassment in the field. It was found that there is insufficient research done on this issue and therefore its causes and consequences are not well understood. This lack of available data makes sexual harassment on the streets invisible and thus ignored. For women it means that they have to suffer this abuse on daily basis and thus perform their activities with fear. Therefore, there is an urgent need to understand better the motivations of the harassers in order to be able to effectively combat this issue.

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