

Women of East Pakistan: A Review in Terms of Development and Empowerment

SHANTA PATRANOBISH

Associate Professor, Department of History, University of Dhaka

Abstract: The partition of India in 1947 led to the creation of two independent states, India and Pakistan. Bengal was divided, and eastern Bengal became the eastern wing of Pakistan, known as East Pakistan. What was the overall condition of women in East Bengal within the State of Pakistan? Unfortunately, there has been no extensive research yet that presents the picture of women's progress in East Pakistan during the Pakistan era, especially in terms of indicators of women's development and empowerment. This study seeks to fill up that gap by investigating the actual status of women in East Pakistan during this period. Primarily the questions of this investigation are: what was the actual condition of women in East Pakistan based on indicators of women's development and empowerment? Were they progressing or regressing relative to the times? What role did the State play in empowering women? To explore the answer of these questions, both primary and secondary sources have been carefully examined. Census report, proceedings, annual report, newspapers, books and scholarly articles are the basis of this paper. This paper presents an analytical narrative of women's economic, political, legal, social and cultural status in East Pakistan. Following a historical research method, the paper concludes with the findings that key indicators of women's empowerment, such as access to resources, involvement in financial decisions, legal recourse, personal and workplace safety, and control over reproduction remained unachieved for the majority of women in East Pakistan.

Key Words: Women Empowerment, Development, Reproduction, Female Entrepreneur, Wage Discrimination, Self-Reliance, Legal Protection

Introduction

Until the early 20th century, most nationalist leaders envisioned women as ideal housewives confined to the sanctity of the home. Nonetheless, recognizing women's dedication and their number in the society, many nationalist leaders began encouraging them to step outside the domestic sphere and join political movements. For the first time, during

the anti-imperialist struggle, Indian women actively participated in public life.¹ As the 20th century progressed, women increasingly participated in politics, the independence movement, social reforms, advocacy for women's rights, and labour and peasant movements. By the second decade of the 20th century, Bengali women had made significant advances in political, legal, educational, and economic spheres. Through the anti-colonial struggle, the partition of India in 1947 led to the creation of two independent states, India and Pakistan. Bengal was divided, and eastern Bengal became the eastern wing of Pakistan, known as East Pakistan. What was the overall scenario of women's development in East Pakistan within the new State, that was Pakistan?

The Pakistan government took several initiatives to develop the status of women. These initiatives included increasing education opportunity for women, initiating policies and actions to remove socio-economic backwardness, creating the environment for women so that they could assume leadership roles in politics, etc. By the 1960s, positive social changes in East Pakistan also began to be felt when these initiatives were in implementation process. A literate middle class was developing and the State's attitudes toward women began to shift. Little research has been conducted to catch that picture of women's progress in East Pakistan during the Pakistan era, especially in terms of indicators of women's development and empowerment. This study seeks to fill up that gap by investigating the actual status of women in East Pakistan during this period. Primarily the questions of this investigation are: what was the actual condition of women in East Pakistan based on indicators of women's development and empowerment? Were they progressing or regressing relative to the times? What role did the State play in empowering women? To explore the answer of these questions, both primary and secondary sources have been carefully consulted. Primary sources cover census reports, reports of different govt. institutions and commissions, assembly proceedings, proceedings of conferences, policy

documents, newspapers, memoirs etc. Secondary sources include important research works. On the basis of these sources, this paper tries to measure women's and girls' empowerment based on their access to education, economic self-reliance, participation in the State's decision-making process and legal protection. These indicators have been selected because the status of women's capacity in decision-making regarding self as well as society is measured through these major indicators. Institutions like World Bank, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, J-PAL and so on follow these indicators along with others to measure women's and girls' empowerment.² Additionally, it is too large to use all the toolkits for measurement in the extent of a single article. However, this study has been conducted following both the qualitative and quantitative research methods within the theoretical framework of women's development and empowerment. The holistic approach to measurement has been followed to capture both the individual level and collective level changes in women's lives in East Pakistan during the Pakistan era (1947-1971).

Theoretical Framework

Broadly speaking, women's development is a subset of human resource development, where the focus is specifically on advancing women in comparison to men. Women's development refers to prioritizing the advancement of women in areas of disparity with men, ensuring their rightful opportunities, fair treatment, and safety.³ When addressing the question of integrating women into development, the three distinct theoretical approaches that have emerged are, Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD) and Gender and Development (GAD).

Proponents of WID advocate for integrating women into the development process by providing them with opportunities to play their own roles, thereby ensuring their rights through participation. WAD holds that women have always been a part of the development process. The idea of integrating women

separately in development process is grossly unnecessary. It focuses instead on the nature of women's relationship with the development process. The primary concern of this theory is how much women receive from the production process to which they contribute. GAD emphasizes the importance of gender relations. Theorists following this approach view women not as passive recipients of development aid but as agents of change and active contributors to development. This perspective underscores the role of the state in providing essential social services necessary for women's liberation. Overall, it is believed that women's development will be ensured by society and the state. Establishing women's rights and providing comprehensive security within societal and state systems will transform women into valuable human resources, thereby accelerating the dynamic function of the production economy. When adequately developed as human resources, women can contribute their physical and mental labour and intellect to expedite the progress of society and the state. Hence, women's development depends on their family, society, and the state system granting them desired rights and ensuring appropriate security in both personal and professional spheres.⁴ Women's development and empowerment are closely interrelated.

Empowerment is the ultimate method within the policies and approaches aimed at women's development. It is a process through which an individual gains the ability to take control of their own life. It involves having power over material, human, and intellectual resources.⁵ Empowerment allows individuals to acquire the rights to bring about positive changes in their own lives as well as in society and their surroundings. It signifies the ability to exercise control, meaning that through empowerment, a person can establish complete authority over their body, mind, and actions.⁶ When it comes to women's empowerment, several key indicators are used. These include, the ability to participate in decision-making, access to and control over resources, involvement in family financial transactions, self-awareness and

introspection, the ability to seek legal recourse, control over and changes in their surroundings, freedom in reproductive decisions and their implementation, freedom of movement and exploration.⁷ Additionally, self-confidence and the ability to achieve self-esteem are also regarded as critical indicators of empowerment. According to the United Nations, empowerment is a process through which women work collectively to understand, identify, and eliminate gender disparities, with the goal of achieving equality and equal access to resources. The UN outlines five levels of empowerment which include welfare, access to and control over resources, women's awareness, participation, and empowerment as the ultimate stage.⁸ To achieve women's empowerment, the education system must be restructured, and women must establish their positions alongside men in economic, social, and political activities. Women's true empowerment will occur when they can overcome all barriers, establish self-determination, and implement their own will.

Numerically, the proportion of women in East Pakistan was nearly equal to that of men. According to the 1951 census, 47.60% of the total population were women. By 1961, the ratio was 48.19% women to 51.81% men, with a total population of 50,840,235, of which 24,499,392 were women.⁹ During the early days of Pakistan, a large segment of Bengali women remained backward and underprivileged almost in every sphere. As East Pakistan was predominantly Muslim, and most Muslim families adhered strictly to purdah, the majority of women were confined by seclusion and veiling practices. Nonetheless, by the 1960s, positive social changes began to occur due to various initiatives taken by the state which were in implementation process. A literate middle class developed, and attitudes toward women started to shift. As a result, purdah became less prevalent, women's education expanded, and their participation in economic activities increased. A progressive and educated class of women started to enter the job market.

This research aims to explore the extent to which such positive changes influenced women's development and empowerment. To determine the progress and setbacks of Bengali women in Pakistan, the following indicators of development and empowerment have been used as benchmarks. By analyzing women's overall status in these areas, the study seeks to uncover the true nature of women's progress and regress in the Pakistan period.

Women's Education

Before 1947, most of the schools and colleges in East Pakistan had a higher proportion of non-Muslim female students as non-Muslim families had less reservation towards female education. After the creation of Pakistan, many educated Hindus who had been advancing the fields of education migrated to West Bengal. This left the educational system in East Pakistan in a dire state, with a significant decline in the number of female students in schools and colleges. Consequently, the overall education system in East Pakistan faced a severe crisis. Taking advantage of this situation, the government began shutting down women's schools and colleges one after another. For instance, plans were made to close Sylhet Women's College. At that time, one of the leaders of the women's movement in Sylhet, Zobeda Khatun Chowdhury, appealed to the then Governor, Feroz Khan Noon, requesting that the college not be closed. The governor gave her one year, stating, "If a sufficient number of students cannot be enrolled within this time, the college will be shut down."¹⁰ Zobeda Khatun Chowdhury, along with other social activists, went door-to-door enrolling students and managed to keep the college running. Due to the declining number of female students, the government also decided to merge Dhaka's Eden and Kamrunnesa Girls' Schools. In protest, on November 15, 1948, around 500 female students organized a strike and demonstration. The *Daily Azad* reported on the event stating, "The extent of the education crisis in East Pakistan became evident from the student

protests in Dhaka on November 15, 1948. Never before had such a large procession of female students been seen in Dhaka. It is clear that the students took to the streets out of absolute necessity.” The strike continued until November 30. The then provincial Prime Minister, in a statement in December remarked, “It is extremely disgraceful for young Muslim women to parade through the streets. Such actions are against Muslim traditions.” This comment sparked intense protests among the students. The strike ended on December 6, but later, female students went on strike again with new demands.¹¹

From November 27 to December 1, 1947, the government convened a conference in Karachi to deliberate on the education system for Pakistan. Key recommendations from this conference included the Islamization of education, making religious studies mandatory, enforcing Urdu as a compulsory language, integrating madrasa education with mainstream education, and expanding technical education. The new system prioritized religious sentiment over a modern, science-based approach to education.¹² In the nascent Pakistan state, adhering to Islamic Sharia while encouraging women to step outside their homes for education was contradictory and often perceived as a violation of traditional norms. However, many women showed interest in institutional education while maintaining proper veiling practices. Recalling this Hamida Khanam, a teacher at Eden College said: “The students of Eden College used to come in horse-drawn carriages enclosed by curtains. Those wearing burqas would hastily remove them at the college gate and hand them to us... Temporary maids were hired for a few months for each carriage to assist in transporting the students from their homes to the college.”¹³ Despite the persistent conservative rhetoric against women’s education in post-1947 East Pakistan, Bengali Muslim women increasingly showed enthusiasm for education. Shamsunnahar Mahmud noted: “Even before the partition, Muslim women had begun to show a new enthusiasm for education. After the partition,

this enthusiasm grew further, leading to a reduction in seclusion practices and various superstitions and customs opposing women's education."¹⁴ In the 1947-48 academic year, there were only 72 female students at Dhaka University.¹⁵ In 1948, two female doctors were appointed as professors in medical colleges, and three Muslim women were appointed as assistant surgeons.¹⁶ However, still the state of women's education was far from satisfactory. According to the 1951 census, there were 19,994,754 women in East Pakistan, of whom only 2,260,233 were educated- just 11.3% of the total female population. Analyzing district-level statistics from 1951, the highest literacy rate for women was in Chittagong (22.4%), yet this was still below 25% of the district's female population.¹⁷ While women's participation in primary education was somewhat higher, their enrollment in secondary and higher education remained very low. Furthermore, opportunities for women to pursue education in fields of their choice were limited. In many areas, women had no access to science education, thwarting aspirations to become doctors or engineers. This sentiment was poignantly expressed by Rowshan Ara Rahman in her memoir:

I wanted to pursue an MBBS and become a doctor, but that dream remained unfulfilled. I enrolled in Barisal BM College in 1947 as the only female student in the science department. However, the college's governing body, guardians of the religion and the newly established Pakistan, deemed it un-Islamic for a lone female student to attend science classes with male students, particularly in practical sessions. Despite pleading for three to four months, I was not granted permission to study science. Eventually, with great regret, I gave away my science books and switched to the arts stream.¹⁸

Rowshan enrolled in the Department of Bangla at Dhaka University later in 1953. At that time, instead of introducing accessible, scientific, and secular curriculum for women, the policies focused on shaping women into ideal homemakers and mothers. In the early days of Pakistan, little initiative was taken to establish new institutions for girls. From 1951 to

1953, only one new school for girls was established in East Pakistan, with a capacity of 500 seats. Moreover, between 1953 and 1957, no new secondary schools for girls were opened in the region.¹⁹ What was the impact of these actions and inactions of the government? The rise in educational costs forced many impoverished families to prioritize their sons' education over their daughters'. Consequently, many female students dropped out of school before completing their education. In the 1958-59 academic year, the dropout rate for girls in primary schools was 60.7%, which slightly decreased to 54.3% in 1963-64. However, an analysis of dropout rates among female students at the secondary level between 1959 and 1964 reveals that only 15% of female students who began in the fifth grade continued their studies up to the tenth grade.²⁰ According to data from 1965-66, the dropout rate for girls in secondary education (grades six to ten) was 55%, of which 73.6% were female students.²¹

The 1961 census report also paints an unsatisfactory picture of women's education. In 1961, the total number of women living in East Pakistan was 24,491,392, with 1,090,120 residing in urban areas and 23,401,272 in rural areas. Of these, only 2,109,441 women were literate, accounting for just 8.6% of the total female population. Among the literate women, 1,523,415 were Muslim. The rates of women's education in major district towns were as follows:

District	Total Female (Population aged 5 & over)	Female Literates	Percentage
Mymensingh	18,697	8,752	46.8
Barisal	23,322	9,194	39.4
Rajshahi	21,018	7,804	37.1
Comilla	20,376	7,307	35.8
Dacca	1,80,960	60,870	33.6

Source: *Pakistan Population Census 1961, Volume 1, Government of Pakistan, Karachi*, p. vi-11.

Statistics show that in 1961, Mymensingh was the most advanced district in terms of women's education. However, even in the most advanced district, more than half of the female population remained illiterate. Additionally, the capital city of East Pakistan, Dhaka, had the highest number of women residents. Yet, in terms of women's literacy rates,

Dhaka lagged behind other major district towns. The following table is a comparative representation of the number of female students enrolled in various levels of education in 1951 and 1961:

Level of Education	1951	1961
Informal Education	14,74,284	3,65,717
Below Primary School (Classes I to IV)	6,62,221	14,08,841
Primary, Middle and Secondary School (Classes V to IX)	1,12,706	3,18,658
Matriculation (SSC)	9,582	11,717
Intermediate (HSC)	-	2,974
Degree	1,270	1,176
Higher Degree	170	334
Oriental	-	24
Total	22,60,233 (11.3%)	21,09,441 (8.6%)

Source: H. H. Nomani (ed.), *Pakistan Population Census 1951, Volume 3*, Government of Pakistan, Karachi, p. 8-2; A. Rashid (ed.), *Pakistan Population Census 1961, Volume 1*, Government of Pakistan, Karachi, p. iv-24.

On the basis of the above table, it is certain that compared to 1951, the percentage of institutional education increased in 1961. The number of female students at the primary and secondary levels also rose. However, the literacy rate for women declined compared to the previous decade. In 1951, the female literacy rate was 11.3%, which dropped to 8.6% in 1961. While there was a slight increase in women's participation in higher education, it remained negligible in terms of the total population. The dropout rate at the primary level significantly reduced the number of women in tertiary education. An analysis of literacy levels among 100 literate women reveals the following progress across education stages, no grade passed (17.34%), primary level (66.79%), Secondary School Certificate (0.55%), Higher Secondary Certificate (0.14%), and higher degrees (0.01%).²² These statistics clearly illustrate the slow progress of women's education. However, by the 1960s, the status of Bengali women had changed considerably compared to earlier periods. The practice of strict seclusion (*purdah*) relaxed, leading to increased female

participation in education, particularly in tertiary education. Women's enrollment in the University of Dhaka offers a representative view of female higher education in East Pakistan. The table below shows the number of female students enrolled in different classes at Dhaka University from the 1952-53 academic year to 1970-71.

Session	Total students	Female students	Percentage (%)
1952-53	1,299	91	7.00
1953-54	1,343	97	7.22
1954-55	1,261	126	9.99
1955-56	1,633	167	10.23
1956-57	2,754	176	6.39
1957-58	3,150	234	7.43
1958-59	3,538	254	7.18
1959-60	3,143	275	8.75
1960-61	3,124	320	10.24
1961-62	3,449	349	10.12
1962-63	4,137	467	11.29
1963-64	4,852	642	13.23
1964-65	4,803	741	15.43
1965-66	4,589	708	15.43
1966-67	5,238	1,021	19.49
1967-68	5,905	1,228	20.79
1968-69	6,664	1,416	21.25
1969-70	8,151	1,809	22.19
1970-71	7,407	1,641	22.15
Total	76,440	11,762	15.39%

Source: *Annual Reports* (From 1952-53 to 1970-71), University of Dhaka

From academic year 1952-53 to 1970-71, a total of 76,440 students enrolled at the University of Dhaka, of which 11,762 were female students, accounting for 15.39%. Throughout the 1960s, the number of female students steadily increased alongside male students at the university. Until 1964, women were prohibited from enrolling in EPUET (later BUET) or engineering universities. This practice changed when three Bengali women, Dora (Khaleda Shahriar Kabir), Manowara (Manowara Begum), and Chumki (Shirin Sultana) filed a case for being denied admission into EPUET. They won the case and became the first female students to enroll at EPUET. Dora recalled, "The entire city and even the country was abuzz with the news. Girls studying engineering became such

a sensation that people from far and wide came to see us.”²³ During this period, the participation of women in Dhaka Medical College also increased, although it remained modest. In the 1965-66 academic year, there were 50 female students, which dropped to 26 in 1967-68 but rose again to 54 by 1969-70.²⁴ In 1970, Dhaka University had 7,028 students, of which 2,800 were female, including 851 resident students at Ruqayyah Hall.²⁵ Female participation in education began to increase significantly in East Pakistan during the 1950s and 1960s, continuing into the 1970s. This progress was driven by the socio-economic advancements in East Pakistan, particularly among educated families, who became more open to higher education for their daughters. Co-education faced little opposition from the educated elite. However, in medical and engineering colleges, most female students came from affluent families, while rural, impoverished women remained largely excluded from tertiary education. According to the 1974 Census, the total female population in Bangladesh was 34,367,484. Among them, 3,887,841 were literate, representing 13.7% of the total female population.

During the Pakistan period, the government did not adopt any specific policy to address women's education. Every Commission formed by the government to address the educational challenges in East Pakistan noted the “disappointing progress of women's education” and made special recommendations for its improvement. Unfortunately, these recommendations were rarely implemented. The Mohammad Akram Khan Education Commission (1949–51), tasked with restructuring East Pakistan's education system, recommended compulsory primary education, the recruitment of female teachers at the pre-primary and primary levels, the establishment of dedicated training centers, and the creation of women's teacher training colleges. However, most of these proposals were not carried out. In 1957, the Aatur Rahman Khan Commission also proposed the introduction of universal, compulsory, and free primary education for both boys and girls. It recommended co-education up to the

primary level with a uniform curriculum. To encourage girls' education, the commission suggested allowing girls to study at senior high schools free of charge. While these proposals were progressive, they were not implemented. Even protests were held against some of the reform commission's recommendations, precisely opposing the co-education proposal in Article 10 regarding secondary education. This resulted in the rejection of co-education for youth. Following the Sharif Education Commission's recommendations in 1959, educational expenses increased, causing women in rural areas to fall further behind in education. Since most secondary-level students did not come from affluent families, the rising costs of books and school fees discouraged many from continuing their education. Women's education, particularly in rural areas, suffered further setbacks as a result. After a detailed discussion on female education, the Sharif commission report summarizes ten key recommendations.²⁶ Analysis of these recommendations reveals a narrow and conservative attitude toward women's education. While the importance of expanding women's education for societal and state development was emphasized, it was also stated that the primary goal of women's education should be to prepare them as eligible mothers and homemakers. To this end, the curriculum for female students at the secondary level was recommended to include subjects like homecrafts, sewing, weaving, cooking, and home and childcare, alongside other subjects. At the higher education level, the commission proposed expanding opportunities for women to study home economics.²⁷

The recommendations of this Commission faced strong opposition from the student community of East Pakistan, which makes it evident that the proposals were not student-friendly. In 1962, when the new education policy was introduced following the recommendations of the Sharif Commission, it sparked a significant movement among Bengali students, highlighting that the curriculum was neither inclusive, nor progressive. In 1962, during the

vigorous movement organized by the Bengali student community against the Sharif Education Commission, female students played a significant role in every aspect of the protest. The protests extended to the Hamoodur Rahman Commission in 1964, which also faced widespread resistance. Similarly, the recommendations of the Nur Khan Commission in 1969 failed to include any specific proposals for advancing women's education. At primary and secondary levels, the curriculum for female students often lacked mathematics, English and science, focusing instead on subjects related to domestic life. Although the 1960s saw an increase in women's participation in education, particularly higher education, it is clear that state-provided facilities and policies were inadequate. Despite this, the education system of the time did produce a class of educated and conscious women who later played leading roles in various fields of society and politics.

Women's Economic Self-Reliance

The ability to acquire resources and participate in a family's financial transactions is regarded as a key indicator of women's empowerment. Achieving financial self-reliance is both a crucial measure of women's progress and an essential means for asserting their rights and capabilities. The patriarchal social structure, aiming to exploit women's sexuality and labour for its benefit, rarely acknowledged women as independent producers or contributors to the economy.²⁸

During both the British and Pakistan periods, women's participation in economic activities beyond the domestic sphere was largely ignored. At the same time, their economic independence was not considered a recognized objective of education either. East Pakistan's economy was predominantly agrarian. In the underdeveloped agricultural production system of that era, women's labour was indispensable. Evidence of women's involvement is found in sectors like weaving, jute processing, silk cocoon production, and thread preparation. From the 1950s onward, women began to enter

professions like teaching, medical services, and clerical work, adding a new dimension to the economy. According to the 1951 census, out of 19,994,754 women, 1,057,699 were economically self-reliant, accounting for 5.3% of the total female population. Among them, 9,99,260 economically independent women were engaged in the civilian labour force, with 8,16,461 in the agricultural labour force and 1,82,799 in the non-agricultural civilian labour force. Additionally, 58,439 women were not employed in the civilian labour force. The census also provides a regional breakdown of women's economic condition as follows:

Divisions	Total Female	Self - supporting		Not in Civilian Labour Force	Dependents
		Civilian Labour Force Agricultural	Non- Agricultural		
Dacca	77,21,850	3,37,812	61,779	18,065	73,04,194
Chittagong	55,79,063	3,69,647	69,938	26,154	51,13,324
Rajshahi	66,93,841	1,09,002	51,082	14,220	65,19,537

Source: H. H. Nomani (ed.), *Pakistan Population Census 1951, Volume 8, East Bengal Tables*, Government of Pakistan, Karachi, pp. (I.4-I.9).

According to the table, 5.4% of women residing in Dhaka, 8.35% in Chattogram, and 2.6% in Rajshahi were economically self-reliant. However, women's entry into various professions even at that time was notable. In 1951, 2,437 women were employed in teaching positions across different levels, 65 were serving as doctors and surgeons, and 2,147 worked as nurses and health workers. Additionally, 666 women were employed as telephone operators, stenographers, librarians, clerks, and administrative officers in various offices. A significant portion of self-reliant women were laborers. There were 32,783 women in the textile industry, 7,797 in glass and ceramics, and 62 in paper mills. Furthermore, 34,364 women were employed in domestic work, and 160 women worked as railway laborers. However, women still lacked opportunities in certain professions particularly in engineering, architecture, piloting, maritime roles, and law enforcement.²⁹

Women faced numerous obstacles in achieving economic self-reliance. One major barrier was the restrictions on women participating in government jobs. Women were considered ineligible for the Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP) and the Police Service of Pakistan (PSP). However, women were increasingly appointed to lower-level jobs and professional roles, particularly in education and health sectors at both central and provincial levels. In 1949, Selina Raisuddin passed the CSP examination with distinction but was not eligible for positions in civil or foreign services due to the lack of provision for women. Instead, she was appointed as an Assistant Accountant General in the Audit Service of Pakistan. Following this, women, led by Selina Raisuddin, initiated a movement in 1949. In response, the government allowed women in West Pakistan to sit for the CSP exams, but women in East Pakistan were denied this opportunity.³⁰ During this period, in response to demands from women's organizations, provincial assembly member Noorjahan Begum called for 25% of government job seats to be reserved for women, although this demand was not met. Another significant obstacle to Bengali women's entry into employment was the lack of necessary education and the regressive societal mindset.

Despite all obstacles, from the 1950s onward, a few female entrepreneurs emerged in Dhaka, setting remarkable examples by venturing into unconventional sectors of that time. Johra Khan was one of those few women and was Dhaka's first female entrepreneur, who in 1948 single-handedly established a modern printing press named *Eden Press* on Shankartola's Sris Dash Lane.³¹ Later, it was relocated to a larger facility in Hatkhola. In the 1950s, Anowara Begum owned *Karim Drug House*, a renowned pharmacy in Dhaka, and was later elected President of the Pharmaceutical Association.³² In the mid-1950s, Lira Industries, founded by Lily Khan, became notable for introducing PVC pipes in the construction industry in the country. Additionally, women entrepreneurs of that era showed interest in establishing small and medium businesses, particularly boutiques. In 1962, Shilu Abed and

Khurshedi Alam founded *Joya*, a boutique and fashion shop, in Dhanmondi.³³

During the 1960s, women began to participate in publication and cottage industry. In 1961, 10.8% of women in East Pakistan were involved in the non-agricultural civilian sector, and 9.9% were engaged in agriculture.³⁴ A significant number of women attained higher education during this decade and joined various professional fields, including teaching, government jobs, and healthcare. Urban women naturally had an advantage in accessing these opportunities. According to the 1961 census, out of 23,401,272 women living in villages, 2,588,282 (or 11.06%) were engaged in earning activities within the civilian sectors.³⁵ That year, only 11 women were lawyers, judges, or magistrates, while 20 served as public service officers. 741 women were employed as fourth-class officers and inspectors in the education and health sectors.³⁶ Illiterate women from lower socio-economic backgrounds often found work like bricks breakers, tea garden labor, or working as domestic servants for minimal wages.

One of the significant obstacles to economic self-reliance for working-class women was wage discrimination. While professional women in institutional sectors benefited from standardized pay structures, laborers faced significant disparities. Women laborers frequently received lower wages than men under the pretext of lower physical efficiency. For instance, in tea gardens, the average daily wage for female workers was 37 paisa, compared to 44 paisa for male workers. Wage discrimination extended to all sectors involving physical labor. The 1969 labour law aimed to eliminate wage disparities in all sectors, including tea gardens. However, many employers refused to comply. Women laborers, particularly tea garden workers, faced physical abuse for demanding equal pay. Protests were organized by women's organizations such as the East Pakistan Women's Association and Wari Women's Association, led by Sufia Kamal, against these injustices.³⁷

Overcoming the constraints of seclusion, women began taking up physically demanding labour out of economic necessity. However, many middle-class women, despite economic needs, were often unable to engage in income-generating activities due to negative aspersions or the lack of respectable employment opportunities. For instance, despite the demand for nurses in hospitals, women hesitated to enter the profession due to societal stigma. In response, the then-matron Akhtar Banu made an appeal in newspapers in 1964, urging young women to join the noble nursing profession.³⁸ Teaching remained the most favored profession for women overall. For the women of East Pakistan, the corporate world still remained an unattainable dream. Women first entered the corporate sector in Dhaka through banking. In 1966, Anowara Begum was appointed as a director of the Industrial Development Bank. The same year, a few women secured responsible positions in various banks across Dhaka.³⁹ Thus, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, women's participation in various civil income-generating sectors began to increase. By 1974, of the economically self-reliant women, 18.7% were involved in the civil sector, while 3.6% were engaged in agriculture. A comparative overview of the percentage of women involved in the civil labour force and agriculture in 1961 and 1974 across different divisions is presented below.

Divisions	(Percentage of Civilian Labour Force)		(Percentage of Agricultural Labour Force)	
	1961	1974	1961	1974
Rajshahi	3.9	23.1	3.2	5.3
Khulna	1.8	14.6	0.9	1.5
Dacca	8.9	17.6	8.0	3.3
Chittagong	25.5	19.4	24.4	3.9

Source: *Bangladesh Census of Population 1974, Bulletin-1 Provisional Results*, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Dacca, pp. 200-201.

In 1974, the participation of women in the civil labour force significantly increased in all divisions except Chittagong, particularly in Dhaka, Rajshahi, and Khulna. Additionally,

more women became involved in agriculture in Rajshahi and Khulna divisions. However, the rate of women's involvement in agriculture declined in the Dhaka and Chittagong divisions. Overall, women's participation in agriculture decreased from 9.9% in 1961 to 3.6% in 1974. On the other hand, the percentage of women engaged in the civil sector rose from 10.8% to 18.7% during the same period. This shift reflects the impact of the expansion of women's education and new job opportunities along with self-employment capacity created in economy. Beyond school, women began excelling in higher education at colleges, universities, and professional fields such as medicine, engineering, business administration, and accounting. As a result, many of the privileged urban women established themselves as professionals in both government and private sectors. However, it is important to note that compared to the total number of women in East Pakistan, the percentage of professional women remained unsatisfactory. In terms of women's economic self-reliance- a key indicator of development and empowerment- it was beyond doubt that most Bengali women were still financially dependent. Even in government jobs, Bengali women were largely absent from high administrative positions that were integral to decision-making processes. Although their representation increased at lower levels over time, they remained excluded from senior administrative roles.

Women's Participation in Decision-Making Processes of the State

From the inception of Pakistan, an awareness of political engagement among women was rising. Expressing optimism of greater participation of women in political activities, Hamida Akhtar Chowdhury wrote in the weekly *Begum* magazine:

The newly independent countrymen, compared to the countrymen of other countries, remains underdeveloped. To transform the country into one that is happy, beautiful, and prosperous, both men

and women must equally participate in politics. Women's involvement in politics is essential to create a country that is wholly beautiful and prosperous. This necessity is not just for today but has existed since the beginning and will continue into the future.⁴⁰

However, the reality was somewhat different. Following the Indian Independence Act of 1947, a Constituent Assembly was formed to draft a constitution for Pakistan. Of the 79 members of this Assembly, only two were women. By 1955, in the newly reconstituted Assembly, not a single woman was nominated. Despite the presence of qualified women, none were given the opportunity to represent or voice women's perspectives in drafting the future constitution of Pakistan. This exclusion caused concern and unease among women in both East and West Pakistan. Begum Liaquat Ali Khan expressed her profound shock at the omission of women from Pakistan's re-formed constitution-making body through writing a letter to the Governor-General of Pakistan, Ghulam Mohammad, regarding this issue.⁴¹ Echoing Begum Liaquat, Begum Akhtar Hussain from Karachi expressed her deep concern in the *Dawn* writing as such:

When the population is not fully represented in the true sense, the popularity of the Constituent Assembly must become doubtful. Women must have a voice in the law-making of their country, especially when the question of their rights is involved. If at the very outset they are ignored, how can they hope to get justice in matters concerning them? ⁴²

Before the 1954 elections, when the voting system for women was amended, women's rights groups of East Pakistan protested vigorously. A conference was held with women from all levels of society to discuss their issues, initiated by figures like Halima Khatun, Sufia (Lily) Ishtiaq, Mariam Khondkar, Amena Begum, Laila Samad, and Lutfunnesa.⁴³ In the 1954 elections, a large number of politically active women supported the United Front. They played key roles in the elections, including contesting as candidates, engaging in

public relations, and conducting election campaigns. Many women began their political careers through involvement in these campaigns. In the 1954 Provincial Elections in East Pakistan, there were a total of 12 reserved seats for women, including 9 Muslim and 3 non-Muslim seats. According to the electoral law, a woman could contest elections for a reserved seat in her community or a general seat. Initially, the law allowed a woman to contest any seat, provided she was a registered voter in East Pakistan. However, this rule was amended on August 7, 1953, to specify that a woman could only contest elections for a seat if she was a registered voter in that particular constituency. The sudden change in this rule led to widespread anger among women, and they protested against the Election Commission's decision.

In the 1954 Provincial Assembly elections, several women, including Nurjahan Murshid, Daulatnnessa Khatun, Badrunnessa Khatun, Anwara Khatun, Selina Banu, Razia Banu, Tofatunnessa Begum, Meherunnessa Khatun, Amena Begum, Nelly Sengupta, Nivedita Mondal, and Bindubashini Sarkar, were elected as members of the Provincial Assembly.⁴⁴ Their presence in the Assembly instilled confidence among other women. In November 1955, three elected women members, Nurjahan Murshid, Razia Banu, and Daulatnnessa Khatun, were appointed as parliamentary secretaries of the provincial government.⁴⁵ After the victory of the United Front, the central League government became alarmed and dismissed Fazlul Haq's cabinet, issuing Section 92A, which allowed for the dissolution of the National and Provincial Assemblies, the banning of political parties, and the arrest of leaders and activists. This led to the arrest of many leaders, including Daulatnnessa Khatun, Selina Banu, Jyotsna Nigoyi, and Nilufa Dolly, among others. Though the United Front government was dissolved, the Provincial Assembly remained functional until it was abolished by the imposition of martial law in 1958. Before its dissolution, women members of the Provincial Assembly played active roles. The speeches of figures like Mrs. Nurjahan Murshid, Nivedita Mondal,

Badrunnessa Begum, Daulatnnessa, and Bindubashini Sarkar highlighted contemporary political, social, and economic issues and focused significantly on improving the overall quality of life for women.⁴⁶ Despite the active participation and sacrifices of women in various movements in East Pakistan, their social and political rights were not given proper recognition in the country's constitution. In protest, an opposition women's organization led by parliamentarian Jahanara Shahnewaz formed a united front. In the 1956 Constitution, 10 reserved seats were allocated for women in the 300-member legislative assembly. Special electoral areas were designated for women's reserved seats, and women voters were given the right to vote for both general and reserved female candidates. However, by the 1962 Constitution, the direct voting rights of women were revoked. Under the 1962 Constitution, six seats were reserved for women in the National Assembly and six in each province, but these seats were filled through presidential nominations, effectively making the female members mere puppets of presidential preferences. Thus, in practice women's rights in the new Constitution were further restricted.⁴⁷ In the 1962 elections, three women from East Pakistan were nominated to the National Assembly from the reserved women's seats: Begum Shamsun Nahar Mahmood and Begum Rokeya Anwar from Dhaka, and Begum Sirajunnessa Chowdhury from Sylhet. In the Provincial Assembly, women like Hamida Chowdhury, Ayesha Sardar, Akhtar Jahan Khan, Khaleda Habib, and Tofatunnessa were also representatives from the reserved seats. However, women had no voting rights in these reserved seats, and since there was no opportunity for competition in these seats, the elections did not excite or encourage the Bengali female population.

In the 1964 constitutional amendment, a clause was introduced disqualifying the wives of government employees from contesting elections. In January 1964, Shamsunnahar Mahmud, a member of the legislative council, proposed an amendment to repeal this clause. Despite being a member of

the ruling party, she protested against the provision, which she argued, undermined women's rights in reserved seats and electoral laws. Earlier, another council member, Rokeya Anwar, had demanded the reservation of 25% of seats for women in both the election committee and the legislative council. This proposal was supported by Sirajunnesa Chowdhury, another prominent member. However, it faced opposition from West Pakistani legislators, Begum G. A. Khan and Begum Mominunnesa Ahad. This divergence highlighted the growing divide in women's rights movements between East and West Pakistan as early as 1964.⁴⁸ After Ayub Khan's re-election as President in 1965, national and provincial assembly elections were held. The national assembly elections took place on March 21, 1965, followed by the provincial assembly elections on May 16, 1965. Under the 1962 Constitution, the three reserved women's seats for East Pakistan in the national assembly were won by Begum Razia Faiz, Begum Dolly Azad, and Begum Maryam Hashimuddin. For the East Pakistan provincial assembly, the women elected to the reserved seats were Hamida Chowdhury, Ayesha Sardar, Akhtar Jahan Khan, Khaleda Habib, and Nurjahan Begum.

In the 1970 elections, the national assembly had 313 seats, including 300 general seats and 13 reserved for women. Of these, East Pakistan was allocated 162 general seats and 7 reserved seats for women. However, there was no provision for direct elections to the reserved women's seats. Instead, the members of the general assembly elected representatives for the reserved seats, leading to a system of nomination rather than direct representation. This process sparked protests, with 106 prominent women from Dhaka issuing a joint statement demanding the right for women to be elected through direct voting for the reserved seats. The signatories included noted figures like Sufia Kamal, Amina Begum, Begum Feroza Bari, Begum Matia, Begum Khaleda Habib, Begum Anwara Khatun, Kamrun Nahar Laily, and Maleka Begum.⁴⁹ They also protested against the practice of selecting

women for reserved seats through nomination by the elected representatives of general seats. Despite these limitations, women were allowed to directly contest general seats alongside men. In the 1970 national assembly elections, 769 candidates competed for the 162 general seats in East Pakistan, of which three were women, Amena Begum, Selina Banu, and Khaleda Habib.⁵⁰ Notably, the Awami League did not nominate any women for the 162 national assembly seats or the 300 provincial assembly seats in East Pakistan. Furthermore, no women were included in the party's electoral nomination board.⁵¹ This exclusion underscored the marginalization of women in the political landscape during this critical election year.

Despite their contributions, women's political rights were not adequately recognized. Between 1947 and 1970, although seats were reserved for women in Pakistan's legislative bodies, these were negligible compared to the total number of seats. Ensuring women's participation in the power structure- particularly in decision-making processes- is a critical prerequisite for women's development and empowerment in the State. This includes women's participation in legislative bodies, especially in the cabinet, as well as attaining active and effective authority in law-making and governmental decisions. However, during Ayub Khan's regime (1958-1969), the state monopolized opportunities for women's participation in legislative politics. Although reserved seats for women existed, they were filled through elections by male members of the legislature, making women reliant on their male counterparts. This arrangement further restricted women's pathways to meaningful participation in legislative politics and curtailed their representative capacity and voice in decision-making processes.

Women's Legal Protection in Pakistan

The development of women is contingent upon adequate security in both personal and professional spheres. Therefore,

the extent to which a state's legal framework provides protection to women is a critical factor.

During Ayub Khan's regime, one of the significant legislative measures was the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance of 1961. This law emerged due to women's movements advocating for reforms in Muslim marriage and family laws. Although it did not adopt all the recommendations of the Justice Rashid Commission, it was a landmark in the history of women's rights in Pakistan. Key provisions included discouraging polygamy, regulating arbitrary divorce, mandatory registration of marriages, setting the legal age of marriage at 16 for girls and 21 for boys, and making the prompt payment of dower mandatory to ensure women's financial security. To control polygamy, the law required that a Muslim man seeking another marriage while already married must obtain permission from his existing wife or wives and apply for approval from the local Union Council (or relevant municipal or city corporation). A conciliation council, including representatives from both the husband and the wife, would decide if the new marriage was justifiable. Similarly, for divorce, the law mandated that the husband send a written notice to the Union Council chairman, who would attempt reconciliation through a conciliation council within 30 days. On the controversial issue of *halala* marriages, the ordinance clarified that a divorced woman could remarry her former husband without an interim marriage to another man, unless this occurred after three instances of divorce between the same couple.⁵² This provision freed women from the humiliating practice of *halala* in many cases. Despite opposition from conservative religious leaders and ulema, progressive women and social reformers supported the ordinance.

Religious leaders from both East and West Pakistan argued that the ordinance, especially clauses restricting polygamy, regulating divorce, specifying the legal age of marriage, and ensuring inheritance rights for grandchildren even in the

presence of a living grandfather, contradicted Islamic law. However, women across all levels of society in East and West Pakistan steadfastly supported the ordinance. Despite demands from religious groups for amendments, the law was adopted without changes by the National Assembly in November 1963.

However, initiatives are hardly found from the Pakistan central government to safeguard the rights of non-Muslim women who constituted roughly 5% of the total population of the country. Regarding East Pakistan, around 9.5% of the total population were non-Muslim women⁵³ who were completely without any legal shield on the question of their rights. Their rights remained dependent on their respective religious laws and traditions.

Women's ability to make decisions regarding reproduction and birth control is a critical indicator of empowerment. In Pakistan, women had little control over these decisions, which were governed by family and state policies. State-led family planning programs often prioritized national interests over women's health, leading to a rise in maternal mortality rates. From 1947 to 1958, records show 8,787 maternal deaths in Dhaka alone.⁵⁴ In 1953, the Family Planning Association was established in Dhaka to address these issues, raising awareness among women. By the late 1960s, efforts to expand family planning included appointing and training female inspectors and setting up family planning clinics in district towns. However, women's bodies remained the focus of family planning policies, and their autonomy in decision-making on issues like reproduction and birth control was largely disregarded.

Evaluation

In East Pakistan, significant disparities existed between men and women across familial, social, political, and economic domains. An analysis of the overall economic conditions of women in East Pakistan reveals that the vast majority were

financially dependent on others. Despite their significant involvement in production, that is, in agriculture, handicrafts, cottage industries, and commercial production, their contributions remained largely unrecognized. Furthermore, women earned significantly less than men across all sectors. In terms of position in their profession, women held a negligible number of high administrative positions even after having high distinctions. However, there was a gradual increase in their participation as fourth-class government employees and as inspectors in education and healthcare sectors. Lack of proper arrangement in higher education and the attitudes of the patriarchal society towards women deprived most women of opportunities for professional attainment.

Progress in women's political empowerment was acutely limited during the Pakistan era. Despite their active participation in political movements and struggles against the British, women achieved minimal political rights. While seats were reserved for women in provincial and central legislative councils, the numbers were negligible compared to the total seats. Women's representation in the cabinet and their participation in lawmaking and governmental decision-making were also minimal. The situation was even worse in the local government. There was hardly any arrangement for women through which they could contribute to the decision-making in local bodies of the government.

Legal protection is a crucial aspect of women's development. While the Pakistan Constitution guaranteed equal rights, freedom of speech, professional choice, and religious freedom for all citizens, these rights were often curtailed for women due to the application of Sharia law. Nevertheless, some progressive laws were enacted, such as the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance of 1961, which aimed to regulate issues like polygamy, divorce, maintenance, and inheritance. However, while the law was progressive on paper, its implementation was ineffective, and women were unable to fully benefit from it.

During the 1950s, societal values and attitudes toward women in Pakistan were conservative. However, the socio-economic changes of the 1960s brought some positive transformations. Women's participation in education, economic, and political activities increased significantly during this period. Nevertheless, these changes were largely confined to educated and progressive families, leaving most women untouched by these developments. They remained unable to establish full control over their bodies, minds, and work, which are fundamental prerequisites for empowerment. Key indicators of women's empowerment, such as, access to resources, involvement in financial decisions, legal recourse, personal and workplace safety, and control over reproduction, remained unachieved for the majority of women. As a result, the overall development and empowerment of women in East Pakistan was hardly realized and basic human rights were yet to impact their lives.

Notes and references

- 1 Sonia Nishat Amin, "Nari o Samaj," in *Bangladesher Itihas 1704-1971*, Vol. 3, Social and Cultural History, ed. Sirajul Islam (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2017), 609.
- 2 <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099042023122012795/pdf/P17429605b7a6309b0970f05379a0c033bb.pdf>;
<https://www.gatesgenderequalitytoolbox.org/measuring-empowerment/;www.povertyactionlab.org/sites/default/files/2018-annual-report-web-ready.pdf>, Last Accessed on 25. 11. 2024
- 3 Sirajul Karim, *Nari Unnayan Adhikar O Nirapattar kausalpatra* (Dhaka: Mothers Publications, 2012), 9.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Tapati Saha, "Narir Khamatayan: Dharanagata Kathamo o Bangladesh Prexhit" in *Bangladesh Unnayan Samiksa*, (Binsatitama Kanda Barrshik Sankhya,140), 142.
- 6 Rokeya Kabir, "Narir Rajnaitik Khamatayan: Bangladesh Prexhit" in *Gender Equality in Bangladesh: Still A Long Way To Go*, (ed.) Shahiduzzaman and Mahfuzur Rahman (Dhaka: NewsNetwork, 2003), 151.
- 7 Selina Hossain and Masuduzzaman (eds.), *Narir Khamatayan: Rajniti O Andolon* (Dhaka: Mawla Brothers, 2003), 83-87.
- 8 <https://www.unwomen.org/en/node/36060>, Accessed on 30, 11, 2024

-
- 9 A. Rashid (ed.), *Pakistan Population Census 1961, Volume 1*, Government of Pakistan, Karachi, p. II-3.
 - 10 Maleka Begum, *Banglar Nari Andolon* (Dhaka: UPL, 2002), 126.
 - 11 Ibid., 128.
 - 12 Proceedings of the First Women's Conference of the All-India Women's Association, (Karachi, 1949), 11.
 - 13 Hamida Khanam, *Shatabdir Sandhikhone Eden College*, in Commemorative Magazine for Eden College Alumni Reunion, (Dhaka: Eden College, 1997), 85.
 - 14 Shahnaz Parvin, *Bangladeser Swadhinatajuddhe Narir Abodan* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2007), 19.
 - 15 *Annual Report*, University of Dhaka, 1947-48, 29.
 - 16 Shahida Parvin, *Shamsun Nahar Mahmud O Samakalin Nari Samajer Agraqati* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2012), 166.
 - 17 H. H. Nomani (ed.), *Census of Pakistan 1951, Vol-3*, East Bengal Report and Tables, Table-7, 9 (Karachi: Manager of Publication, 1952), 105.
 - 18 Rowshan Ara Rahman, "Prachayer Oxford- Swarnomoy Smritite Samujjol," in *Saurabhe Gaurabhe Dhaka Biswabiddyalaya* (Dhaka: Dhaka University Alumni Association, 2009), 505.
 - 19 Six Year National Plan of Educational Development (Karachi: Education Division, Government of Pakistan), 18
 - 20 Monjur Ahmed, "Education is Progress: Proceedings of the Symposia", (East Pakistan Education Week, 1968), 93-102.
 - 21 Ibid.
 - 22 A. Rashid (ed.), *Pakistan Population Census 1961*, op. cit.
 - 23 *Bi-weekly Ananya*, 14 December 2019.
 - 24 Chand Sultana Kawsar, *Dhaka Medical College: Itihas O Aitihya 1947-1971*, PhD Dissertation (Dhaka: University of Dhaka, 2021), 284.
 - 25 *Annual Report*, University, of Dhaka, 1970-71, Appendix B.
 - 26 Report of the Commission on National Education, (Karachi: Ministry of Education, Government of Pakistan, 1961), 195-196.
 - 27 Ibid., 191-193.
 - 28 Salma Khan, "Arthanitite Nari: Hastasilpa theke Corporate Byabastapannaya", in *Dhaka Nagar Jibone Nari*, Sonia Nishat Amin (ed.) (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2010), 79.
 - 29 H. H. Nomani (ed.), *Pakistan Population Census 1951, Volume 8*, East Bengal Tables, (Karachi: Government of Pakistan, 1951), 2.2-2.10.
 - 30 Khawar Mumtaz & Farida Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back*, (London: Zed Books, 1987), 22.
 - 31 Salma Khan, op. cit., 94.
 - 32 Ibid
 - 33 Ibid, 95.

-
- 34 *Bangladesh Census of Population 1974, Bulletin 1 Provisional Results*, (Dacca Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh), 200-201.
- 35 A. Rashid (ed.), *Pakistan Population Census 1961*, Volume 1, (Karachi: Government of Pakistan), V 40-41.
- 36 *Census of Pakistan 1961*, op. cit.
- 37 Maleka Begum, Op. cit., 155.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Salma Khan, Op. cit., 96.
- 40 *Begum*, 23 March 1952.
- 41 Op. cit., 10 July 1955.
- 42 Dawn, 3 July, 1955, p. 9; citation from Sarah Ansari, 'Polygamy, Purdah and Political Representation: Engendering Citizenship in 1950s Pakistan', *Modern Asian Studies*, Published online by Cambridge University Press: 5 December 2008, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/modern-asian-studies/article/polygamy-purdah-and-political-representation-engendering-citizenship-in-1950s-pakistan>, accessed on: 29.11.2024
- 43 Maleka Begum and Syed Azizul Haq, *Ami Nari: Tinsha Bochorer Bangali Narir Itihas*, (Dhaka: UPL, 2001), 113.
- 44 Report On Election to the East Bengal Legislative Assembly ,1954, 72-73.
- 45 Maleka Begum, *Rajniti: Andarmahal Rajpatha o Samsad Unabinsha o Binsha Shatabdi*, in *Dhaka Nagar Jibone Nari*, Sonia Nishat Amin (ed.), (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2010), 206.
- 46 Assembly Proceedings (official Report) Third Session, (East Pakistan Assembly, 1956), 209, 225, 226, 237, 238, 284, 285 151.
- 47 Maleka Begum, Op. cit., 149.
- 48 J.P Bhattacharia, *Ranaisance and Freedom Movement in Bangladesh*, (Calcutta: Minarva Associates, 1973), 202.
- 49 *Begum*, 26 April, 1970.
- 50 *Daily Pakistan*, 16 October, 1970.
- 51 Mofida Begum, *Awami League Rajniti: Nari Netritto (1949-2009)*, (Dhaka: Haqqani Publishers, 2010), 109.
- 52 The Muslim Family Laws Ordinance, 1961(Ordinance No. VIII of 1961) Section 7(6).
- 53 The percentage of non-Muslim women has been calculated based on the *Census of Pakistan 1961*, op. cit., pp. II-23; 69. In this write-up, the 'non-Muslim women' is a category that covers all the women of the religious minorities in both part of Pakistan.
54. Papreen Nahar, "Unabinsha O Binsha Shatabdite Nari Shasthya," in *Dhaka Nagar Jibone Nari*, Sonia Nishat Amin (ed.), (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2010), 118.