

CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT :

Declaration of the years 1975-85 as the UN Decade for Women reflects the global concern of recent times on issues related to women's role and status in society. These issues are concerned with raising the status of women ensuring their involvement in the process of development and fuller participation in the wider social process (ICSSR Newsletter, 1975). However, the implementation of various developmental schemes have made the planners, workers and researchers in this area not only aware of the various problems that arise in practice for various socio-economic reasons, but also the necessity for clarifying some fundamental concepts before specifying their goals. The very concept 'development', it has been found, cannot be taken for granted and needs clarification and definition. A study of the numerous articles written by experts on women and development reveal very strikingly how each author has his or her own idea of what should be the accent in women's development and how the author then equates this accent with development as such; better economical deal, equal power-sharing with men, better development of individual personality.

Jessie Tellis Nayak poses the question 'what do we mean by women's development?' and answers : "The goal of women's development programmes should be to give rise to 'adult women' — women who can be objective, can weigh alternatives, and make choices and take the consequences. Women who can assert their rights, speak up when required and fulfil their responsibilities" (Nayak, J.T., 1981, p.3).

It is highly significant of the state of affairs that Nirmala Butch ends her article on women and development with the question :

"It is apparent however that even if we succeed in more equal access of women to health, education and employment, this would be seen falling short of the ideal long term improvement in women's socio-economic conditions and answers will be needed to the question of what is really the development that women want - is it only more education, more employment and better health or is it more equitable sharing in the power structure so that there is no question of support but only of easy acceptance and partnership?" (Butch, N., 1981, p.7).

Kumud Sharma has discussed models in women's development in order to pinpoint how and why the concept differs from reality. She talks of the integration model and the

equality model. The former model takes the family or household as unit and assumes that any benefit that accrues to the family will automatically benefit the women too.

Planners just fail to see women as individuals. But even in the interventionist, equality model women are treated as beneficiaries rather than as active participants. Further as Sharma has pointed out "societal structures which are discriminatory reshape policies and programmes and dilute the long term effect of well-intentioned policies" (Sharma, K., 1981, p.5). The crucial question that she raises is : should development be "need oriented or goal oriented, should be pragmatic or idealistic, endogenous (bottom up) or exogenous (top down). Is it possible to strike a balance between the two?" (Sharma, K., 1981, p.6).

Vina Majmudar and Kumud Sharma (1980) have emphasized that development should be accompanied by structural change in society relating to the total population, as well as to women in particular. The emphasis has been on women's rights, social oppression of women, health, political policy, poverty, unemployment, education, health, political and economic participation etc.

Indira J. Parikh has done numerous studies on the societal factors that affect the role of Indian women in family and society and she has also pointed how each step that women take^s

4
1

to come to terms confronts her with a choice. Women experience their 'being' in terms of traditional culture and values and their 'becoming' in terms of modern aspirations. Women themselves are so much caught up in traditional values that many accept the roles, the stereotypical roles that society expects of them. Women get identified with home, security, stability and continuity (Parikh, J.I., 1982). And even women who are lucky to get into a profession find that it is not easy to have a 'space' for themselves, their personality. They live in others' space. Thus while they accept job responsibility and do it competently, fulfilling the role of a performer, they are denied the right to take initiative, show their resourcefulness, innovativeness and creativity. Elsewhere Parikh has pointed out how this denial of space for women is symptomatic of Indian tradition: when the daughter moves out of the house, hoping to find in marriage and married life a role where she can develop her individuality, she finds that she has become from being a daughter merely a daughter-in-law (Parikh & Garg, 1981).

Dandekar has pointed out some of the problems of integrating women in economic development. He sees several hurdles in the way of greater employment of women: compulsions of household responsibilities, maternity, and for these reasons less mobility. Dandekar suggests that local women should be employed in various services as educational, medical and health and even on part-time basis so that they can attend to household duties as well as career. Another suggestion made by him is to open public kitchens so that their cooking

burden is reduced and creches for children so that their children can be looked after (Dandekar, V.M., 1982).

A review of the literature clearly shows that today the concept of development is far less concerned with per capita income and far more concerned with equity and the quality of life. "The broader view of development seeks to ensure a rapid improvement in the status of women and children" (Mosk, C., 1981, p.31). But the pity is that especially in the developing countries and more so in the Muslim countries of the Third World, the national statistics of these countries reveal that there is a very poor exploitation of this vast human resource in economically productive activity. The Bangladesh Census data, for instance, reveal that hardly 2.31 per cent of female population are found as economically active population (2.33 per cent rural and 2.61 per cent urban) (Statistical year book of Bangladesh, 1980, p.456)*

* The figures depend of course on the criteria on which a person is counted as 'economically active'. Women spend a lot of energy in the household chores and do work that should be counted as labour income. Many women in the unorganized sector do not come under the census definition of 'economically active' population.

Although the proper utilization of human resource is the central goal of development, surprisingly enough all the development processes have by-passed about 50 per cent of the total manpower constituting the women labour force of which 90 per cent are located in the rural areas (Census report, Bangladesh, 1974). This in spite of the fact that the importance of human resource is sufficiently realised today. Therefore, "it is essential not to lose sight of the fact that development is about, by, and for human beings, as individuals and as social beings aiming at their liberation and fulfilment" (UN Development Programme, 1979, p.17).

Women labour force is the most neglected and under utilized resource all over the world, more so in the developing nations of the Third World which includes most countries of South Asia, Africa and Latin America. As a result the women in these countries are socially deprived and economically dependent.

A recent report of the International Conference on Women held at Udaipur in India, referring to Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand, has stated that "under marital laws the women of these countries are neither breathing free air nor can strive for better order. The whole thing is suffocated and the women are the worst sufferers". (The Economic Times, November 19, 1981). Even today in India, Srilanka,

Bangladesh and in some other Muslim countries like Algeria, Sudan, Ethiopia, "Women are not ready to accept that they are of equal importance like male members in society". (Benatia Farouk, 1980, p.465). They are socialized to believe that their lives are cheaper than that of their men. They can not command equal shares in various socio-economic affairs in development. They have not yet learned to assert their own right breaking through traditional conviction and hence are easily exploited by men. This can be supported by the statement, "it is said by the men in the villages that if you let your wife go out, their eyes will be opened, and this is very good way to keep the women ignorant and are thus easily exploited." (JWP, Bangladesh, 1980, p.8). Such lack of attention in the utilization of women labour force often results in poverty and drags the whole nation. This is indeed a highly undesirable and shocking phenomenon for the development of a nation "both on the ground of human rights and optimal resource utilization" (Hossain Monowar, 1980).

Bangladesh where the present investigation has been done, is one of the poorest countries of the Third World and hence presents a more serious picture of the socio-economic conditions of women. The problems of women's participation in economic activities in Bangladesh far outweigh those in India and many other countries in the Third World.

A brief overview of the roles and status of women as is presently prevalent in Bangladesh is given below which would give an appropriate background for the rationale of the present study.

ROLE AND STATUS OF WOMEN IN BANGLADESH :

As pointed out earlier, due to under-utilization and negligence of women labour force, the women in most countries of the Third World enjoy a very low status (Mazumdar, V., 1978, Barbar, R., 1980, Smock, C., 1980, Chaudhry and Raihan, 1980, Jain. D., 1983). This observation can be more appropriately applied in case of Bangladesh. Wide disparity between men and women characterizes all levels of Bangladesh society. "The socially tragic but paradoxical truth is simply this - the one who, in private life is an affectionate father, loving husband, benevolent brother and respectful son is, in the collective spirit, utterly inconsiderate, an inveterate and undignified critic, an exploiter and oppressor of women" (General report on "Role of women in socio economic development in Bangladesh, March, 1977). In Bangladesh, the absolute majority of women live in rural areas. They are expected to play traditional domestic roles - the roles of a docile daughter, a subordinate and compliant wife and a dependent mother (Chaudhury & Raihan, 1980). They are recognized as inferior to men in all aspects

of life. Subordination of women to men and their static domestic functions have rendered them insecure and helpless. Most of them are illiterate and unaware of their rights. In a recent study it has been observed that 70 per cent of the rural and 80 per cent of the urban men respectively considered women inferior to men and motherhood as the most desirable role for a woman (Jahan, R., 1976).

It is taken for granted that the new wife should soon become mother and thus her "social status improves with age, and with the bearing of male children" (Smock, A.C., 1978, p.98). This alone perhaps ensures her status, but on the other hand, she fails to assume a powerful role in control over birth of children.

Even more important than this question of female's social status is a rigid division of labour in which women are confined to activities that can be performed within and related to the home while men are left to pursue economic, social and political interest in the society. Under this system women who are willing to be socially acceptable are not allowed to choose any other role but that of wife and mother. Consequently, they enjoy a very low status in family, society and nation as a whole. This low status of living is characterized by several issues. Some of these are: low level of living, low level of literacy, lack of

employment opportunities, high mortality among women etc. (ICSSR, News letter, 1975).

INVISIBILITY OF WOMEN'S WORK :

What about those women who on account of economic necessity have to work? Here again they are found in a disadvantageous situation. Productive work, if done at home is not given any recognition, such activities do not command any market value and hence they are excluded from the labour force by the census, although they may be very much engaged in productive activities within the household. In a recent report of one study in three Bangladesh villages, it has been mentioned that "income generating activities may take place both within and outside one's own household" (Islam R., 1981, p.59). In these sample villages, more than 30 per cent of the total active women were reported to be engaged in productive works within the household (Islam R., 1981). But their contribution in household economy is not taken into account. As has been aptly observed by Khushi Kabir, "Rural women in Bangladesh are responsible for grain processing and storage; they grow most of their family's fruits and vegetables, they care for poultry and livestock, they supplement family's food and income through kitchen garden, cottage industry... Yet women's contribution to agriculture and household production receives less recognition than their domestic

child rearing chores" (Kabir, K., 1976, p.73). In this way their productive activities and contribution to family economy are hardly recognised.

A recent study reveals that the amount of time spent by rural women on various activities has been found to vary between 10-14 hours a day. The study also noted that women spent less time on recreation than men on an average about 0.24 hours per day. (Farouk, A. and Ali, A., 1975). These activities of village women "though time consuming and essential to production are not seen as a contribution to the family income because these are supplementary to the men's productive work. The activities rendered are considered as logical consequences of womanhood" (Chaudhury & Raihan, 1980, p.10).

THE WOMEN WAGE EARNERS :

The role of female labour force in rural economy can be seen in other cases where women are fully employed by others or are self-employed. In rural areas a growing disparities centres around work patterns of rural women. Women who do not have land, "are being forced out of their homesteads to work in other households, to seek work in public programmes such as the Food-for-Work Programme, or engage in petty trading and business in the villages, cut

and bring firewood from hills and even do field work in some regions of Bangladesh" (McCarthy, 1981, p.3).

In some cases families are headed by females having their dependent members. To support and maintain them, they have to keep themselves engaged in certain money earning activities which provide them with bare necessities of life. A village study (Ellickson, J., 1975) showed that it was predominantly widows, with no one to support them, who were looking for work. In this village, a few women sold fish in the local market, a couple of women sold betel leaves and one sold glass bangles from house to house. They, thus engaged themselves in earning income for their survival. Sometimes in some families, poverty is so acute that it becomes an economic burden on the part of the parents to keep an unmarried daughter at home who is not participating in gainful activities. Therefore, the females of such families are seen involved in income earning activities to improve their level of living. Thus, the issue of women's status in such families is immediately linked with women's access to employment and their own earnings.

NATIONAL STATISTICAL DATA INDICATING LOW STATUS
OF WOMEN IN BANGLADESH :

To substantiate low status of women in Bangladesh, a few statistical data are presented below. The data, taken

from different sources, will substantiate the low and inferior status of women in Bangladesh. The Committee on the Status of Women in India suggested to adopt the following aspects that might help to locate the status of women vis-a-vis men: (ICSSR, 1977, pp.32).

Sex ratio between male and female	(Table 1)
Population of Bangladesh by age & sex	(Table 2)
Probability of Survival by sex	(Table 3)
Mean age at marriage of male and female	(Table 4)
Literacy level of male and female	(Table 5)
Labour force participation level of male and female	(Table 6)

Population : Male & Female

Table 1 : Population in Bangladesh 1974, 1981 (in thousand).

Year	Total population	Male		Female		Sex ratio M/F (100)
		N	%	N	%	
1974	71479	37072	51.86	34407	48.14	108
1981	87052	44850	51.52	42202	48.47	106

Source : (1) Chaudhury & Raihan, "Female Status in Bangladesh" BIDS, 1980.

(2) Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh, 1980.

A look at the Table 1 shows that though the population has increased over a six year period, the percentage of male and female population has remained almost the same but sex ratio has fallen slightly.

Age Structure :

Table 2 : Population of Bangladesh by Age and Sex, 1974
(percentage distribution)

Age Group	Male	Female	Total
0 - 14	47.5	48.7	48.1
15 - 19	8.5	8.0	8.3
20 - 29	12.9	14.6	13.7
30 - 39	11.0	11.1	11.0
40 - 49	8.4	7.6	8.0
50 +	11.7	10.0	10.9

Source : Bangladesh Population Census Report, 1974
National volume.

The figure shows that at the age of below 15 years, the percentage of women is higher than that of men. For the age group 20-29 years the situation is also the same. But for the age groups 40-49 and over 50 years the proportion of men is greater than that of women. The high sex ratio (Table 1) and higher proportion of men beyond the

age of 40 years in Bangladesh indicates the higher mortality rate of females in comparison with males which substantiate the lower status of women (Government of India, 1974).

Mortality Rate :

Table 3 : Probability of Survival by Age & Sex, 1977
(Life expectancy 1977).

Age	Male	Female
0	55.9	50.9
1	62.0	56.5
2	62.5	57.6
3	62.5	58.4
4	62.3	58.9
5	61.6	58.6
10	57.8	54.9
15	53.1	53.4
20	48.3	49.1
25	43.8	44.8
30	39.2	40.4
50	26.0	27.0
65	15.8	15.7

Source : Samad, Apron et al.; Demographic Surveillance System - Matlab, Vol.6, Scientific Report No.18 1979.

Table 3 presents data on probability of survival by sex at different ages. It shows that the expectation of life at birth for men is 55.9 years and 50.9 years for women.

which indicates that at birth men have a longer life span than that of women. Before the age of 15 years, the data shows the childhood mortality of female is higher than that of male. After 15, women can expect life span on an average or almost equal to men. The higher childhood mortality of females is characterized by the two factors - preference for sons and neglect of daughters. However, this higher probability of death and lower probability of survival for women clearly indicates inferior position of women in every walks of life.

Age Disparity at Marriage :

Table 4 : Mean Age at Marriage, 1974, 1975 in Bangladesh.

Year	Source	Male	Female
1974	DSS	24.6	17.6
1975	BFS	24.0	16.0
1974	Census	24.0	15.9

Sources : DSS - Demographic Surveillance System - Matlab, Census 1974, Scientific Report No.10, Dhaka, Cholera Research Laboratory, March, 1978.

BFS - Bangladesh Fertility Survey, 1975, Ministry of Health and Population Control : Population Control and Family Planning Division, Dhaka: December, 1978.

Census - Bangladesh Population Census Report, 1974, National Volume, Dhaka: Government Printing Press.

Inferior position of women to men can also be seen in Table 4 which presents a wide age difference at the time

marriage between male and female. This wide difference in the age of husband and wife also indicates the dominating power of men resulting in lack of controlling power of women on fertility. However, the lower age at marriage of female is responsible for the higher number of children and longer reproductive period. Marriage at an early age means that the girl is forced to drop out of school to look after the family and its members at a very early age. Since she is 8-10 years junior to her husband, she is unlikely to participate jointly in family decision-making, which is another forceful indicator of status in the family.

Literacy Level :

Table 5 : Numerical and Percentage Distribution of Literate* Population (5 years & over) by Sex and Area, 1974.

Area	Number (in '000)	Percentage
<u>Bangladesh</u>		
Both sexes	14420	24.3
Male	10222	32.9
Female	4198	14.8
<u>Urban</u>		
Both sexes	2356	44.0
Male	1604	52.0
Female	762	33.3
<u>Rural</u>		
Both sexes	12054	22.3
Male	8618	30.3
Female	3436	13.2

* Literacy is defined as the ability to both read and write in mother tongue - Bengali.

Source : Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh: Bangladesh Population Census Report, 1974 National Volume, p.27.

Although the majority of the population in Bangladesh are illiterate, its rate is higher among women than that among men (Table 5). In the census of 1974, literacy rate for female is 14.8% and for male is 32.9%. In urban area female literacy rate is 33.3 per cent in rural area 13.2 per cent. Although the female literacy level in urban area is higher than that in rural area, the women still are lagging far behind the men in literacy both in the urban and rural areas. The data of this table indicates that very few girls have access to education.

Labour force Participation :

Table 6 : Percentage Distribution of Labour force Participation rates according to Pilot Manpower Survey, 1979 (10 years & over).

Characteristics	Area	Both sexes	Male	Female
Economically	National	35.35	62.00	2.31
Active	Rural	36.16	62.64	2.33
Population	Urban	28.71	53.99	2.61

Source : BBS - Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh, 1980, p.456.

It can be observed from the above table that only 2.31 per cent of women aged over 10 years of age, are

economically active while it is 62 per cent for men. The women's participation in labour force during the year 1979 is almost the same in both rural and urban areas in Bangladesh. This low rate indicates that women in Bangladesh are far behind their counterparts with respect to participation in economic activities. This poor participation rate is mostly due to non-recognition of women's activities as productive efforts in household economy as well as other factors discussed earlier.

FACTORS AFFECTING THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN BANGLADESH :

The subordinate position in the low status of women in Bangladesh can be explained in terms of factors which are broadly held responsible for un/underutilization of productive potential of women labour force. Factors such as the prevailing cultural, mythological, and religious restrictions, political and economic conditions are retarding women's participation in development.

Religious and Cultural Restrictions :

In Bangladesh, majority of the womenfolk are Muslims and Hindus constitute the second largest community. They observe 'purdah' in varying degree from puberty or sometimes earlier. But "this purdah is not strictly a muslim phenomenon. The hindu rural gentry also practised it to a

significant extent - in fact even the traditional hindu urban classes did, even if they did not wear the burqa (a garment covering the entire body) (Chaudhury and Raihan, 1980, p.6). The 'purdah' system which is imposed on muslim women by religion implies restrictions on the mobility of women and contact with men outside the home. Observance of 'purdah' is strictly maintained more in rural areas than in urban. In village area very few girls have access to education particularly after primary level. Again the religion 'Islam' "clearly states that men and women have their own spheres of activity - a scheme of functional division in accordance with their respective natural dispositions and inherent physical and physiological qualities and characteristics" (Maududi, A.A., 1968).

Under such prevailing religious system, women who wish to be socially acceptable are not allowed to choose any other role but that of wife and mother. Thus the vast majority of women have to abide by cultural and traditional prescriptions with little chance to leave the confines of their homes for contact with the outside world. The kinship boundaries of the family and the physical limits of the household very much define the world of the average women in Bangladesh.

In traditional Muslim law there is limited polygamy where "a male is allowed to marry upto 4 wives at a time" and he also "may divorce his wife any time without assigning any reason" (Chaudhury and Raihan, 1980, pp.21-22). In Muslim customs and laws, the laws of inheritance are complex. In case of wife, she inherits a fixed share of one eighth of deceased husband's estate whereas the husband inherits a fixed share of one quarter of his deceased wife's estate" (Chaudhury and Raihan, 1980, p.23). Thus the different aspects of the Islamic religion along with its 'purdah' system have kept the women suppressed to men under the same roof.

Social Attitudes :

Besides the religious restriction, the prevailing social attitudes have discouraged women from asserting their rights and these attitudes stand in the way of participation in socio-economic activities outside home. Rural people hold the view that women are likely to lose their chastity if they are to work with them. Under such social order, women in Bangladesh have little access to education and employment. Their activities can only be home-centred. In the subsistence economy of Bangladesh, since men are the principal earning members, they are considered economic assets of the family. For instance, in a village study all male respondents "considered sons as an economic asset but

none had such expectation for the girls" (Chaudhury and Latif, 1975). Now the situation demands that all such negative attitudes, wrong beliefs - should be replaced by positive ones that will encourage women's participation that will bring forth a new era of progress and prosperity.

Political and Economic Condition :

The political and economic condition of nation has an impact on the status of the females. It is impossible to think of a sound nation: without political stability as we cannot think of a sound mind without a sound body. So, where there is a healthy nation there also exists sound female status. Bangladesh is a new nation. After a nine months of blood bath at the cost of the lives of 30 lakh people it has got its independence. The immediate post independence era was marked by chaos and confusion. For a speedy development of a country, a congenial political atmosphere is an essential prerequisite. But unfortunately, since independence there hardly exists any favourable condition of political stability which can create a congenial environment for women's participation in development activities. Frequent change in the Government, unrest among the political parties, the consequent tension in public life instead of fostering national economy, have greatly threatened it. Constant tension in public mind and the consequent

insecurity refrain most of the women, particularly the village women from participating in outside activities. The women often feel insecure and find it disadvantageous to work with concentration in such chaotic atmosphere which often leads to lawlessness.

Although women have right to cast their votes, the rural women especially utterly lack proper judgement in selecting the right candidate due to lack of education and political consciousness. So they are easily exploited and influenced by different unfair ways which is an impediment to democratic government. Sometimes religious ideologies are so politically motivated that they are used to exploit the freedom and rights of women which create reverse effect on socio-economic life of women. Thus due to constant social, cultural, political and economic exploitation the womenfolk remains underutilized and they fail to contribute to the development of the nation.

RECENT TRENDS IN FEMALE LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION
IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT :

Despite the gloomy picture of the status of women outlined above, it is heartening to note that there has been recently an awakening among women themselves regarding their status. They have become conscious and aware about their roles (Indian Express, Oct., 3, 1983). The impact of

this awakening is also noticed among the different organizations at the government and private levels. They have started realizing that speedy development is almost impossible if 50% of human resources constituting the female component of the population of which 90 per cent are located in rural areas is ignored or remain under-utilized. To remove the disparity between men and women which characterizes all levels of Bangladesh society is an absolute prerequisite for widespread integration of women in productive activities. It has, further been felt that women labour participation will not only enhance their status in society but also improve their quality of life. It adds to the income of the family and consequently raises the level of living in the family and thereby of the nation as a whole. It has already been remarked that "in Bangladesh development will necessarily be slowed down unless there is greater emphasis on the proper utilization of rural women labourforce as contributors and participants" (Kabir, K., 1976).

Numerous studies have established the fact that the money in women's hand will be spent for the betterment of their families and will help to raise their levels of living. It has been rightly said that no nation can be prosperous where women and their homes are neglected. No

home can be bright, healthy and happy where the housewife's power, position and prestige - the status as a whole is hampered. Employment, health, education and training can be considered the measures of the status of women. If the unfortunate rural women who are the worst sufferers, are given education and training and provided with adequate food as well as scope to utilize their potentialities, they could hold a powerful position in the family through taking part in decision-making activities inside and outside home on which depend not only the maternal happiness and happiness of home but also much of the prosperity of the country.

DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES FOR WOMEN IN BANGLADESH :

The Government of Bangladesh has recently started giving emphasis to women's development. Besides the Government programmes, a number of voluntary organizations, both locally financed and externally aided, have undertaken the task of special programmes for women's social mobilization raising their social status particularly for the rural women. Many of these organizations, it has been reported, have attained considerable success in bringing the women out of their homes to attend various village level programmes which can be seen in some rural areas where women are engaged in "digging canals for irrigation, removing earth, participating in road construction, breaking bricks,

attending village level programmes, to develop their skill, so that they can improve their income generating capacities (Chaudhury and Raihan, 1980, p.16).

The overall objectives of such organizations is the social and economic upliftment of the rural women by catering to the different functions, viz., functional literacy, vocational training, health, nutrition, family planning, women's co-operatives, market facilities of products, taking social actions against exploitation etc. all of which will increase their participation in income generating activities.

In the following paragraphs a brief description of the function of different organizations has been given.

(1) Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development - BARD :

The pioneering organization for women labour participation in development process in Bangladesh is the 'women's programme' of Bangladesh academy for rural development - (BARD). The first and foremost aim of this project is how to turn the women into more effective and contributing members of their respective families, community and society as a whole. With this view the project launched many programmes in village areas of Comilla district. Village based women's Co-operative Societies have been established in different villages. They offer loan and training to the

village women so that they can utilize this to uplift their level of living. Among training courses, vegetable gardening, food and nutrition, poultry keeping and vaccination, co-operative and accountancy, sewing, weaving etc. are important ones. At present this organization is operating women's development project in 40 villages in Comilla district. Observations show that "changes have occurred in their behaviour pattern, better living, knowledge and attitude towards capital formation and economic activities as well as participation in organized activities (Qadir and Qaddus, 1977, p.31).

(2) Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee - BRAC :

Bangladesh rural Advancement Committee is a private voluntary organization involved in initiating and implementing rural development programmes. Aiming at the major objectives of economic and social upliftment of the disadvantaged rural women, the BRAC has established Jamalpur Women's Programme in 1975 in one small district which is affected by rural backwardness badly. A recent report of BRAC says that on completion of years from 1975 to 1980 of Jamalpur Women's Programme it is apparent from the work done by the women that they have become more conscious and aware about their roles and status. They have claimed that they have been able to "open the eyes of the poor women" (Jamalpur Women's Programmes, Bangladesh; 1980, p.9).

(3) Food for Works Programme (FFW) :

With the objectives of generating employment opportunities for rural women, the Government of Bangladesh with the support of foreign agencies introduced Food for Work Programme throughout the country in 1975. In 1975, 30 per cent of the workers were female; but this figure declined to 5 per cent in 1976 due to a good harvest (UNICEF, Oct., 1977). In this programme in exchange of hard physical labour - digging and reexcavation of canals, building of roads and flood embankments, food in the form of wheat could be earned by those women who came forward to take advantage of this opportunity. An experience with women in Food-for-Work programme by Chen, M. and Ghaznavi, R., revealed that in all the cases studied, the aim and only reason forcing women to seek Food-for-Work employment was economic (Chen & Ghaznavi, 1977). Despite religious restrictions and social disapproval, economic need had forced these women to come out in the open to take up this job. The fact that these women had resorted to work and so eke out a living, bears testimony to the belief that poor women are willing to work (Chaudhury & Raihan, 1980).

(4) Ministry of Women's Affairs :

For the upliftment of the status of women in society, the Bangladesh Government has created, in 1976, a full fledged Ministry of Women's Affairs. To implement this broad objective, several policies have been formulated in

the 2nd Five Year Plan (1980-85). The policies are :

- ensuring a proper atmosphere for women to participate in socio-economic activities;
- expansion of educational opportunities for women for their emancipation and absorption in socio-economic activities;
- creation of more employment opportunities for women.

The Government has declared that 10 per cent of government jobs and 50 per cent posts of primary school teachers are to be reserved for women (Bangladesh Observer, 14 March, 1980).

As rural women are the most disadvantaged groups who have no control over the means of production and distribution, who have no land and assets the 2nd Five Year Plan has, therefore, recognized women as a target group and income generating activities particularly for this group are being given special attention.

(5) Regional Development Academy (RDA) :

This organization is a private voluntary organization. It has been activated for women's social mobilization raising their social status, creating their educational and employment opportunities. Village based co-operative societies have been established. They offer loans and

training to the village women so that they can utilize this to uplift their level of living.

In addition to the above organizations, there are also other organizations, relatively small voluntary organizations which are involved in various women's activities. The improvement of women's productivity and raising the motivation towards family planning are essential objectives of these organizations.

However, empirical evidence needs to be carried out before anything can be said about the impact of the movement of these organizations.

NEED FOR PRESENT RESEARCH :

No doubt, all the policies and programmes for women launched by several organizations are intended to improve the socio-economic condition of women in general and of rural women in particular. But to what extent such programmes have been successful and how far have they been able to change the lot of women ?

An annual progress report of the BARD (1979) says that this project has helped to liberate the potentials of rural women and has been successful in motivating women to participate in various village level programmes. Now the question arises :

- How much have these efforts been able to eradicate the poverty of rural families in general and women in particular, characterized by the lack of access to bare necessities of life ?
- Have they been able to improve the quality of living conditions of rural women ?
- Is their nature of work, condition of work conducive to ensure better living condition to their families?

Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, in their annual report of project (1980), has claimed that it is helping "to open the eyes of the poor women" (JWP).

But to what extent has it helped the women to come out of their shell of social barriers through participation in gainful activities ?

Does gainful employment ensure a better status to the women both within and outside home? Does a working wife or mother command better status in the family by way of having better say in family matters?

Is she being considered for taking family decision on different issues ?

Does she have better control than the unemployed wife over the family finance management ?

Does she have any control over family size ?

Does the employment affect their views, opinions towards different progressive notions, namely, family planning, equality of sexes?

How do the employed women perceive life in comparison to the unemployed women ?

Has her involvement in gainful activities enabled her to take part in community life ?

These are the queries which lack empirical support. Hence, the major objective of the present study is exactly to find answers to the above queries. These findings could serve as vital feedback for improvement of women welfare as it is pointed out that findings of the empirical investigation are of importance in the interest of uniformed planning and administration of development programme (Dube, S.C., 1955).

A review of existing literature on the issue of women's role in development and their status reveals a complete dearth of empirical research with indepth qualitative and quantitative data with the exception of a major study done by Chaudhury, R.H. on women in non-agricultural occupation in a city area in Bangladesh in 1975, and another census type sample survey designed only to collect basic

information from the households of three selected villages in Bangladesh by Islam, R., in 1981. From the women's roles and status point of view, such information could permit limited analysis. Hence, it is obvious that there is a great need for in depth empirical investigation to provide answers to the questions mentioned above as it is quoted by Dube (1955) "in the interest of uniform planning and administration we need a series of concrete baseline studies of village communities in different parts of the community" (p.153).

ROLE OF HOME ECONOMISTS ;

In the task of upliftment of rural women, educational institutions, especially, the school of Home Economics should come forward with fresh programmes, projects and suggestions devoted to the improvement of women's status. They should take the lead and pave the way to further development which will be followed by such other institutions.

Experts in Home Economics can undertake research projects and make significant contributions in this field either individually or collectively because Home Economics is the only field which is mainly concerned with the women - the homemaker and welfare of their family life.

Home Economists equipped with better knowledge of family living will be able to focus on different socio-economic problems of every day life of families, and be able to critically analyse the problems of the rural families. The responsibility of Home Economicsts include not only evaluating and finding out loopholes in programmes but also helping government in formulation, modification and implementation of programmes geared towards upliftment of rural women.

It is worth mentioning here that in 1980, the Government of Gujarat chose the Faculty of Home Science, M.S. University of Baroda (SIP, 1980) as the most suitable expert institution for undertaking a socio-economic investigation in the two Talukas of Baroda district with the major objectives of assessing socio-economic backgrounds of rural women, and devising income-generating activities for these women which would help to raising their level of living.

A similar approach can be emulated in the college of Home Economics in Bangladesh. For more effective implementation of the development programmes, the staff of this college should extend their best possible help and co-operation to government initiatives regarding the upliftment of the rural women which is presently one of the chief concerns of the development of rural Bangladesh.

The foregoing discussion highlights that there is a great necessity for investigation of socio-economic conditions of rural women to provide necessary feedback to the planning, implementing of policies and programmes oriented toward women development in Bangladesh. Hence, the current study with the major objective to investigate the role of rural women labourforce in development and its impact on various aspects of family living has been undertaken.

POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTION OF THE PRESENT STUDY :

Dissemination of the findings on women's role and status as the present one will help womenfolk in general and the rural women in particular to realize that they also, like their male counterparts by actively participating in various economic activities can contribute to the economic development of the family and thereby of the nation as a whole. They would come to learn that they are not supposed to remain confined within the four walls of the homesteads as obedient and dependent wives, but can as well significantly contribute towards boosting the income of the family by making proper use of their unutilized potentials. By exploding the traditional, social and religious myths and superstitions which act as impediments in rural women's participation in outside activities, the study will help to

mobilize them to come forward in practical field with men by breaking the traditional purdah system. Women, as contributors to family economy will naturally feel more involved in family affairs and less dependent on their husbands. This is likely to bring about a remarkable change in and toward the attitude of women. Women themselves will begin to assert their own rights and responsibilities and their counterparts will begin to treat them as partners in their family progress instead of caretakers of kitchen and children. The present study can thus make a humble beginning in the task of raising the status of women in the eyes of family and the society.

The observation that participation of women in various socio-economic activities is a 'sine qua non' for steady development of the country will arouse interest in womenfolk to take active parts in such activities. Findings of the study based on the opinions from the respondents could reveal that women are gradually becoming more and more interested and willing to get employed in outside activities. Keeping this in view, attempts will be made by public and private enterprises to increase existing job, and training and other facilities and to create suitable new ones to engage the willing women.

The present research, as it intends to study the conditions of rural women 'in situ' will take into consideration their background and education, likes and dislikes,

problems and difficulties, and also their willingness or otherwise to participate in outside gainful activities. The results of the study, therefore, will show the way to formulate more effective programme for upliftment of rural women and devise ways and means to ensure their maximum participation in the development process. A root-based study like the present one will make readily available the basic data and information to the planning authority on the basis of which future course of work can be planned.

Further, on studying the family living pattern of the rural women the present research also intends to make some suggestions to improve the lot of these long neglected sections of population. It is assumed that for lack of education, training, knowledge and experience these women are not aware of time saving devices and different ways of making best use of their resources. To improve their skill and efficiency they are to be trained. To impart them basic knowledge in different household, professional and managerial activities and community development, arrangements can be made from time to time by experts of Home economics in the form of seminars, refresher's courses, extension services. Handbooks and pamphlets may be distributed to those who can read, practical demonstration, lectures and discussions may be arranged for those who are unable to read. Successfully implemented, such

measures will increase the efficiency of rural women and consequently, will lead to improvement in the pattern of their living condition. Apart from imparting education, they might be given income generating activities with view that money in a women's hands will be spent for the betterment of the quality of life of their families.

Such a study of multidisciplinary approach as the present one will widen the scope of Home Economics as a social science. Providing guidelines with empirical data it will also enrich the contents of Home Economics courses in Bangladesh. The bulk of Bangladesh comprises rural areas; therefore, contents of education in general and that of Home Economics in particular, should accordingly be adjusted to the needs of these rural masses who form the grass roots of any development programme.

The findings of this research in the form of suggestions from the rural women will help the different organizations to formulate policies and undertake projects to improve the condition of rural women. Development programmes and projects undertaken to suit their temperament and liking will ensure their maximum co-operation and will accordingly improve their lot. If the working conditions of the employed women are improved and if they are paid better remuneration, the rate of female participation in the labour force will automatically increase.

Such attempts as to provide rural women with income generating activities would open up a variety of employment opportunities to the specialists in Home Economics. For instance, it will create scope for Home Economists to work as project workers, social welfare workers, researchers in any development oriented institution or organization and also as expert members of decision-making bodies concerning women's welfare, like bureau of Ministry of Women Affairs. Moreover, with practical experience and with knowledge of Home Economics they can make important suggestions to the Ministry of Planning as expert members.

The information collected by the investigation will provide data base which will fill up the lacunae in research work on women and development as well as encourage other researchers to undertake further ambitious work on rural women development. More such systematic and scientific studies on rural women in different villages of Bangladesh would positively contribute to the total development of the country by accelerating women's participation in economic activities.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES :

The present study focuses on the following specific objectives.

1. To analyze the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the spouses and their households and determine the relative status of women on the basis of these data.
2. To determine the extent of female labour force participation, and study the occupational pattern of the employed and unemployed women.
3. To study the working conditions of the employed women, their satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the work, and identify the determinants of female labour participation (FLP).
4. To study the family behaviour pattern of households in selected areas indicating the status of women in the home and community, and test the relative strength of female labour participation along with 4 other explanatory variables, viz., socio-economic status of the household, family size, religion, and literacy of women.

The indicators selected were :

- (a) decision-making power in the home,
- (b) division of labour in the household responsibilities,
- (c) control over family purse,
- (d) control over fertility,

- (e) participation in community development organization,
 - (f) Perception towards life, and
 - (g) Opinion towards progressive notions namely, small family norm and equality of sex.
5. To study the consumption expenditure pattern of the sample households as a prelude for assessing the strength of female labour force participation on consumption level along with socio-economic status, religion and family size as explanatory variables.
 6. To fit Simple Linear Regression model for deriving parameters of marginal propensity to consume and income elasticity for different groups of food and nonfood items for the entire sample households.
 7. To fit Multiple Stepwise Regression model to the
 - (a) status score of the women, (b) consumption expenditure on different goods and services for assessing the influence of female labour force participation along with other explanatory variables, namely, socio-economic status, religion, literary level, family size.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY :

The scope of the study is limited; it was mainly concerned with the rural women of two villages in Bangladesh. By confining the study to rural women both employed and unemployed, married, widow, divorced or deserted all kinds of women were included in the sample, but, all of them had

family life. The women who had no family life, were excluded from the purview of the study. However, only married women whether living with husband or divorced and their households were included.

Moreover, as the major objective in the present study was to find out the extent and impact of female labour participation on family living, it was necessary that the stratified random sample of households should consist of females of both employed and unemployed categories having a home and family life.

The study was limited to only two villages. Hence, the representativeness of the findings for all rural areas of Bangladesh could be questioned. Though this is an inherent limitation for all such types of empirical investigation, still it is a fact that, there are some fundamental features common among the villagers and their ways of life in Bangladesh. As the proverb says "one needs to test one grain in a pot of rice to know whether the rice in the pot has been properly boiled or not. Similarly, one needs to cast a close look in a village of a country to understand rural socio-economic conditions of that country" (Haque, M.N., 1973, p.2).

ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY :

The organization of the present study is as follows:

Chapter I has introduced the present investigation and its justification through defining and clarifying the concept 'Women and Development' and discussed the status of women in socio-economic and cultural context of Bangladesh.

Chapter II traces a review of existing literature relevant to the present investigation.

Chapter III presents the research design including the methodology and theoretical framework of the study.

Chapter IV deals with the findings and discussion with requisite interpretation. This chapter is divided into three sections. These are: (1) the findings on the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the sample respondents; (2) the extent of female labour force participation and its impact on the status of women in the family and (3) the consumption expenditure pattern of the households.

Chapter V summarizes the whole study and notes the findings. It also suggests some guidelines towards policy implications.