

Language and Gender in Bangladesh: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

The article described the ways in which the Bengali language has been used by a male-dominated society in Bangladesh to oppress and victimize women. This study aimed to develop a deeper understanding of language and gender in Bangladesh. It was also to raise awareness of human rights related to language. A sociolinguistic study of the Bengali language scenario in a Bangladeshi context was presented in the article. This study explained the correlation between women's empowerment and language awareness. This study examined how women are humiliated in a male-dominated Bengali society from a sociolinguistic perspective. This article also discussed how the Bengali language is susceptible to gender insensitivity. In Bangladesh, policymakers and planners of linguistic policies and planning, as well as academicians, may desire to devote additional attention to improving gender-sensitive language in educational and professional settings. According to this study, Bangladeshi is still a gender-sensitive language in terms of Bengali usage.

Keywords: *gender and language, gender sensibility, linguistic inequality, linguistic sexism, male-dominated language*

Introduction

Pettersson (2011) stated that there is a relationship between linguistic gender and the biological characteristics of a referent, but the two are not identical. In a similar manner, the term, gender, is related to, but not identical to, the biological characteristics of an individual, as discussed from a sociocultural perspective during the last three decades. From a feminist perspective, gender is generally understood as a socially constructed concept linked to stereotypes that are mostly negative (p. 61). Language is a fundamental property of communication systems that transmit information using verbal or non-verbal codes. It is significant to note that communication involves the exchange of messages and information between two or more people, with a particular focus on messages. Language is one of the most significant inventions that enables man to transmit knowledge from generation to generation. Language brings people together and contributes to family, society, and political development. Speakers and listeners understand each other's feelings and thoughts through words. Without words, they can express their feelings using body language. Language allows people to understand power struggles and harsh relationships in a materialistic society. A positive atmosphere must be created among people by removing evidence of superiority and repressive ideas from their language to achieve peace and harmony. Language is a governing force in politics, economy, and sociology. Moreover, language rotation from one generation to the next contributes to human development. The way in which a language is spoken can reflect the perspective of a racial group, its attitude towards women, or even the general characteristics of its nation. Human rights are communicated through language, which also brings people together. Social, political, and cultural differences between men and women can sometimes be reflected in language. Words used in the language can contribute to social inequality. Furthermore, such language often prevents men from having a favourable attitude towards women. A growing body of literature investigates how men maintain their dominant position through linguistic behaviour. Furthermore, men become violent towards women and express their anger through them. Consequently, women may not be treated equally in terms of linguistic abilities. In some languages, language is also used to oppress women.

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As stated in the paper, the Bengali language spoken in Bangladesh can be used by men to oppress women. As noted by Yasmeen (2022), gender equality is a topic discussed in every society in the contemporary world. One of the most important areas identified by this equality is the use of language.

The focus of the paper

A central focus of this study is the societal structures and cultural norms of Bangladesh, as well as the use of language—specifically Bengali—as a tool of oppression and victimisation in a male-dominated society. This analysis is conducted in Bangladesh, a South Asian nation that, like other nations in the region, has deep-rooted patriarchal traditions that have a significant impact on societal dynamics. In addition to these traditions, gender relations often favour men, resulting in a society dominated by men. Male dominance does not only restrict women's access to resources and decision-making processes but also penetrates more subtle and pervasive aspects of social interaction, such as language use. According to the study, the Bengali language, spoken by the majority of Bangladesh's population, plays a crucial role in this context.

Language, a means of everyday communication, is not simply an innocent conduit for ideas and thoughts. In contrast, it is capable of serving as a powerful instrument of power and control, capable of establishing, enforcing, and perpetuating social norms and hierarchies. As a result, this argument is consistent with the concept of linguistic sexism, which suggests that language can reflect and reinforce traditional gender roles. In Bangladesh, Bengali language usage by the male majority often degrades, belittles, and victimises women, reinforcing patriarchal structures and gender inequality. As a result, discriminatory terminology, degrading idioms, and proverbs, as well as the normalisation of derogatory language towards women, may manifest.

In short, this study examines the intersection of language and gender in Bangladesh, examining how the Bengali language may reinforce gendered power structures and victimise women in a predominantly male-dominated society. Consequently, it sheds light on the sociolinguistic aspects of gender inequality in Bangladesh and potentially in other countries as well.

Methodology

A comprehensive and systematic methodology is used in this study based on the examination of secondary data, with the primary focus being on a thorough literature review. Secondary data refers to data that has been collected and compiled by other researchers or institutions in the past. Prior research studies, reports, articles, and online resources frequently contain this type of data. The use of secondary data offers the advantage of gaining access to a wide range of information and perspectives without having to invest significant time and resources in collecting primary data.

A comprehensive and diversified literature review was conducted in this study to ensure a well-rounded examination of the topic at hand. Peer-reviewed academic articles as well as reports available on websites were used for this review. In order to identify the most relevant sources, the researchers used prominent academic search engines, such as Google Scholar and ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center), which are either hosted by EBSCO or CSA. Scholarly articles are available on these platforms, allowing researchers to access information that is of high quality, reliable, and peer-reviewed.

The search process was enhanced by using specific keywords, such as *language* and *gender*. This research objective closely aligns with these terms and may yield pertinent scholarly work on the intersection of language and gender, particularly in a sociocultural context. In spite of the fact that most of the information utilised is secondary, it is acknowledged that the information is derived from a combination of primary and secondary sources. The term primary source refers to first-hand evidence or data that has not been interpreted or analysed by others, whereas secondary sources provide interpretations or analyses of these primary sources. This study takes a multifaceted approach to understanding how language is used to reinforce gender roles and biases in a patriarchal society by combining both types of sources. The methodology of this study is based on a rigorous literature review of secondary sources, which was sourced from reliable academic databases using relevant keywords. The approach ensures a thorough understanding of the topic by grounding the analysis in existing research.

Discussions and Findings

According to Kloch (2000), during the 1970s and 1980s, feminist linguistics frequently critiqued the language system. The argument was based on observations regarding the category of grammatical gender, which is the most obvious expression of gender differences and is present in most languages. Languages where grammatical gender corresponds to natural gender allow for profound speculation or interpretation when their sexes are treated asymmetrically. For too long, language was dominated by men who did not adhere to gender neutrality and sought to maintain power over the opposite sex. This was seen as a sign of a sexist attitude towards language itself. A feature of the language system governing the thinking and world of language was sexuality (p. 47). Historically, feminists have claimed that sexist language can have significant consequences for gender relations and the relative status of men and women (Jennifer *et al.*, 2012). In recent research, it has been demonstrated that grammatical gender can affect how people interpret the world around them in terms of gender (Boroditsky, 2009). Generally speaking, sexist language is established by implying that men and women are not equal. According to Trask (2004), language is sometimes intentionally or consciously patronizing or contemptuous towards a sex, usually women. In addition, a male-dominated society discriminates against women in many ways. The problem is caused by misconceptions about women. Nilsen (2007) conceptualized language and society as a chicken and egg phenomenon. Language is a reflection of a society's values and beliefs. Language is often used to discriminate based on sexual orientation in society. According to Sultana (2021), language is one of the most powerful tools for lifting someone up or bringing them down. In addition to being a medium of expression, language is also a medium of exploitation, discrimination, and torture. Furthermore, people's social status has been determined by the choice and application of words throughout history. She also added that, as language reflects society's attitudes, how women are viewed by a society can be determined by the type of language used towards them.

Exploring the interplay between language and gender has yielded a rich body of research, unearthing the complex ways in which language both mirrors and shapes societal gender norms. Spender (1980) laid the groundwork for understanding language as a cultural construct in her work. She argued that language reflects and reinforces societal norms and structures, including gender. In doing so, she contended that language often perpetuates patriarchal power dynamics and assigns a subordinate status to women. Investigations into the distinctive ways that different genders use language have also been a subject of focus. Tannen (1990) discussed the distinct communication styles of men and women. She found that women often use language as a tool for creating relationships and connections, while men tend to use language to assert dominance. The literature has also closely examined the relationship between language, power, and gender. Penelope (1990) proposed that language is a primary means of maintaining power differentials in society. She suggested that these power dynamics, deeply embedded within language, can marginalize and silence women, emphasizing the political implications of language use.

Building upon Butler's (1990) theories of gender performativity, some scholars maintain that language plays a crucial role in performing and constructing gender identities. Gender is not an inherent attribute but a socially constructed category that is performed and reinforced through language and behavior. In recent years, the impact of digital media on the intersection of language and gender has garnered increasing attention. Language used in online spaces can perpetuate gender stereotypes, with men typically dominating conversations and women often objectified. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2013) further contributed to this body of research by illustrating how individuals use language to construct their identities. They contended that language is not simply a reflection of one's gender but is instrumental in shaping gendered identities. Additionally, Beeching (2014) investigated the ways in which pragmatic particles are used differently by men and women in French, offering linguistic evidence of gendered language use.

These works demonstrate how language and gender are intricately intertwined. Language plays an active role in the construction and perpetuation of societal gender norms and power dynamics. Digital communication presents new challenges and opportunities for further exploration in this field.

Correlation between women's empowerment and language

In both developed and developing countries, women's empowerment is widely discussed. Policymakers realise that without women's development, sustainable development is impossible. Women should be empowered to be themselves by awakening their own inner power. There is a close relationship between women's empowerment and language. This is when they discover their talents and strengths and use them for their own development. Language has a significant impact on women's subordinate positions.

The only way to empower women is to free them from linguistic discrimination. It is significant to note that language development is closely related to national history. Language possesses a lot of power. Language allows people to express themselves through objects or things. Language represents people's perception, thinking, and learning, such as their minds. The use of language makes thinking more concrete, clarifies its conception, etc. People's conceptions and images of women are shaped by their senses, daily experiences, and linguistic languages. Language plays a significant role in the generation of contemplative ideas about women. Women are constructed using language in the manner in which people view them. Men and women use language to describe each other, shaping their perceptions of each other. For centuries, women have been restricted by language frameworks. Languages subjugated and enslaved their existence. The Bengali language presents women as weak, powerless, and helpless. For example, words such as brave, ambitious, strong, or strong are typically used to praise men. Mannan (2018) states that the word *Paurusha* [heroic character] is well known to denote male courage. However, there is no such word to describe the courage of women because women being heroic is unthinkable in a society dominated by men.

According to Raju(2022), in the Bangladeshi society, the limited familial, social, and economic autonomy experienced by women is directly linked to their lack of vocal freedom or linguistic autonomy. Likewise, men perpetrate linguistic violence against women, just as they subject them to physical abuse. Men have developed a unique lexicon aimed at demeaning, devaluing, and degrading women through the use of obscene, unspeakable, and derogatory language. This language exemplifies the linguistic oppression they exercise over women. Such derogatory linguistic choices erect obstacles for women, reinforcing gender inequalities.

Women are praised for their taciturnity, shyness, forbearance, etc. A woman is weaker than a man as a result of these praise words. As a result of incorporating all these qualities, society aims to maintain the dependency and weakness of women. It appears that the words reflect a prejudice against women who raise their heads. In the Bengali language, women are portrayed in an unrespectable light.

The dominance of masculine power over language is explained by three feminists, including Helen Sisu, Louis Irigaray, Judith Butler, and Julia Kristiva. In the first part, they discuss language politics. They demonstrate that in patriarchal societies, men control the power structure and, on top of that, they wish to dominate women through language. They want a neutral division of words or a two-way division in which men and women exist in an equal power structure. Women need an image worthy of respect. There should be a linguistic environment where women are respected. Women must be treated with respect instead of demeaning language. Language must be used correctly to create women's social status. Women's empowerment will also be accelerated and realised through language. To overcome women's inferiority complex, significant linguistic changes are required. Women often need to free themselves from their linguistic confinement. Studying language, gender, and power in Bengali, Sultana (2021) found that language, however, is one of the most powerful tools for perpetuating gender discrimination in society. Power politics are entwined with the choice of words and the use of language. In other words, language should not be regarded as a mere vocabulary. Furthermore, she added that the slang words in Bengali in Bangladesh that are often used in daily life clearly maintain the patriarchal hierarchy.

Sexism and Bengali language:

Intersectionality between sexism and language is an area of intensive study within the field of linguistics, whose implications extend to intersecting fields such as sociology, cultural studies, and gender studies. It requires an examination of the linguistic mechanisms that reflect, shape, and perpetuate sociocultural norms and biases, thereby revealing the embedded sexism within language structures and usages. A central element of this investigation is the examination of the linguistic manifestations of sexism, both subtle and overt. In addition, the use of male generics, which subtly reinforce patriarchal dominance, disparate terminologies for men and women, which place women in inferior or subservient roles, and gendered connotations are also prevalent. Each of these contributes to the perpetuation of gender-based stereotypes and the reinforcement of traditional gender roles, potentially leading to the marginalisation or diminishment of certain demographic groups. Moreover, sexism in language is not simply a matter of identifying and analysing problematic linguistic structures. A significant segment of this scholarly discourse explores language as a tool for challenging sexist paradigms. Language shifts may contribute to greater gender equality, inclusiveness, and respect.

The study of sexism and language is an ongoing intellectual endeavour. The impact of digital communication platforms and social media on the evolution of language use and gender norms is largely unexplored. Language and its usage are constantly reshaped by these modern mediums, creating a significant potential impact. The study of sexism and language is an intellectually rigorous, nuanced, and essential subject. An understanding of the power and influence of language, along with a commitment to furthering the discourse on this topic, are essential. The pursuit of gender equality extends to all aspects of life, including linguistic choices and communication styles.

The word *bessha* [prostitute] originates from the Sanskrit word *baissbo*. Businessmen were known as *Baissbo* in ancient times. There was a lot of honour associated with the title. Now, it refers to women who earn their living by having sex with men in the Bengali language. Society deems women to be *rakshitas* when they are kept by men exclusively for their entertainment. When men keep women for their own entertainment, they are considered powerful and lordly. There is an element of shame associated with these words when *rakshitas* and *baissho* are used by women.

Bengali words are used the same way in masculine society. As an example, *Noti* refers to a dancer. Bengali female dancers are called *Nortokior Noti* in Bengali. Sometimes, it is interpreted as disrespect. Male dancers are treated differently from female dancers linguistically. Moreover, Mannan (2018) stated that criminal activity has always been more prevalent among men than women in Bangladeshi society. Consequently, most languages created to address criminals are male-centric. A few examples are '*mastan*', '*gonda*', '*dakat*', '*Juari*', '*chhintaikari*', '*santrashi*', '*pasisakti*', and so on. He added that though some girls have been involved in these crimes recently, the words and phrases used usually refer to males, and there is no equivalent word for females.

In his essay on the *Banglaynarir bhasha* [language of women in Bengali], Sukumar Sen, as cited in Raju (2022) and Urmi (2017) has elucidated certain words that signify the societal dynamics between men and women. These lexemes, namely '*onadishti*', '*lakshnichhara*', '*antokuro*', '*ari*', '*adikhyeta*', '*kutni*', '*kebenta*', '*gadi*', '*gumra*', '*ga*', '*chhiri*', '*thomak*', '*dhan*', '*demak*', '*nyaka*', '*poyati*', '*biyen*', '*kutti*', '*minse*', '*rand*', '*randi*', '*seyna*', '*somatta*', '*sobag*', '*soi*' and many others serve as indicators of gender-based roles and statuses in society. The Bengali language employs certain phrases and verb phrases that are specific to women and highlight their unique characteristics. These phrases, such as '*Kacha boyes*', '*Kochi kbuki*', '*Koler chbele*', '*Chokberbali*', '*Dante bish*', '*Nonirputul*', '*Nadir tan*', '*Peter chbele*', '*Matbar divyi*', '*Ranga bou*', '*Handir khabar*', '*Patakuroni*', '*Jhograte*', '*Sate panchenathaka*', and '*Sat panchbhara*' etc., provide insight into the social norms and expectations surrounding women. Additionally, verb phrases like '*Jhetiyebidey kora*', '*Baner jolebbasa*', '*Biye phulphota*', '*Mukbekhoiphota*', '*Handitesthandeya*', '*Kende hat basano*', '*Soi patano*', '*Paka chulesindurpora*', '*Handi thela*', '*Porermukhejhalkhanya*', and '*Matba kota*' etc., further emphasize the gendered language and roles in Bengali society.

Men have much more access to the outside world than domestic women in Bangladesh, so their language has a richer vocabulary. It was once forbidden for women to utter certain words in Bangladesh in accordance with local culture. It was also customary for men not to speak certain words in front of women. Bengali women in Bangladesh did not pronounce their husband's, father-in-law's, or brother-in-law's names with their mouths but used other words. Women tend to use sign language among themselves. Similarly, when one or two women are present, men no longer speak the same language among themselves. It is the same for women. In addition, some insulting words or abusive language are reserved for men only. In Bengali, there are also different types of such words for women.

Bengali Slang words and women

A purpose of slang, according to Croft (2000), is to avoid social taboos, since conventional language tends to hide certain realities. Due to this fact, slang words tend to be rich in certain domains, such as violence, crime, drugs, and sex. It is common for Bengali slang to focus on the humiliation of women. These words are passed down from generation to generation in Bangladesh. Women are frustrated, embarrassed, humiliated, and slandered when dirty words are used against them. Even though the dirty word *motherchud* [motherfucker] is spoken about in Bengali, it is now a common phrase. Motherhood and women are both insulted by the use of this dirty word. There is no hesitation in using insulting slang terms against women. As a result of male dominance over women, people use slang about women. The Bengali language places men in a more dignified position linguistically than women.

A number of abusive words are used in Bengali, including *atkopali*, *Kora mal*, *keulta*, *gamla*, *jinish*, *batabilebu*, *rosogolla*, *luchi*, *tomato sauce*, *dulkikbanki*, *chinal*, *magi*, *potita*, *avicharini* and so on to insult women and womanhood. The Bengali people often address women in a derogatory manner as a way of expressing their displeasure with or abuse towards them. Bengali slang is often used to describe women offensively. Women are oppressed and dehumanized by

the male gender. A wide range of words for women are common, such as *shakchunni* [witch] and a variety of negative words used exclusively for females, but none of these words have an equivalent masculine term. There has been an introduction to all of these words by men. There is no masculine equivalent to the words *kamini*, *bhamini*, *mabila*, *angana*, *ramani*, and *lalna*, which are used for women. Due to the economic dominance of men in society, women have been socially marginalized in many ways. As a result of the injustice committed by men, women are burdened with the burden of linguistics. This negative attitude towards women hinders their advancement and self-confidence. As a result, masculine societies degrade women and distance them from economic, social, and political activities, rights, and power. Women in masculine societies are urged to use humane words and expressions towards them.

According to Raju's (2022) study, the term "eve-teasing" has developed into a form of verbal harassment and nuisance directed towards women. The manipulation of food items, fruits, musical instruments, and weapons is employed to linguistically oppress women. For instance, the use of phrases such as "*rose bhorakomola*" [juicy orange], "*tight mal*" [tight good], "*kochi dab*" [young coconut], "*etombom*" [atom bomb], "*mishititenu*" [sweet tamarind], "*tanpura*" [stringed instrument], "*garirchasis*" [car's chassis], "*double dekar*" [double-decker], "*golap jam*" [rose jamun], "*kompanir mal*" [company's product], "*magir garage boro*" [girl's garage is big], "*kalinagini*" [black serpent], "*kashbon*" [cluster of shrubs or a small wooded area], "*kochimal*" [young good], "*India gate*" [India Gate], "*jambura*" [grapefruit], "*golapiapel*" [pink apple], and others, is used to harass women, while also inappropriately and indecently comparing various parts of a woman's body to these objects. These representations are heavily imbued with sexuality, lust, and vulgarity.

Within the context of Bangladeshi media practices, the frequent and in-depth coverage of sexual assault incidents appears to be a calculated strategy to enhance audience engagement and increase readership. This tactic seems to resonate with the public, indicating an underlying societal interest or concern in these reports, a factor that underscores the significant influence that journalistic language and narrative construction have in shaping public opinion. Different sectors of the populace respond differently to these reports.

Some individuals, moved by empathy and concern, may use these reports as catalysts for advocacy or action against sexual violence. Others may be involved in the journalistic process itself, meticulously documenting these cases in an attempt to bring them to the forefront of public attention. There are also those who follow these stories to stay informed about societal issues and incidents of crime.

However, the manner in which sexual assault is reported and discussed carries additional implications, particularly for survivors of such violence. It is essential to recognize that the language used in this context can perpetuate stigmatization and feelings of humiliation. The words chosen, the framing of the incident, and even the discussion surrounding it can inadvertently remind survivors of their trauma, thus complicating their healing process. This reality underscores the complex intersectionality of language and sociopolitical dynamics. The ways in which media outlets choose to represent sexual violence not only shape public perception but also have a profound impact on survivors and how they navigate their experiences. This issue warrants critical analysis, and it urges media outlets to exercise sensitivity and responsibility in their reporting, potentially promoting more respectful dialogue and attitudes towards sexual assault survivors.

Bengali has been characterized by gender discrimination throughout its history. Schools and colleges in Bangladesh organize a wide variety of sports. There is also evidence of linguistic discrimination. The boys compete in high jump, long jump, and long run, while the girls are not permitted to participate in these sports. Games such as pillow passing, musical chairs, and *kanamachiachi* [a female sport] are played by girls. There has been an increase in the number of women participating in a variety of sports in recent years. A few examples include football, cricket, hockey, volleyball, etc. Bangladeshi people, however, refer to cricket and football as cricket and football when men play them. Women play these games in Bengali called *promila football*, *promilakriket*, and *promilaboki* instead of football, cricket, or hockey. By using these types of words, masculine society portrays women's participation in these sports as less significant. Moreover; a boy who expresses his feelings in a girl's way will be looked down upon by other boys. People who express their feelings in a manner that is similar to that of a girl are bullied as half-men. Generally, people's minds are constructed in such a way that boys cannot express their feelings as well as girls or behave as delicately as girls. Women's speaking styles are traditionally determined by masculine societies.

This has resulted in their inability to think freely. According to Alam's (2020) research, it is common for parents to caution their children with phrases such as "Boys don't do it" and "Girls don't do it". Furthermore, societal norms dictate that women who exhibit behavior typically associated with men are subject to humiliation. Gender-based social discrimination leads to gender-based language discrimination in Bangladesh.

Bengali proverbs and women

This paper examines the treatment of women in Bengali society, focusing on their portrayal as machines for production. It explores the role of Bengali proverbs in describing gender roles and investigates how proverbs provide valuable insights into the cultural, folkloric, and traditional aspects of Bengali society. Additionally, the study investigates the prevalence of disrespectful images and figures of women, along with the perpetuation of stereotypes portraying women as weak, dependent, crooked, and lazy. Through a formal academic analysis, this research aims to shed light on the gender dynamics and inequalities present in Bengali society today.

Women's treatment within societies often reflects deep-seated gender inequalities and biases. This paper delves into the treatment of women in Bengali society, highlighting their portrayal as machines for production. Furthermore, it examines the role of Bengali proverbs as a means of conveying gender roles and providing insights into the cultural fabric of society. Additionally, the study addresses the prevalence of disrespectful images and figures of women and the perpetuation of negative stereotypes. Understanding these dynamics is essential for comprehending the nuances of gender relations in contemporary Bengali society.

The treatment of women as machines for production reveals a societal perspective that predominantly values women for their productivity rather than recognizing their individual agency and autonomy. This devaluation and objectification of women perpetuate gender inequalities and hinder progress towards gender equity. Bengali proverbs serve as a powerful medium for capturing and conveying societal expectations and perceptions of gender roles. By analyzing these proverbs, researchers can gain valuable insights into the traditional roles assigned to women and men within Bengali society. The examination of proverbs enables a deeper understanding of cultural values, beliefs, and customs that shape gender dynamics and influence social interactions.

Proverbs act as a cultural repository, reflecting the historical and social fabric of a community. In the Bengali context, they provide rich insights into the cultural, folkloric, and traditional aspects of society. By studying these proverbs, researchers can decipher the norms, values, and attitudes surrounding gender, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of contemporary Bengali society. The prevalence of disrespectful images and figures of women underscores the presence of gender biases within Bengali society. These depictions often lack respect and reinforce negative stereotypes associated with women. Women are frequently stereotyped as weak, dependent, crooked, and lazy. Such stereotypes perpetuate gender inequality and hinder efforts towards achieving gender justice and empowerment.

The treatment of women as machines for production, as reflected in Bengali proverbs, reveals underlying gender inequalities within society. Bengali proverbs provide valuable insights into cultural values, folklore, and traditions, aiding in the comprehension of present-day Bengali society. The prevalence of disrespectful images and the perpetuation of stereotypes further highlight the need for challenging and transforming gender biases to foster a more equitable and inclusive society. By critically examining these aspects, scholars and policymakers can work towards promoting gender equality and empowering women within Bengali society. The table below explains some proverbs and their meanings.

Table 1: The Bengali proverbs about men and women and their meaning.

Bengali proverbs	Extensive meaning and comments
<i>Porush ragle boy badsha, nari ragle boy bessha</i> [If a man becomes angry, he is a king; If a woman becomes angry, she is a prostitute.]	In men, anger is a virtue, but in women, it is detrimental. Women will be referred to as <i>Bessha</i> [prostitute] by the society.
<i>lozza nareer vbushon</i> [Shyness is the ornament of women.]	In general, women are considered to be more shy and introverted than men.
<i>porusber bol taka, nareer bol shakha</i> [Money is the power of men, the power of women is to be a wife.]	The power of men is derived from money. With the help of their money power, men are now able to accomplish anything in society. There is a lack

	of economic empowerment among women. In most cases, they do not have any rights to their property. Due to this, they are dependent on men for their livelihoods.
<i>ovagar goru mor,e vaggobaner bou more</i> [Cows die when a man is unfortunate; wife dies when a man is fortunate.]	When a woman dies, it is considered a blessing for men. He will therefore be able to marry again. There are many ways in which society treats women in a pathetic manner.
<i>Baap ka beta</i> [Father is the icon of his son]	The society recognizes that man is the holder of the evolution of heredity. However, women do have children. Women are considered to be the only machines used in production (for the purpose of giving birth to children). Men deserve to be regarded as the idols of their sons.
<i>Nao, ghora ,nari je chore tar -e</i> [Boat, horse and women are the products of those who use them.]	Women are not different from objects or animals in any way. Since they are like objects and animals, they do not have a choice. As a result, everything will be dependent on the men. Society defines duty according to its masculine values. It is not possible for women to make their own decisions regarding their lives, nor can they refuse to protest or scream.
<i>Songsar sukher hoy romonir ghune, romoni sundor hoy sotitto rokbone</i> [The beauty of a home depends on the women; the beauty of a woman depends on her morality.]	According to the proverb, the following statement can be made: The role of women will be limited to domestic activities only. It is believed that women have been blessed with this virtue. This proverb is used by masculine societies to suppress the economic empowerment of women. Furthermore, it states that education is not appropriate for women and that it is their responsibility to remain at home at all times.
<i>Kothai kotha bare, mothone, bare ghee; Baape pot baray, ma baray jhi</i> [Words increase words, churning increases clarified butter; Father is responsible for the birth of son, mothers are for daughter.]	This proverb misrepresents the scientific explanation of sexual chromosomes. There are two X chromosomes in the cells of women, while there are both X and Y chromosomes in the cells of men. The chromosome determines the biological sex of a child. X chromosomes are contributed by women everywhere. Males produce their Y chromosomes during reproduction, which results in male children. It is known that a female is born when a male contributes his X chromosome. However, according to this Bengali proverb, women are held responsible for birthing girls.
<i>Nareer mon esshore o bujbte pare na</i> [God cannot read the minds of women.]	Every human heart is untouchable. Women are, however, suppressed and portrayed in complex and dubious situations because people use such words and terms only to refer to them.

<i>Meye manusher kotha bad dao</i> [Skip what the women say.]	According to the proverb, society disregards the knowledge and wisdom of women. As a result of this negative attitude toward women, society considers women's thoughts and feelings unreliable.
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Source: Author's collection

Women in Bengali Literature: The Power of Language

The comprehensive examination of literature affords a perspective from which one may comprehend the intricacies of the society from which it emerges. The focal point of inquiry in this study is Bengali literature, which, akin to any other literature, presents a meticulous analysis of societal conventions, cultural principles, and prejudices that are deeply ingrained within Bengali society through its abundant repertoire of stories, poems, and plays. Bengali literature holds a profound significance beyond mere entertainment or artistic expression, serving as a repository of cultural, social, and historical strata that constitute the very essence of Bengali society. Its narratives convey not only tales but also encapsulate the spirit of various epochs. Each literary composition encodes within its text the collective psyche, aspirations, struggles, and transformations of its people.

The core of this written portrayal is the writer's perception of communal expectations. Writers intentionally or unintentionally weave societal norms, biases, and practices into the fabric of their works. These are discernible in various aspects of the literary piece, from the overarching narrative structure and thematic undertones to the development of characters and progression of the plot. For instance, shifts in political ideologies or religious beliefs are reflected in Bengali literature. While literature mirrors society, it can also reinforce societal biases unintentionally. If prevailing norms favour a particular demographic, literature might mirror and magnify these preferences. Consequently, central characters or protagonists may predominantly belong to this privileged group, receiving more favourable or multifaceted portrayals. Such unintentional amplification of biases can lead to the normalization of these prejudices, particularly among young and impressionable readers.

It is particularly important to provide readers with the essential tools to critically analyse literature. This goes beyond understanding the plot, but it involves delving deeper into the underlying themes, biases, and representations. By interrogating literature, readers can discern societal portrayals, both commendable and problematic. Literature possesses an inherent power that extends beyond mere representation, as it has the capacity to challenge and transform societal norms. Through literary analysis, both readers and writers can engage in the contestation and redefinition of established norms. For instance, if Bengali literature has historically perpetuated gender stereotypes, modern-day writers have the ability to redefine these narratives by crafting stories that subvert convention and champion inclusivity. This, in turn, establishes new societal benchmarks. Moreover, readers can impact the literary world through their preferences and endorsements, thus steering it towards more egalitarian and progressive directions. While literature reflects the essence of society, it also holds the potential to be a change-maker, serving not only as a mirror of societal nuances but also as a beacon directing societal evolution. The biases and norms presented in literature are not immutable; with critical examination and conscious efforts, they can be reshaped, making literature a potent catalyst for societal advancement.

According to Muslima (2018), there has been a significant transformation in the role and representation of women in literature, leading to debates about the stylistic choices of female authors. It is worth noting that the manner in which women writers break conventional norms regarding language and thematic content has raised concerns among established literary figures. Paradoxically, certain expressions that are acceptable when penned by male authors become controversial when adopted by female writers. This double standard often results in undue speculations regarding the personal lives of these women authors, revealing deep-seated gender biases in the literary domain. The societal perception, which occasionally applauds women for matching supposedly male writing standards, further underscores the entrenched patriarchal attitudes in literary critiques.

According to Juthi (2022), literary scholars utilize imagination and experience to create literature. However, these authors are often categorized into gender labels, with men being simply referred to as "authors" and women as "female authors".

This distinction and the ensuing discussions delve deeply into the historical and societal aspects that perpetuate gender biases, particularly in literature. Advocating for change, the narrative highlights the profound influence of societal attitudes on literary representation and critiques.

Gender-Insensible Terms, Phrases, and Proverbs: The Bengali Language in Bangladesh

The Bengali language, with its rich and expansive linguistic tradition, has recently been the focal point of extensive research with regard to gender sensitivity. This study explores the considerable shift observed in the Bengali language within Bangladesh from gender-biased terms to more gender-insensible language. The conventional lexicon of Bengali has long been populated with terms, phrases, and proverbs exhibiting marked gender bias. Such language has been employed without hesitation in daily communication, reflecting the deeply entrenched gender norms in society. This paper argues that such gender-insensitive terminology has significant implications for the maintenance and perpetuation of gender inequality in social structures and attitudes.

Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge the recent advancements made towards dismantling gender biases within the Bengali language. Today, there is an increasing trend towards favouring and popularising gender-neutral terminology over its gender-specific counterparts. This shift not only acknowledges the growing recognition of gender diversity but also holds the potential to subtly reshape societal attitudes and perceptions regarding gender roles and identities. A clear example of this shift is evident in the replacement of the traditional terms for student—*chhatra* [boy student] and *chhatri* [girl student]—with the neutral terms *Shiksharthi* and *purua*. Similarly, in a professional context, the patriarchal term *sovaapoti* [chairman] is gradually being phased out in favour of the more gender-neutral term *sovaprodhan* [chairperson]. Moreover, according to Begum's (2021) research, the term *purushjounokormi* [male sex worker] has been utilized in official national policy papers, research papers, and various other government and non-governmental documents for many years, despite not being present in the Bengali dictionary. This is a working term, used in a professional context, and as such, it has become an accepted term. Recently, the term *purushbeshya* [male prostitute] has been introduced in contemporary stories and novels. However, the tendency of the public to hurl abuse at women using such terms suggests that it may not be surprising if these same terms are soon used to verbally abuse men.

Finally, the Bengali language in Bangladesh is in the process of undergoing a significant shift towards the adoption of gender-insensitive terms. This linguistic evolution mirrors the larger societal progression towards gender equality and inclusivity. It is crucial that this transformation continue to be monitored and encouraged to ensure the Bengali language evolves to reflect the diverse and equitable society it represents.

The correlation between women's empowerment and language awareness

Language awareness and women's empowerment are interconnected in several ways. Understanding this correlation involves considering how language is used, represented, and understood in society, as well as how it can be harnessed to bring about change. An important component of any nation or ethnicity is its language, which is deeply ingrained in its origin, evolution, and use. Language development often parallels the historical advancement of the nation it is associated with. An individual's consciousness can be energised and shaped by the boundless power of language, or it can be extinguished, reducing it to nonexistence through the same power. A language serves primarily as a medium for the expression of thoughts, in which a series of symbols are used to express our comprehension and intentions.

The use of language facilitates the projection of emotions and perceptions towards subjects or objects, thereby creating a visual representation replete with symbolism. This contributes significantly to the cognitive understanding and reflection of individuals. In fact, one's perception of any entity is shaped by the lens of language.

In offering clarity and accuracy to our cognitive process, language creates a lasting mental image, which makes it difficult to break free from its influence. The way in which people conceptualize women is influenced by their daily interactions and the way in which language portrays them. Consequently, language plays an important role in the formation of sociocultural concepts associated with women. In the same way that language creates mental images, it also creates representations of women in our cognitive realm, from which disassociation is difficult.

Similarly, people interpret the language associated with women in a variety of ways, much like they interpret the language of history, science, or literature. Observing the language that is used to describe women provides us with insight into their social positions. Essentially, language determines how women manifest themselves in one's cognitive realm.

A person's conceptions of women are greatly influenced by the language they use when describing them, which implies that people's perceptions of women are greatly influenced by the language they use to describe them. Evidently, the language associated with women provides insight into their identity, characteristics, and the social norms that determine their place within society. Therefore, language-induced perceptions and thoughts are often the root cause of gender-based discrimination. In the past, women have been ensnared by the restrictive and oppressive aspects of language. As a result, their existence has been undermined, and their potential has been limited. Through its systemic portrayal of women as inferior, language has perpetuated an image of vulnerability and helplessness in women. (see Nahar, 2013 and many others)

a) Representation: Utilizing inclusive language can have a transformative impact on cultural standards, empowering individuals and promoting equity. For instance, gender-biased language reinforces stereotypes and undermines women's status in society. Women's empowerment necessitates understanding these biases and working towards their rectification. Historically, numerous languages have used masculine forms as the default, employing *he* to refer to an unspecified person or professions ending in *-man* (e.g., fireman, chairman), thus reinforcing the notion that men are the norm and women are the exception. A language awareness campaign may strive to promote gender-neutral terms, such as firefighter and chairperson, to challenge these norms and represent women more equitably.

b) Communication and Advocacy: Empowerment frequently entails expressing viewpoints, exchanging ideas, and promoting rights and transformation. Proficiency in language and consciousness can augment these activities, allowing women to communicate their thoughts more persuasively, substantiate their arguments, and expand their audience. Furthermore, language awareness can facilitate the identification and confrontation of oppressive or discriminatory discourse. The #MeToo movement provides a significant illustration of this association. Women from all corners of the world employed this hashtag to disseminate their encounters with sexual harassment and assault, thereby heightening worldwide awareness of the issue. They skilfully utilized language to champion for change, both in terms of shared experiences and appeals to action.

c) Education: Proficiency in language is a critical component of education, which, in turn, is an established contributor to the empowerment of women. Females who possess proficiency in the official or dominant language of their region enjoy greater access to education, are better equipped to comprehend and assert their rights, and are more likely to actively engage in societal affairs. Furthermore, language awareness incorporates an understanding of language's cultural, political, and social implications, which represents an integral aspect of comprehensive education. In numerous countries, the language of instruction may not correspond with the primary language of many students, thereby restricting their educational opportunities. In such contexts, instruction in the dominant language, coupled with an emphasis on multilingualism, can facilitate the education of girls and assist them in comprehending their rights. For instance, the teaching of English in rural areas of India has empowered numerous girls, enabling them to complete their education and access superior opportunities.

d) Inclusion and Participation: The act of empowerment is comprised of social, political, and economic participation, each of which is integral to its success. Language plays a pivotal role in women empowerment. Bangladesh is known for having Bengali (Bangla) as its most commonly spoken and official language. Women with proficient Bangla skills can actively participate in social, economic, and political activities, enabling them to shape their own lives. For example, Bangladeshi women who are fluent in Bangla have greater opportunities to secure employment in both public and private sectors, participate in local community meetings, and communicate effectively with healthcare providers or educators without facing language barriers. In addition, proficiency in Bangla is essential for women seeking to engage in labour rights dialogues and understand workplace instructions within Bangladesh's rapidly growing garment industry, which is predominantly female-driven. Moreover, females who possess an adeptness in the English language are presented with a higher probability of obtaining occupation with multinational enterprises situated in Bangladesh.

e) Cultural Expression and Identity: The intrinsic link between language and cultural identity and expression is a well-established fact. For women, a profound understanding of their language can facilitate creative expression, preserve their cultural lineage, and enrich cultural diversity. Moreover, such an understanding can serve as a conduit for psychological empowerment, reinforcing their sense of belonging and self-worth. In the culturally rich

tapestry of Bangladesh, indigenous groups such as the Chakma, Marma, and Santal each possess their unique linguistic flavours.

For example, indigenous women belonging to these groups have made a significant impact by preserving and promoting their ancestral languages and traditions. A case in point is the Chittagong Hill Tracts where indigenous women have spearheaded initiatives such as cultural festivals, folkloric song renditions, and traditional storytelling, all rooted in their vernacular. By actively promoting and engaging with these languages, these women act as custodians of their cultural legacy and underscore their distinct identity in the vast Bangladeshi milieu. As a result, language awareness has significantly propelled women's empowerment in Bangladesh, amplifying their cultural pride, fortifying their sense of community, and heightening their self-regard. Competent linguistic skills in one's indigenous language promote cultural heritage and enrich social diversity, reinforcing women's sense of belonging and self-worth. Furthermore, language awareness equips women to challenge and reshape entrenched gender norms and stereotypes perpetuated through linguistic structures. In many global contexts, societal narratives often marginalize women, relegating their achievements and contributions to the periphery. However, when women vocalize their experiences and aspirations in their native tongues, they disrupt these entrenched narratives, staking their claim as equal stakeholders. In summary, the role of language awareness in the empowerment journey of Bangladeshi women, and indeed women worldwide, cannot be overstated. Its multifaceted contributions - be it in safeguarding cultural heritage, championing diversity, or subverting gender constructs - carry undeniable significance.

Therefore, promoting language awareness, such as learning about language biases, promoting gender-neutral language, and encouraging language skills, can significantly contribute to women's empowerment. It allows women to challenge societal norms, participate fully in society, and advocate for their rights and those of others. Conversely, women's empowerment can lead to a greater focus on language awareness, as empowered women can contribute to changing how language is used and understood in their communities. The first step towards empowering women is to transform one's linguistic practises, particularly by eliminating derogatory language directed at them. There is no doubt that language plays a pivotal role in fostering a more respectful societal environment for women and empowering them. It is possible to deconstruct deep-seated prejudices against women through a change in language usage, enabling their true value to be acknowledged and celebrated. The success of these linguistic reforms depends on their prompt implementation. This discussion emphasises the transformative potential of language in reshaping societal norms and contributing significantly to women's empowerment and gender equality.

Beyond Binary: Language and Gender Fluidity in Bangladesh

The Hijras are often described as individuals who exhibit a mix of male and female identities or a group of females with male gender assignments at birth, and they are not confined to the male-female binary. They are known for challenging the rigid, binary gender constructions prevalent in their culture, thereby blurring the gender roles. Within this cohort, there exist individuals who are classified as pre-operative, post-operative, and non-operative transsexuals, all of whom strongly identify with a gender that differs from their biological sex. They are often described as individuals who are not confined to the male-female binary but exhibit a mix of male and female identities or are a group of females with male gender assignments at birth. Daize and Masnun (2019: 183) have observed that in Bangladesh, various categories of Hijras exist. These categories encompass the *Koti*, which is characterized by a masculine appearance, the *Chibri*, which is characterized by a feminine appearance, the *Khoja*, which is characterized by male genitalia sacrifice, and the *Akua*, which predominantly comprises of transgender individuals and males who masquerade as Hijras.

Hijras have historically dressed like women, but it is not mandatory for individuals to transition physically to become a member of this community. A majority of them identify as neither men nor women but rather as a third gender. This group has received legal recognition in countries such as India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh (Rehman, 2016). In recent times, the administration of Bangladesh has taken admirable strides towards promoting inclusivity and augmenting social protection for distinct gender identities. The aforementioned momentum was initiated with the Cabinet's 2013 resolution to formally recognize the Hijra demographic in official documents and census counts. This was followed by the Ministry of Social Welfare (MSW) issuing an official notification pertaining to the Hijra community in 2014.

It is noteworthy that in 2018, an amendment was made to the Electoral Roll Act, 2009, enabling the inclusion of “Hijra” as a discrete gender category in voter registration forms, alongside the traditional “male” and “female” classifications. Furthermore, the MSW also introduced various livelihood programs tailored for the Hijra population in 2013. These endeavors demonstrate the government’s proactive approach in ensuring that the constitutional entitlements of the Hijra community are upheld. Nevertheless, the implementation of specific laws or policies to categorically prohibit gender identity-based discrimination is still pending (Titir, 2019: 01). However, the introduction of the Hijra gender identity option on official documents in 2013, including passports, has allowed them to identify outside the binary on formal papers (Daize & Masnum, 2019). The legal system, despite recognizing certain countries as a “third gender”, still heavily relies on the gender binary and lacks comprehensive laws to protect individuals who identify outside traditional gender norms. The LGBTQI population remains marginalized or ignored, with the Hijras being the only accepted gender outside the binary, although their existence is tolerated more than genuinely accepted (Abdullah, 2018; Khan *et al.*, 2009).

Language is a crucial factor when considering the acknowledgement of transgender and non-binary individuals in Bangladesh. The Bengali language, with its rich historical depth, emerges as a prominent area of study, in particular. In the past, Bengali, like many other languages, lacked specific terms to describe the nuanced spectrum of transgender and non-binary identities. This resulted in lexical gaps. Trask (1993) defines a lexical gap as the absence of a presumed word that would naturally conform to the structure of existing words (p. 157). However, Lehrer (1974), a specialist in the field of semantics, argues that the notion of lexical gaps is somewhat ambiguous, as it is employed to signify any instance where a word is non-existent for a variety of reasons (p. 95). While the English language has a plethora of words to describe transgender individuals, Bengali language initially lacked direct equivalents. However, languages are evolutionary in nature. As societies become more aware and inclusive, their languages adapt by creating new words (neologisms) or by adapting existing ones to convey previously unexpressed ideas. The term *Hijra*, which is deeply rooted in South Asian languages including Bengali, serves as an umbrella for certain non-cisnormative gender identities. Nevertheless, it is crucial to distinguish between traditional terms and contemporary, globally-influenced terms such as transgender.

The specialized language referred to as *Uti* has its roots in the Mughal administration and is a combination of Persian and local vocabulary. As time progressed, the language's lexicon grew with the addition of multiple inventive terms. Currently, this particular dialect is observable in numerous territories throughout Southern Asia, including countries like India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh (Moon, 2020). Within the mainstream Bangla, *Uti* denotes topsyturvy or reverse and signifies a language spoken in the reverse order. Nevertheless, it is crucial to highlight that *Uti* is not merely mainstream Bangla spoken in reverse; instead, it operates as a dialect with an exclusive set of words. The Hijra community, commonly recognized as the third gender, employs the term *Uti* to denote a unique language of communication that they assert is spoken universally by hijra. While the hijra do include *Uti* in their mainstream Bangla, they do not entirely substitute it. Interestingly, the *Uti* terminology is utilized when articulating erotic desire and practices (Hossain, 2013).

Tabel 2: List of a number of words from Uti Language

Transliteration	English Meaning
Aakkhar	Big, Huge, Great, Large
Aariaal/	Bigger, Greater, Larger
Ariyal se kharial	Much much more, Much much larger
Bechish	Bad, Ugly, Disgusting, Abhorrent, Terrible, Rotten
Bechish Khoma	Ugly face, Disgusting face
Bikar	Excitement
Bilā karā	pierce
Chadra Jhira, Chadra Jhura	Wearing clothes
Chadra, Sadra	Cloth, Apparel
Chhudrani	Cum, Piss

Chiptu	Vagina
Chisha	Beautiful, Good, Excellent
Chisha Khoma	Beautiful face
Chomkachomki	Dance and song
Chomkano	Dancing and singing
Duniyadar	Parents, Father-Mother
Gotiya Anadhērā	Friend, Companion, Mate the night of the new moon the night of the new moon
Hamsi	I
Hitki	Intersexual Person, Hijra
Janana	Transsexual Guy, Sissy, Effeminate Gay Guy, Hijra With Dick, Hijra Who Has Dick, Shemale, Lady-Boy
Jhok / Jhokmasi	Hair, Armpit hair, Pubic hair, Wig, Any hair-related thing
Jhokmasi Patano	1. Shaving or hair removal of pubic hair, armpit hair, or hair, etc. 2. Removing a wig from the head.
Jholki	Money
Jozomen	Straight, Heterosexual
Kacchi	Bad, Terrible, Ugly, Disgusting, Rotten, Not very convenient
Kacchikhoyari	Bad person, Devilish-natured person
Khaariaal	Biggest, Greatest, Largest
Khoma	Face, Facial features, Visage
Khomar Darshon	Facial hair (e.g., beard-moustache-goatee)
Khomar Darshon Patano	Shaving the beard and mustache.
Khulfi	Shoe, Sandal, Footwear
Khulfi'r Tundani	Shoe beating, Sandal beating
Khulfi'r Tundani Debo	Will give a shoe beating, Will beat with a sandal
Kothi	Sissy, Transsexual, Effeminate Gay Guy, Bottom, Submissive Guy, Passive Guy
Lali	Kissing, Sucking And Licking
Lali Mashi	Tongue And Lips
Ligum	Cock, Dick, Penis
Lukkhor	Few, Small
Lukkhor	Small, Tiny, Little
Neheri / Neherun	Woman, Lady, Female
Neherun Chadra Jhira	Wearing women's clothing, Crossdressing
Pakki	Good, Beautiful, Excellent, Convenient
Panthi	Active Partner Of Effeminate Gay Guy, Top, Manly Dominant Guy, Macho, A man who plays the top role
Parikh	Permanent boyfriend or lover
Patano	Drive away, Throw away, Oust, Evict, Expel, Reject, etc.
Petuya	Sibling, Brother or Sister

Shibli	Intersexual Person, Hijra
Sudda	Old man
Suddi	Old woman
Takni	Food
Takni Taka	Eating food
Thappu	Money
Thosok	Make-up
Thosok Jhira	Putting on makeup
Tumsi	You
Tundani, Tandani, Tandi	Beat, Hit, Punish, Attack
Tunna	Boy, Teenager
Tunni	Girl, Teenage girl
Uṭhāōbāj	thief
Velki	Show Off, Style, Fashion, Charm, Charisma, Power To Attract People

Source: Author's collection (see Moon, 2020; Ulti bhasha – the language of Bangladeshi LGBTI people, 2010)

When inducted into the hijra community, new members undergo a rite of passage. As part of this process, they assume the role of followers known as *chelas*[followers] and acquire the Ulti language from the community's leader or guru. This linguistic experience not only enables them to communicate distinctively within the community but also reinforces their identity as hijra. In Bangladesh, the third gender speaks Bengali but also has its unique language, the Ulti language, which is a blend of Hindi, Persian, and Urdu. One notable feature of Ulti is its distinctive vocabulary, which often includes erotic terms that allow hijra to express desires that mainstream languages may not capture. Due to its limited number of speakers and the insular sources from which it is learned, the language remains mostly undisclosed. The use of specialized lexicons by non-normative groups, including hijra, has been extensively analyzed by scholars. Lavender languages, which are distinctive languages employed by sexual minorities in the Western world, have been the subject of comprehensive studies. However, comparable linguistic practices in non-Western contexts have not been thoroughly examined, with only a few exceptions, such as the research conducted by Leap and Boellstorff (2004). Hall (1996) was among the pioneering anthropologists who investigated the linguistic behavior of the hijra community, particularly their use of Hindi in India. She introduced the term "hijralect" to describe a specific vocabulary that her participants in Delhi closely associated with Farsi. Similarly, linguists such as Awan and Sheeraz (2011) identified a distinct language employed by Pakistani hijra, often referred to as Farsi. The origin of this term and its connection with the hijra community's language remains somewhat ambiguous in current literature. Nevertheless, Hall (2005) observed that hijra in Delhi frequently connect it to the Mughal era when Farsi served as the official language. In the study by Hossain (2013), it was suggested that despite not commonly using the term Farsi, the hijra in Bangladesh exhibit noticeable similarities in vocabulary with the Farsi lexicon. However, the Ulti language is currently waning.

In addition to, according to Moon (2020), the gay community in Bangladesh has played a role in keeping the language alive by incorporating it into friendly banter and borrowing words from the Koti community. Moreover, the language known as Ulti Bhasha is a unique linguistic phenomenon that is exclusively utilized by the LGBTI community of Bangladesh. The language bears striking similarities to the Polari language, which is a highly specialized form of slang that was once used by gay men in the Britain. It is important to recognize that Ulti Bhasha is not simply a compilation of terms and phrases, but rather a complicated linguistic system that serves as a crucial element of the cultural identity of the LGBTI community in Bangladesh (Ulti Bhasha- The Language of Bangladeshi LGBTI People, 2010).

Language assumes a pivotal role within the Hijra community, serving as an instrument for identity, expression, and protection. By enabling this community to communicate privately within public spaces, language functions as a defensive mechanism and fosters a sense of unity. The Ulti language is regarded by the Hijra

community as a vehicle for conveying their distinct identity. Having endured significant marginalization over an extended period, they remain deprived of numerous civil rights and are frequently deprived of the dignity they are entitled to. Despite the obstacles, they exhibit a tenacity to advocate for their rights. Unfortunately, societal bias, ignorance, and derogatory treatment remain pervasive. Many are isolated from their families and subjected to ridicule within their social circles.

Through embracing this unique language, the community has discovered a sense of belonging and solidarity (Dutta, 2023). The distinctive linguistic practices of the community have substantially influenced their identity and safeguarded their interests within a society that often ostracizes them. The predicament experienced by the Hijra community in Bangladesh serves as a salient reminder of the interdependence between linguistic entitlements and broader human rights. Although the Hijras confront socio-economic challenges similar to other marginalized groups worldwide, they also encounter a profound denial of their linguistic human rights. In adopting the Hijra Farsi, which is rooted in the Ulta language, they are affirming their linguistic rights, which are fundamental to human dignity and identity. The act of utilizing, preserving, and cultivating one's linguistic heritage, particularly for disadvantaged groups, is enshrined within linguistic human rights. For the Hijra community, the Ulta language represents not only a means of communication but also a symbol of identity, unity, protection, and healing. It provides them with a sanctuary from societal prejudices, a shield against violence, and a remedy for wounds inflicted by bias. The community's shift towards their distinctive language is not just a matter of preserving a cultural artifact, but also a demand for the recognition of their linguistic human rights. Neglecting or suppressing their linguistic heritage is tantamount to violating their fundamental human rights. The Hijra community's linguistic rights must be acknowledged and protected for the sake of human rights.

Within a society that systematically marginalizes and oppresses them, the Hijra community of Bangladesh and the broader Indian subcontinent has harnessed the power of language. It not only shapes their unique identity but also offers a means of protection and survival. Recognizing and respecting this linguistic heritage is essential for understanding and supporting the Hijra community in their ongoing quest for rights, recognition, and dignity.

Conclusion

The study highlights the strong connection between language and society, emphasizing that the study of a nation's language can provide valuable insights into its culture, society, and characteristics. In the context of Bangladesh, the claim is made that women are linguistically dominated by men from both a historical and social perspective. This assertion suggests that language inequality exists, with women experiencing subordination in linguistic interactions.

Yasmeen (2022) proposed that policymakers should prioritise language equality in Bangladesh, recognising the importance of addressing this issue. By focusing on language equality, it is believed that a society can be formed that is free from discrimination between men and women, which can ultimately shape the psychology and well-being of individuals. The argument implies that language policies can play a crucial role in eliminating gender inequality within the Bengali language. The significance of language in shaping society and reinforcing power dynamics is a well-established area of study within sociolinguistics.

Language reflects social norms, power structures, and cultural values, and it is through language that individuals communicate, express their identities, and negotiate their positions within a social context. In many societies, including Bangladesh, language has historically been used as a tool of social control and dominance. Linguistic dominance by men over women can manifest in various ways, such as gendered speech patterns, lexical differences, and the exclusion of women from certain linguistic domains or positions of authority. These patterns often reflect and perpetuate gender inequalities present in wider societal structures.

Efforts to promote language equality and address gender disparities in language usage can have significant social and psychological implications. A language policy that aims to eliminate gender inequality within the Bengali language, as suggested by Mannan (2018), could involve various measures. These might include promoting inclusive language practises, encouraging equal representation of women in linguistic domains, and challenging linguistic norms

that reinforce gender stereotypes. By implementing such policies, it is hoped that women in Bangladesh will have equal opportunities for linguistic expression, participation, and influence. This, in turn, could contribute to a more inclusive and equitable society where individuals are not limited by linguistic biases or stereotypes. It is worth noting that the effectiveness of language policies in addressing gender inequalities depends on various factors, including societal attitudes, institutional support, and the engagement of different stakeholders. Implementing language policies alone may not be sufficient to tackle deeply rooted gender inequalities. Broader social changes, including shifts in attitudes and power dynamics, are also necessary for long-term transformation.

In short, the connection between language and society is indeed intertwined, and the study of a nation's language can provide valuable insights into its culture, society, and characteristics. In the case of Bangladesh, language inequality, particularly the linguistic dominance of women by men, is suggested to exist. The importance of addressing language equality in order to foster a society free from discrimination is emphasised. Language policies can play a crucial role in achieving gender equality within the Bengali language, but broader social changes are also necessary to create a more inclusive and equitable society.

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