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Womens Compromise for Household Spaces in terms of the Physical Environment in Sweeper Colony of Pabna Municipality, Bangladesh

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Abstract: *Women of the low-income group in urban areas of Bangladesh, living in densely populated areas, suffer to achieve their demands for settlements, utility, and community service facilities. They are one of the most neglected genders to fulfill their spatial needs. This paper aims to study the nature of domestic spaces and the women's compromise in using domestic spaces in the study area of Pabna sweeper colony, a low-income housing by the Government in a small town of Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, the Sweeper community is a secluded and ignored community, both socially and by the government as well. After surveying 81 households and 100 women, it evaluates that this housing community's women suffer from inadequate working, storing, and private spaces of unhygienic conditions that interrupt their reproductive, productive, and community engagement role. They are also victims of gender discrimination, social inequalities, absence of economic identity, sexual harassment, etc. It needs much attention to ensure standard shelter and provision of survival, health, productivity, and welfare, considering women's practical gender needs in perspective to Bangladesh's socio-cultural structure. Improving spatial quality by vertical extension with the help of the government, non-profit organization, and engaging themselves would change a lot to women's physical and mental health, including their roles to the economy and society.*

Keywords: *Low income group of Women's compromises, Household Spaces, physical environment, Sweeper Colony, Pabna, Bangladesh.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Women of low-income group in urban areas of Bangladesh grieve a lot to address the increasing demand for settlements, utility and community service facilities. The urban poor people find their shelter in slums and leads a dreadful life. A home is a shelter for rest, safety, comfort, and protection against enemies and vagaries of climate (Mahbub-Un-Nabi, 2012). The definition of Housing by WHO is: "Residential environment, neighbourhood, micro-district or physical structure that environs of that structure, including all necessary services, facilities, equipment's, and devices needed for the physical and mental health and social wellbeing of the family and the individual" (United Nations, 1976). Housing addresses human needs in two aspects i.e., biological and socio-cultural conditions. When housing demand cannot be adequately fulfilled in an urban area, the poor people live with less civic amenities, an unhealthy environment, and an insecure place. Low-income housing is not homogenous in terms of the family social system (Moser, 1989). The sweeper's significant population as a member of the untouchable community faces discrimination in almost all life spheres. In a study, Hossain (2013) mentioned that they were deprived of healthy housing facilities, their housing sites were intolerably filthy, and they suffered from water and sanitation problems. The unavailability of potable water was another severe problem that often-created unrest in the community. As a result, the community had to pass miserable times in their day-to-day life. Their rights to civic amenities were always neglected. The sweepers have limited land access, and they have mostly settled down municipality colonies or government land. Due to the increasing demand for urban land, they are often forced to move to low-lying cities' peripheries. The quality of their shelter is generally inferior. However, some variations within the sweeper's housing are broadly categorized as building and semi-pucca and tin-shed or 'jupri'. They are compelled to live in a limited space that is used for multiple purposes such as living, sleeping, cooking, home-based activities and so on (Siddequa, 2017). Sweepers has to clean roads, rooms, office spaces, human sludge, etc, which cause severe diseases (Kabir et al, 2015).

The perception is growing worldwide that poverty is becoming increasingly feminized, that an increasing proportion of the world's poor are female (Moghadam, 2005). Facility planning like child-care, transport sector, etc. are essential basic services for women mostly to meet the male workforce needs than low-income women who often do not use public transport (Rahman, 2013).

Practical gender needs are the needs women identify in their socially accepted roles in society. They are helpful and often inadequacies in living conditions such as water provision, health care, and employment (ILO, 1998). After realizing the nature of domestic spaces, it must be required to gather knowledge of women's practical gender needs to reach the study's objectives. Research in the field of spatial quality for women in low-income urban housing of Bangladesh is insignificant. It requires much attention for researchers, scholars, and policymakers to pay attention to women's practical gender needs regarding Bangladesh's socio-cultural structure. This research aims to identify the women's interaction patterns in terms of the nature of domestic spaces and their compromise in using household spaces to fulfill their needs within the Pabna Sweeper Colony's physical environment.

II. METHODOLOGY

Primary data were collected by Field Observation, Questionnaire Survey, Focus Group Discussions, and the people's interviews. Before sampling and data collection, a field observation was conducted by authors. A total of 100 people was randomly selected for the study. A well-structured questionnaire was then prepared to collect the respondents' demographic information, household information, socio-economic condition, accommodation facilities, women involvement in a community participating work, etc. There is a photographic survey, also. Secondary data were collected from the literature review, Google map, newspapers, and so on.

III. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

A. Study Area Profile

The Pabna is an economically significant district in Bangladesh, located in the Rajshahi division. The geographic location of the Pabna district is in between 23°48" and 24°21" north latitudes and between 89°00" and 89°44" east longitudes. The total area of the district is 2,376.13 square kilometres (BBS, Pabna Zilla Series, 2011). Pabna municipality is an administrative unit in Pabna district. Pabna sweeper colony is located at Dipchar, Ramchandrapur, Anonto Bazar in Pabna municipality. The people who are living in the Pabna sweeper colony are all sweepers by occupation. The selected study area has a high population density for homogeneous residents. A summarization of the study area is in the following table:

Table I

A brief information about the Pabna Sweeper Colony

Description	Number
Area	1.45 acre
Population	1500
Total Household	85
Educational Institution	1
Religious Institution	2
Community tube well	4
Toilet	4

Field Survey, 2020

B. Nature of Domestic Space in the Surveyed Area

The physical feature of land in the surveyed area is mainly low-lying area. High population density and settlement crowding also exists. The ownership of the land belongs to Pabna Municipality. Linear settlement pattern is prevalent for the study area and the settlements are arranged alongside the internal streets in the area. The entire site is bounded by a boundary wall connected to Hazirhat road, Anonto Bazar, Pabna. The surveyed area does not have any multistoried buildings, and the floor area ratio is one for every person. The survey shows that the maximum family structure of the study group is mostly joint families. Among this family structure, the percentage of 7-9 members (50%) and joint families with 4-6 members is 45%. Only 5% of respondents live in a nuclear family more than 3 levels of headings should be used. Typology of the Dwelling Units in the Surveyed Area: Based on existing dwelling structures, the authors present a classification of housing units in the surveyed area. A short description with the photographs of this housing unit types are discussed in follows:

- 1) Dwelling units without additional Space: This type of dwelling unit covers almost all the land provided for every person by the Pabna municipal authority.
- 2) Dwelling unit with open veranda: Kutchha, pucca, and semi-permanent structure, two or more rooms with open veranda that is open to the sky.
- 3) Dwelling unit with semi-open veranda: In pucca and semi pucca structures, these dwelling units have been seen in the surveyed area. The closed portion is generally used as a kitchen or storing kitchen utensils, fuels or other daily necessities, and open part is used for child caring, sitting place or gossiping with neighbors.
- 4) Dwelling unit with closed veranda: A veranda made of brick wall and iron grills with an open entry or iron door. This type of veranda gives more protection, safety, and security to the dwellers.

Table II
Typology of dwelling units

Dwelling unit without additional space		
Dwelling unit with open veranda		
Dwelling unit with semi-open veranda		
Dwelling unit with closed veranda		

Field Survey, 2020

C. Women's Behavioural, Spatial and Temporal Pattern of Domestic Space

The women of the studied area's daily domestic activities are eating, storing daily necessities, child-rearing, taking rest, watching TV, gossiping with family members, etc. Most of these activities occur inside the room, and floor is mostly used for these activities. Within the studied communities, respondents with better economic conditions have a dining table, tea table, laptop, sound system, aquarium, wall clock, different types of room decorators like wall mat, photo, flower vases, and, so forth inside the room. Generally, the bed is used for sleeping, watching TV, taking rest, guest entertainment. Women generally do worship every day in the family. Women dominate the kitchen. From the period of 5 AM to 8 AM, women participate in physical activities like cleaning their rooms, child care and eating breakfast. After breakfast, they go out for work and return back home within 1 PM. Then, daily household activities like bathing, praying, cooking, washing clothes, etc. is carried out by women. Most of the households have dish line connection, and generally, women watch Indian Bengali television series after evening. Around 9 to 10 PM, they go to sleep on the bed or the floor according to their socioeconomic condition after doing some final household chores.

D. Women Interaction Pattern

According to the survey report, 6% of the respondents have an educational status of above primary education, 14% of respondents have completed their primary education, 42% have no formal education, and 38% of respondents are illiterate. Except for a primary school, there is no educational intuitions inside the colony. From the survey data, only 2 college female students are identified in the surveyed area. Pre-marriage, economic condition, and gender discrimination are some of the significant factors for the low rate of female education. Daughter is considered to be synonymous with weakness in the studied community. The studied area's nuclear families consisting of a husband, wife or one or two children. Most of the families are a joint family with 4-6 or more members. These joint families are consisted of husband, wife, children, sister-in-law, mother-in-law, uncle, aunt, brother-in-law, and father-in-law. Generally, old members are the head of the family. Due to their employment status, these women's family contribution is negotiated by the male members. The majority of the male members of the family in the studied area is that the only responsibility of the female members of the family is to do household chores. The male members in the family do not actively participate or support the female members in the daily household works. Often, women interact with the neighbours in activities like friendly discussions etc. Due to the high population density in the study area, quarrel and shouting incidents between the residents are often observed. Women's compromise of spaces at Different Phases of the Life-Cycle: Women start to face gender discrimination from their birth. During childhood, they are allowed to play with boys but from teenage age boys and girls are separated from close interaction. Girl's education level is limited within primary or lower secondary classes. Zinuk and Arcana are two college students found in the study area. Most of them are married before age 18. They could not express their opinion or desire to choose life partners. They are expected to be prepared for any kind of decision of the household. Before marriage, a girl helps her mother doing household works and take care of her younger member in the family. Even, a female person cannot share her gender problems with brothers or father freely. After marriage, a woman must take all responsibilities of all household work. Besides, they also do a cleaner job in the municipality or residential apartments and contribute in family income. In case of extended family, women stay with 6 or 7 family members in one single room with her husband in a chowki or khat, floor or a small attached unit. It is a threat of women's privacy. When they are becoming old, they are totally dependent on her sons or daughters' family. Male members are considered as decision-makers in the family.

E. Compromising the Use of Space for Domestic Activities inside Dwellings

Generally, khat or chowki is used for sleeping and women sleep with her husband, son, daughters and mother in law or father in law in one single room. Inadequate ventilation, damp environment, dark interior makes unhealthy inside the room. Some wellbeing family have well facilitated separate rooms for parents and their offspring. A few dwelling units have dining table for eating. Mostly the floor is used for eating. In case of extended family, male members and children eat before, then mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law dine together. Due to lack of furniture and small space inside the room, women face challenges every time to manage storing necessary utensils, fuel, daily clothes, etc. Women keep their everyday clothes on a hanging rope inside the room. Poor women not only face problems to storing kitchenware and other necessary household materials but also give extra labour cleaning this space. Because of inadequate kitchen space, women generally make vegetables for cooking in veranda or inside the room, a few times in courtyard. In some cases, they have an attached unit or near in dwelling room, made with polythene or bamboo mat which is open to the sky use for cooking. Every day, women need to extra effort to clean the kitchen space. Maximum household in the study area have separate bathroom. But maximum own bathroom's inside is dark and not well constructed. Poor women negotiate with open bathing space near tube well and standard toilets and bathrooms with both men and women in the surveyed area.

Slippery, dirty, inadequate barrier and structurally weak washroom threaten women's privacy, health and security issue. Most of the women go outside for their jobs daily. Besides, all responsibilities of household work are conducted by the women without or a little help from her husband. Generally, women cannot go outside for passing their leisure time. Their indoor leisure is limited within gossiping and watching TV. Women's negotiation with limited domestic space inside dwelling units create lack of privacy for women. Women in wellbeing families having more rooms for a living can spend more personal time with her husband at home. With the changes in time, now women's childbirth delivery occurs in Pabna General Hospital. But a few poor women give birth to their babies at home in unhygienic environment and lack of privacy. When a male guest except relatives coming in the house, generally a newly married woman or teenage girl cannot go in front of guests without any necessary. At this time, women also stop all their household activities inside the room. In the research area, Pabna municipal authority provides pipe water supply without any charges. But this water is odorous, dirty, and unsuitable for drinking. They don't face any problems to collect municipal water because most of the family have their own point illegally connected source of water supply like tube well and submersible.

F. Compromising Space Use for Home-Based Activities and Community Participation:

After doing jobs, when male member passes their leisure time in room, tea-stall, or courtyards, then a female member in the family are busy with daily household activities. Every day women face problems managing their domestic work in a little space of dwelling units. Population growth and High residential density is the main cause of this problem. The responsible authority's unresponsiveness is another cause of this problem. Baby's foldable pot, wood, unused corrugated iron sheets, pot and other unnecessary things make congestion, dirty and odour near dwelling units. Sometimes one household occupies his/her neighbour space for keeping these materials. This situation crosses all the limits of tolerance, especially for women, when they do domestic works in the kitchen or veranda. Under the circumstances, women negotiate with her domestic space for home-based activities.

A few open spaces found around the school and temple which are accessible for all. Generally, children use this space for playing and people also use this space for worship, prayer, and celebration of their festival; women occupy a little room for gossiping with the other women of the community. They discuss their daily life problems there. Women mainly dominate the courtyards as using this space as cooking, talking, tailoring, and child-rearing and so forth. During Occasions, men and women negotiate the same space for the celebration of their religious festival.

IV. CONSEQUENCES

In the sweeper community of Bangladesh, women play an essential role in earning for their family. Lack of Proper physical environment has lots of harmful consequences in their daily life. Despite having a financial identity, women face gender discrimination in this society because of social structure, religious superstitions, traditional thought, lack of education, and so on. Their living condition and surrounding environment are not so good with a comparison of their income. The involvement of usury and drug addiction and smuggling is the critical reason for their poor state of living. These women cannot meet up adequately their practical gender needs in the surveyed area. Sometimes women face domestic violations to her husband or sons for refusing money for taking drugs or usury business. Most of the time, women compromise their wants and desires for their families.

According to survey data, most of the women are not satisfied with inadequate domestic spaces in the Pabna sweeper colony. Women face difficulties daily doing household work due to insufficient light and ventilation, lack of privacy, high residential density, inadequate moving place, etc. How counterproductive domestic spaces effect on their practical gender needs are discussed as follows:

Due to the poor condition of the drainage structure, the wastewater spread over the courtyard, it causes inconvenience doing domestic water during the rainy season. Waterlogging is experienced by dwellers of sweeper colony almost every year resulting dirty and unhygienic environment. Garbage pollution also makes a dirty environment and foul odour in the area. Most of the Kutcha and semi pucca structures are exposure in adverse weather because of poor maintenance.

A few Dwelling units made by partition and some kutcha structures have no ventilation or windows for entering natural light and air. Due to the insufficient ventilation, and kept closing windows whole day and night for women privacy issue makes environment damp, dark, unhygienic inside the dwelling units. Poor families use a less power electric bulb for indoor lighting. Sometimes women face difficulties doing domestic work because of insufficient lighting.

According to survey data, Pabna municipal authority provides .75 Katha land and one single room for living in each household. Poor joint families need at least two or three beds for sleeping. To manage floor space for sleeping every day, it takes extra labour every day. The floor is also used to store the daily necessities, eating, child care etc. and because of these activities, make congestion inside the room. Nuclear and comparatively wealthy families built their dwelling units with adequate openings, veranda, small prayer room, attached kitchen and washroom within limited land.

Washing clothes, cleaning the room and other household activities are less difficult than poor families' women. These women feel more comfortable using domestic spaces. Everybody opined that poor drainage system and wastage mismanagement is responsible for dirty, foul odour and unhygienic outside domestic spaces i.e. open spaces, outdoor kitchen, and courtyards.

A physical boundary bounds the study area but many people from outside come for taking drugs or buy it. It is a great threat of security and privacy, especially for women. The security system is entirely dependent on ownership. If joint facilities to live in one single room or two-room shared a partition or a wall (structurally weak) make an embarrassing situation for female persons. Most often women and teenage girls feel awkward because of so many small and medium openings in the barriers of washroom. While they going out to use washroom or for other reasons at night, usually a male member of the family also presents with them.

V. CONCLUSION

Nature of domestic Space, behavioural, spatial and temporal pattern of domestic space, women negotiation, how women fulfill their practical gender needs and their nature and extent of negotiation of domestic spaces in Pabna Sweeper Colony is identified from the study. In surveyed area, women meet their practical gender needs in inadequate utility provisions, low dwelling structures, unhygienic environment. Unplanned, highly residential density and population growth make more congestion in the study area. With that insufficient domestic space make vulnerable for women in terms of women privacy, security, safety, hygiene and comfort. They can improve their situation by their own Endeavor. However, they are so much indulged in debt so that they cannot invest to improve their physical environment. Vertical extension with the help of non-profit organizations and government at nominal cost can improve their spatial quality. Proper policy making, development planning, spreading education, formal training, and better interior arrangement are the ways to solve their problem.

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