

Observing Hindu Women's Inheritance Rights and Challenges in Dhaka and Bogura: A Quantitative Study

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Abstract: Discrimination against women is a widespread occurrence on a global scale. A global challenge involves attaining equal rights for all genders. In Bangladesh, prejudice has historically been based on two factors: gender and religion. Hindu women likewise experience prejudice and mistreatment based on their gender and faith. The authors applied quantitative method to collect primary data from two districts of Bangladesh: Bogura and Dhaka. Two villages of Bogura district, Khanpur and Koil under Dupchanchia upazila and Dhakessory Temple in Dhaka city were selected as the study area by the authors. The primary data gathering tool for the study was a survey questionnaire because it followed a quantitative methodology. The inquiries were posed in Bengali for the benefit of the participants. After that, coded data were imported into SPSS 16.0 and subjected to statistical mean analysis. Microsoft Word 2007 and Excel 2007 were used to reproduce these data in order to generate a better graph, chart, and table.

Keywords: Hindu women. Inheritance rights, Challenges, Discrimination, Hindu religion, Gender inequality.

INTRODUCTION

Women facing discrimination is a common phenomenon worldwide. Achieving equal rights for all genders is a global challenge. Religion and gender have been two common bases for discrimination in Bangladesh for a considerable amount of time. Women belonging to Hindu religion also face discriminations and deprivations on the basis of gender and religion. First of all, Hindu women fall into the category of religious minority and secondly, they are treated as 'women' under the subjugation of patriarchal society which make them vulnerable in wider society. Compared to their male relatives and women of other religions, Hindu women in Bangladesh are granted very limited property rights (Zahur M, 2016).

Although women are considered as the vulnerable section of the society, they are playing a significant role in the economic growth of the country. Their activities are no longer limited to the household work only (Zahur M, 2016). Although women in Bangladesh contribute as the change maker in different sectors from agriculture to parliament, their rights are not addressed significantly in regard to inheritance specifically those who belong to Hindu religion. In general, Hindu people are governed by Hindu laws which are from ancient period that fails to fulfill the needs of Hindu women in present days.

Although the constitution of Bangladesh grants equal rights to men and women, many women especially Hindu women are deprived. Hindu women's life is shaped by their religion that's why they lag behind in rights to inheritance. Religious

norms determine Hindu women's rights to inheritance which is discriminatory. Hindu law regulates every aspect of private life, including marriage, adoption, intestate succession, gifts, and wills (Nayan, N. D, & Das, T. 2023). Considering the property rights of Hindu women, it is discriminatory on the ground of sex and a clear discrimination on the ground of religion as well (Zahur M, 2016). Despite the fact that Bangladesh's constitution forbids discrimination based on sex or religion, no one piece of legislation has been passed to change the customary norms that grant Hindu women restricted property rights (Zahur M, 2016). Using the name of constitutional secularism, religion has become one of the most pervasive tools in the hands of the political authorities for the marginalization of religious minority groups especially of Hindu community (Hossain, M. A. I., 2020). Bangladesh is obligated to end all forms of discrimination because it is a signatory to numerous international accords and a member of the global community. Bangladesh is therefore failing in its international duty as well as the non-discrimination mandate of the constitution by ignoring the property rights of Hindu women (Zahur M, 2016).

Hindu women's rights to inheritance are related to various factors that determine their full participation in society. Property inheritance help women empowerment, increases decision making power and make them confident. Hindu women need rights to inheritance to fight against gender wage gap, against domestic violence that will secure the position of women not only in family

but also in wider society as well. The main obstacle to development of the women is related to their limited as well as unjust right and access to resources, particularly to land (Jinnah, Shah I Mobin, 2013). As a developing country, Bangladesh is trying to progress in women's education, gender equality and equal rights in all aspects of social and political life. Leaving a large number of women deprived of inheritance rights, development and progress of Bangladesh will be almost impossible to achieve.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women's rights are violated in different sectors of society in Bangladesh such as in joining workforce, in public spheres, in employment, in payment and largely in rights-based sectors. The society of Bangladesh is largely dominated by patriarchal values and women's deprivation start from family life. Despite the fact that both men and women have the right to own land, women's use of this privilege is extremely limited and disappointing (Lina N.A, 2023). Women's ownership over land and access to it have repeatedly been said to have the capacity to increase gender equity while also alleviating material deprivation (Lina N.A, 2023). For the development of the country, there need to be enough space for women's participation in economic activity specially in resources. One of the main problems preventing the growth of economic development for women is due to the unfair and limited access to resources, particularly in land (Lina N.A, 2023). Refusal to exercise inheritance rights not only prevent women from controlling their own lives but also force them to live in subjugation and humiliation (Moni O. H & Fahim H.K, 2021). Research indicates that laws pertaining to women's rights are still ineffective due to socioeconomic reasons, poor governance, and culturally negative attitudes about women's rights. (Khan et. al. 2016).

Land ownership is regarded as the most effective means of reducing poverty and as a vital marker of social status and authority. (Lina N.A, 2023). Equal access to land and environmental resources is one of the ways to achieve development (Sarwar MG, Islam R, Monzoor R, 2007). Alleviating poverty, promoting gender equality and empowering women have been the top concern to achieve Millennium Development Goals in Bangladesh. The marginalization of women from the means of production is a critical factor in the subordination of women from the viewpoint of

feminist critique (Sarwar MG, Islam R, Monzoor R, 2007).

From the beginning of Indian society, Hindu women have had limited legal rights to inherit property (D Halder, K Jaishankar, 2008). Men always inherit more than women under the rules of inheritance. Very few women in Bangladesh own property under their own name and as a result most of the rural women in Bangladesh are landless (Sultana AM, 2010)). The current Hindu inheritance law states that women frequently do not receive a share of their parents' and husbands' property, and even when they do, it is not on an equal footing with the male family members (Pandit H, 2022). Due to their increased negotiating strength, land-owning women are better able to secure more equitable rights distribution within the family (Sourav R I, 2015).

METHODOLOGY

The study was quantitative in nature. Quantitative method was applied due to the nature of the research. The study was conducted using primary data. Primary data were collected using a close-ended survey questionnaire.

The Study Area

The study was carried out in two districts of Bangladesh; Bogura and Dhaka. Two villages of Bogura district were Khanpur and Koil under Dupchanchia upazila were selected as the study area. Likewise, Dhakessory Temple in Dhaka city was selected as the study area because Dhakessory temple is the main religious prayer hall in Dhaka and Hindu people from all social classes come there for religious purposes.

Data Collection Instrument

Since the study was based on quantitative method, survey questionnaire was used as the main data collection instrument. This method of data collection was selected because it is useful for obtaining and comprehending individual perspectives and understandings of particular issues (Ghimire, P., 2019). Additionally, the interviewer has the option to delve into the vast array of questions that contain the terms "what," "how," and "why" (Bryman, A. 2016).

Sampling: Participants

The subset of the population chosen for study is referred to as a sample. It's a portion of the populace. (Bryman, A. 2016). Married Hindu women were chosen as the participants of the study since they have more experiences regarding inheritance system and Hindu religious system.

Purposive sampling was used to involve the participants in data collection. Because purposeful sampling is accessible and has a high response rate, it is beneficial for data collection (Bryman, A. 2016). The sample size for the study was 200 comprising 100 from Bogura district and 100 from Dhaka city.

Data Analysis Technique

Data were collected through the in-depth interviews using survey questionnaire. When questionnaire was being developed, the response categories were coded. As the data collection procedure was finished, the data were edited, rechecked thoroughly. Questions were asked in Bengali language for the convenience of respondents. Then coded data were entered in SPSS 16.0 and analyzed by using statistical mean. To have a better graph, chart, and table these data

were recreated at MS-Excel and Microsoft word-2007.

Ethical Consideration

Permission from respondents to participate in the study was sought and were informed about the purpose and objectives of the study. It was made clear that participation in the study was voluntary and they had the option to stop providing information at any time. The responders were requested to provide truthful facts from their own point of view. The confidentiality of data was assured through rapport building by the researcher.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Socio-Economic Condition of Participants

The respondents comprised of different socio-economic conditions and occupations. Age, educational level, caste system and occupation were the major criterion of socio-economic conditions of the respondents.

Table-1: Socio-Economic Condition of Participants

Age Distribution		Percent		Total Frequency
		Bogura	Dhaka	
	20-30	32	40	72
	31-40	37	31	86
	41-50	30	16	45
	51-60	9	3	12
	61-70	2	8	10
Level of Education	Illiterate	6	6	12
	Primary	70	17	87
	Secondary	15	31	46
	Higher Secondary	4	24	28
	Graduate	4	19	23
	Post Graduate	1	20	21
Caste	Brahmins	9	28	37
	Ksyatriya	31	12	43
	Vaisya	27	35	62
	Shudra	27	17	44
	others	6	8	14
Occupation	Housewife	96	71	167
	Retired	1	5	6
	Job	2	19	21
	Student	1	5	6

Table 1 shows that most of the respondents (71% in Dhaka and 69% in Bogura) were aged between 20-40 years, 39% respondents in Bogura and 19% in Dhaka were aged between 41-60 years and the rest of the respondents were (2% in Bogura and 8% in Dhaka) above 60 years old.

A notable variation exists in the educational level of the respondents. In the study, it was found that (6% in Bogura and 6% in Dhaka) 12% respondents

were illiterate. Most of the respondents, 70% in Bogura and 31% in Dhaka, have educational qualification up to primary level and Secondary level respectively. 43% Respondents in Dhaka have educational qualification between higher secondary to post graduation compared to and 5% in Bogura. It was found that more educational attainment was centered in urban area, Dhaka.

Remarkable variation also exists in the caste system of the respondents. Most of the respondents in Dhaka and Bogura were brahmins and Ksyatriya which comprised 28% and 31% respectively, 62% respondents were Vaisya (27% in Bogura and 35% in Dhaka), 44% Shudra (27% in Bogura and 17% in Dhaka), and the rest of the respondents (6% in Bogura and 8% in Dhaka) were “others”.

Significant variation is also found among the respondents in regard to occupation. As shown in

table 1, most of the respondents (96% in Bogura and 71% in Dhaka) are housewives. 19% Respondents in Dhaka were job holder compared to only 2% in Bogura. Likewise, only 6% respondents were retired (5% in Dhaka and 1% in Bogura), and 6% were students (5% in Dhaka and 1% in Bogura).

Practice of Inheritance Rights and Condition of Hindu Women in Society

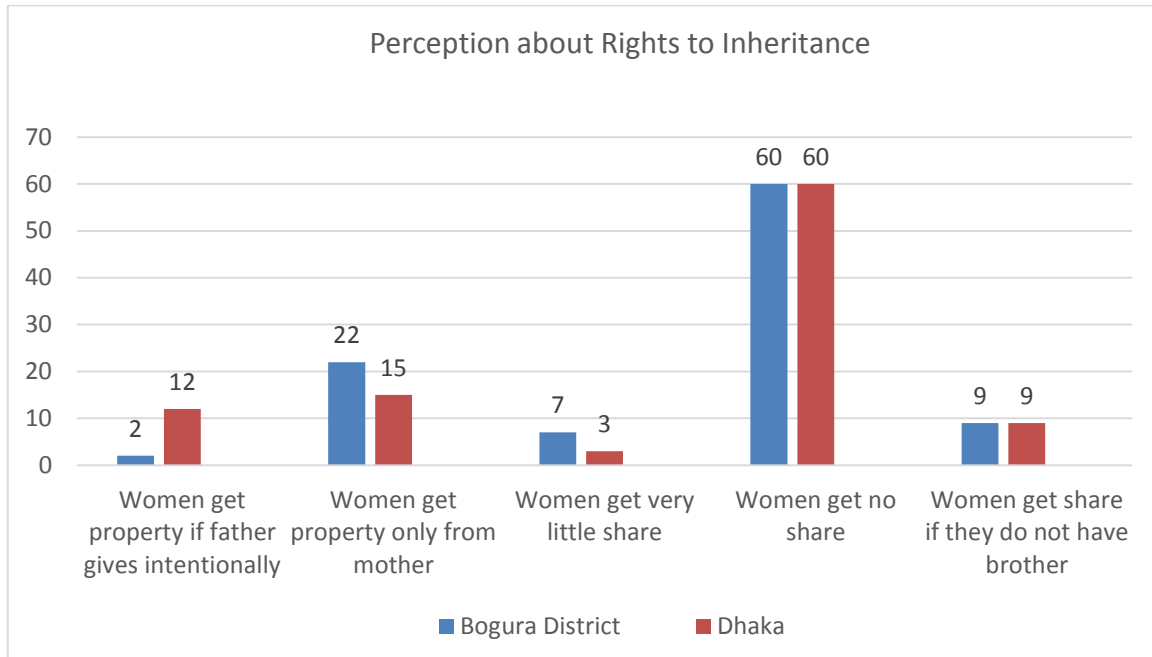


Figure 1: Perception about Rights to Inheritance

Perception about rights to inheritance varies among the respondents since there is no specific uniform laws regarding rights to inheritance in Bangladesh. Hindu women’s rights to inheritance are the combination of all perceptions about inheritance rights. General perception about Hindu women’s rights to inheritance is that Hindu women do not get share of property and getting share of property is conditional upon several issues such as if father gives intentionally, if they do not have brothers and if mother owns property.

Figure 1 shows that most of the respondents’ (60% in both Dhaka and Bogura) perception is generally women get no share of property, 37% respondents’ perception is that women get property only from mother, 10% respondents’ perception is that women get very little share, 18% respondents’ perception is that women get share if they don’t have brothers and 14% respondents’ perception is women get share of property if father gives intentionally.

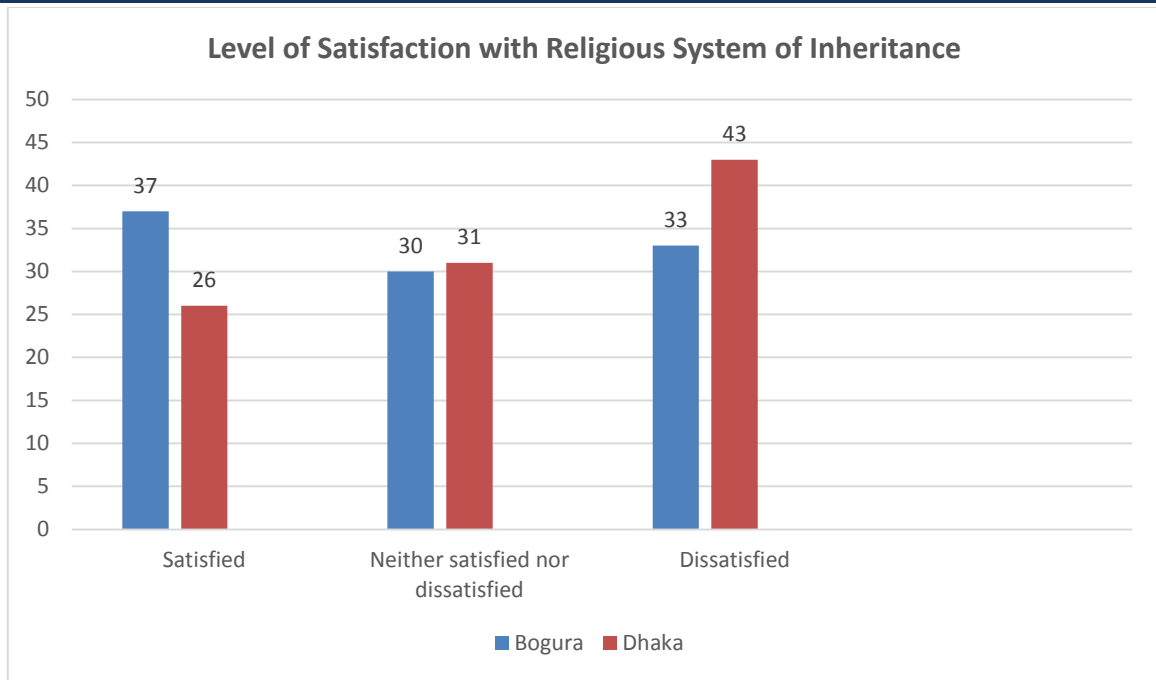


Figure 2: Level of Satisfaction with Religious System of Inheritance

Figure 2 shows that most of the Hindu women in Dhaka (43%) are not satisfied with religious system of inheritance compared to 33% in Bogura. Those who are satisfied with religious system of inheritance (26% in Dhaka and 37% in Bogura) think so because it is their traditional system which is followed from generation to generation and cannot be changed. Many women think that even if

they are dissatisfied, it will not lead to changes to inheritance system and they are bound to be pleased with it. Respondents those who are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (30% in Bogura and 31% in Dhaka) are mostly neutral, they are accustomed to traditional system and do not oppose it and if the system changes, they will also accept it.

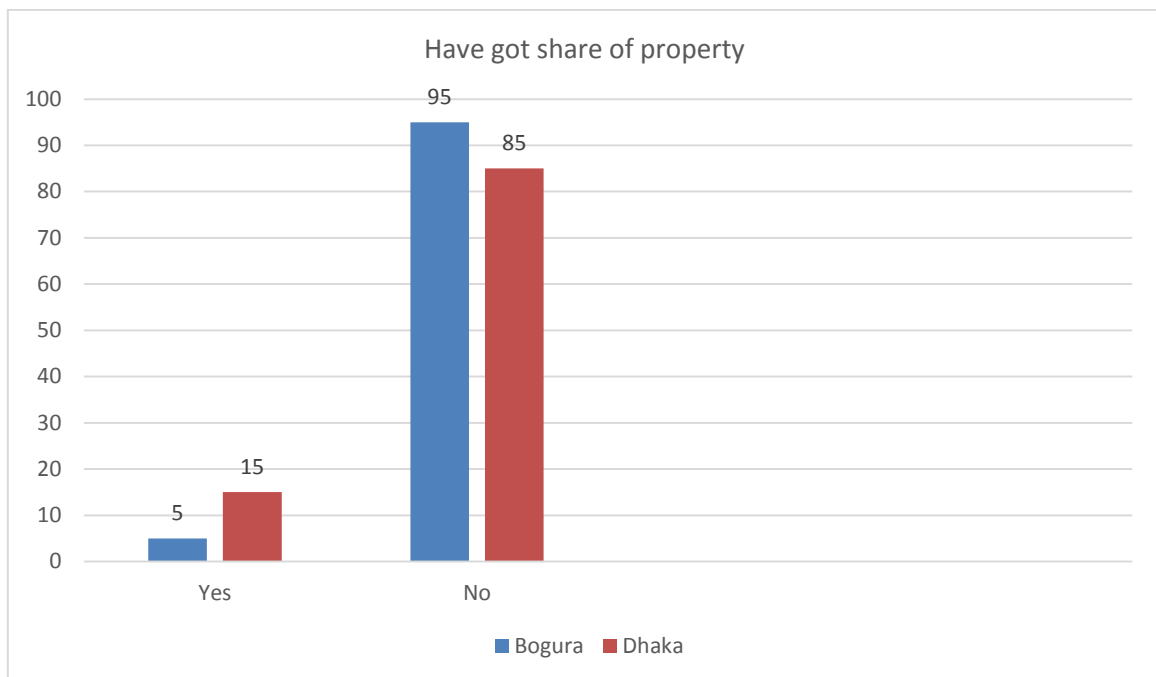


Figure 3: Have got share of Property from parents

Figure 3 shows that 95% of the respondents in Bogura have not got any share of property compared to 85% of the respondents in Dhaka.

Only 15% of the respondents have got share of property in Dhaka compared to only 5% in Bogura. The rate of getting property in Dhaka is 3

times higher than those of Bogura due to the level of education.

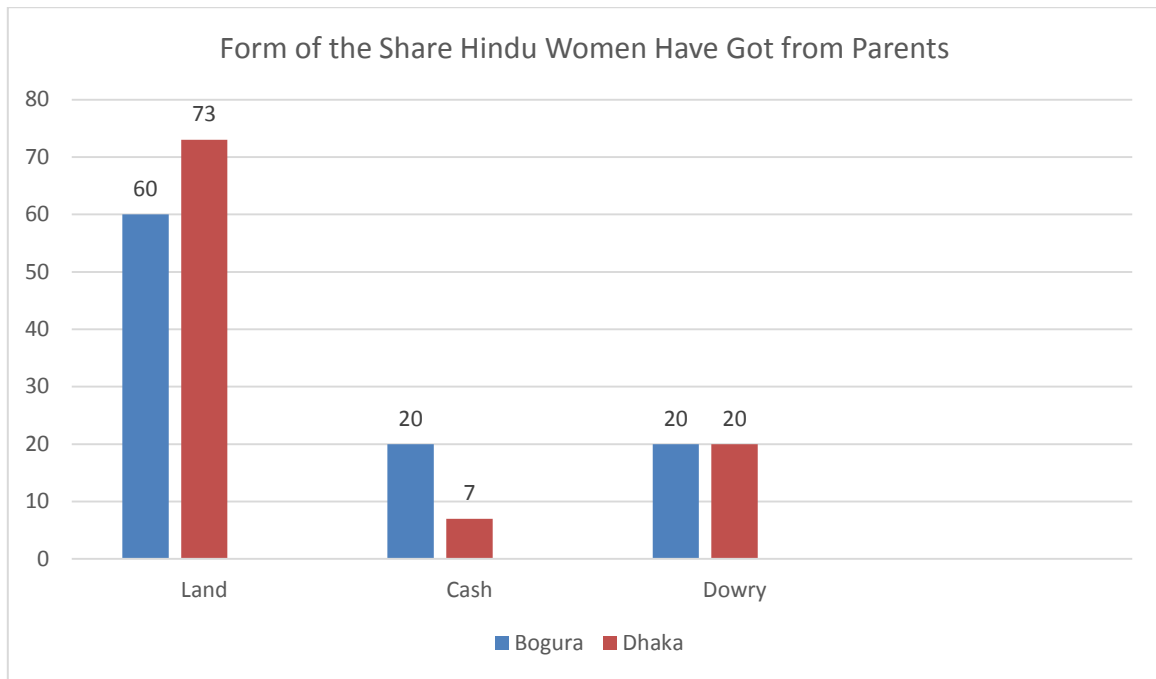


Figure 4: Form of the Share Hindu Women Have Got from Parents

Figure 4 shows that most of respondents 73% in Dhaka have got share of property in the form of land compared to 60% in Bogura. 20% Respondents in Bogura and 7% respondents in Dhaka have got share of property in the form of cash taka. Respondents those who have got share of property in the form of land or cash received it as inherited property. 20% respondents in Dhaka and 20% in Bogura received inheritance rights as dowry system. Hindu women consider the dowry

as a share of property since a part of property is sold to arrange the marriage of daughters. Since Hindu women receive their property rights as a bequest during marriage, they do not assert a claim to it. Frequently, parents would sell their daughter's portion of the estate to cover marriage expenses. Women do not advocate for their rights because of this (Nahar, K, et al. 2020).

Challenges to Rights to Inheritance

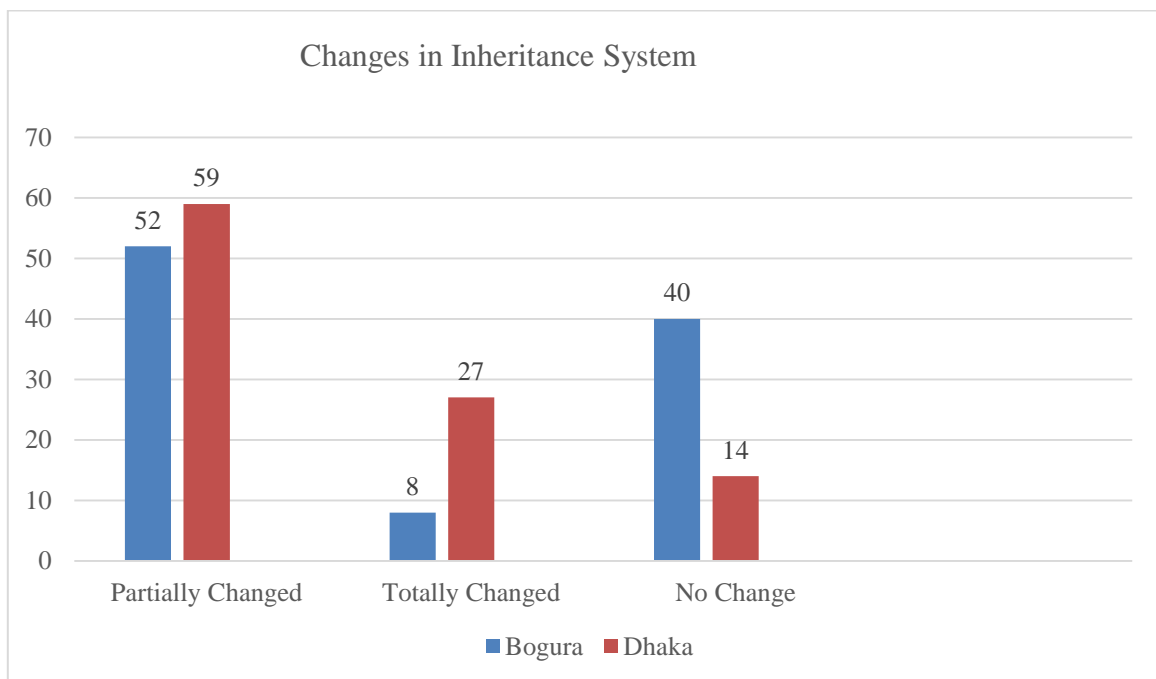


Figure 5: Changes in Inheritance System

From the figure 5, it was found that in Bogura, 52% Hindu women reported to have partial changes in inheritance rights compared to those of 59% in Dhaka; 8% and 27% respondents in Bogura and Dhaka favor total changes in inheritance system respectively; 40% respondents in Bogura and 14% in Dhaka reported to have no change in the system.

Opinion about changes in inheritance system were influenced by level of education and age of the respondents. It was found that traditional system of

inheritance was more prominent in Bogura than those of Dhaka. It was also found that younger and educated respondents were more in favor of changes in inheritance system than those of older respondents.

The number of respondents supporting change (either partial or total) in inheritance system increases with the higher level of education. So, education and change in inheritance system is positively co-related with each other.

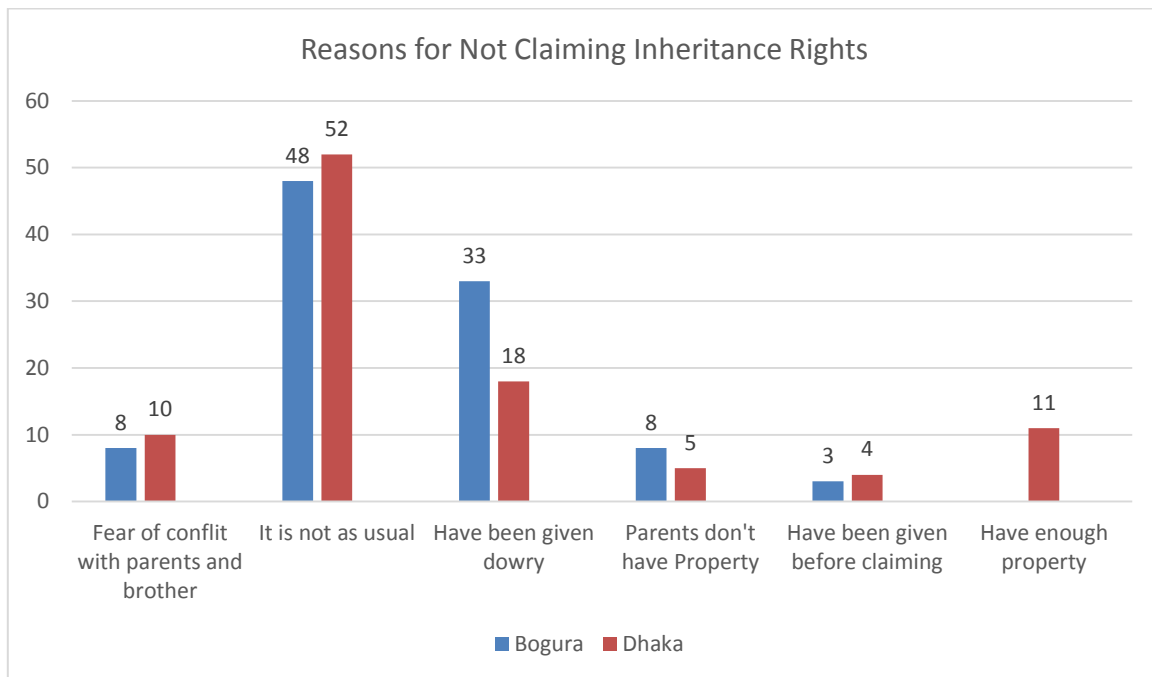


Figure 6: Reasons for Not Claiming Inheritance Rights

Figure 6 shows that most of the respondents, 48% in Bogura have not claimed inheritance rights because it is not as usual in Hindu tradition compared to those of 52% in Dhaka; 8% respondents in Bogura and 10% in Dhaka reported that they have not claimed inheritance rights because it will create conflict with parents or brother; 33% respondents in Bogura and 18% in Dhaka have not claimed inheritance rights because they have been given dowry during marriage,

(8%+5%) 13% respondents have not claimed because their parents do not have property, (3%+4%) 7% respondents have not claimed because they have been given before claiming. The fear of severing family ties is one of the primary causes for not claiming inheritance rights. Dowry system is also another important causes of it since Hindu women cannot consider marrying their daughters without a dowry (Nahar, K, et al. 2020).

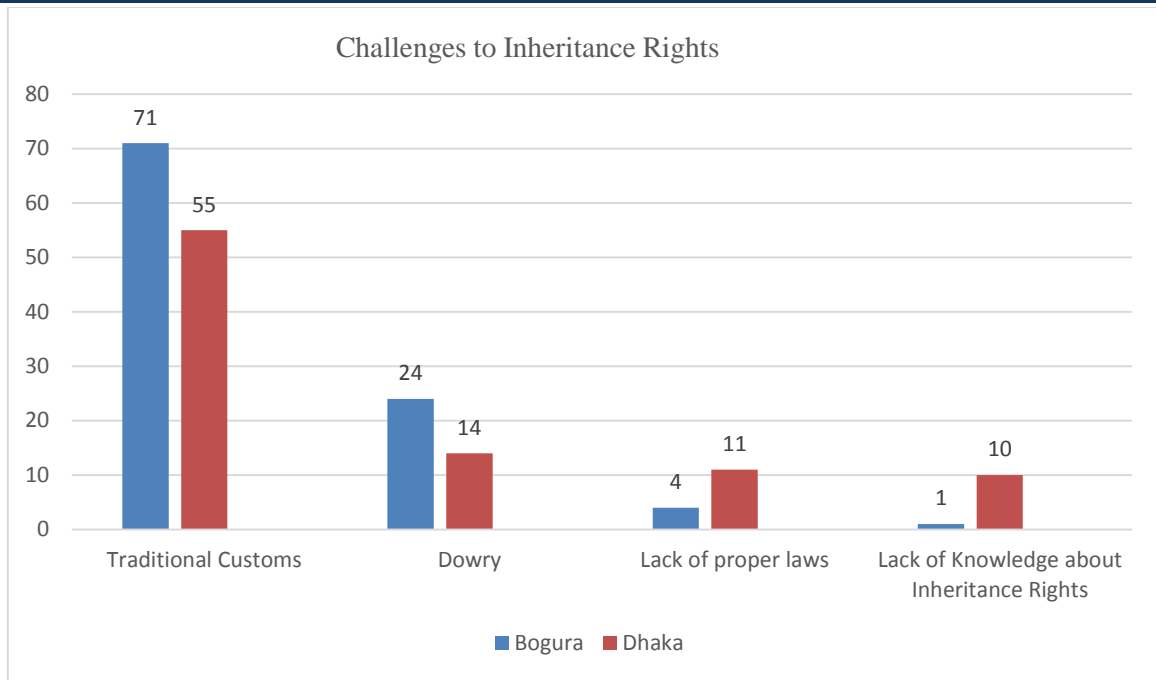


Figure 7: Challenges to Inheritance Rights

From the above figure it was found that 71% respondents in Bogura consider traditional customs as the main challenge to rights to inheritance compared to those of 55% in Dhaka, 24% respondents in Bogura consider dowry as the main challenge compared to those of 14% in Dhaka, (4%+11%) 15% consider lack of proper laws as

the main challenge and Only (1%+10%) 11% consider lack of knowledge as the main challenge to rights to inheritance. It was also found that older respondents as well as respondents with little educational qualification were comparatively more rigid about traditional customs than those of younger and educated respondents.

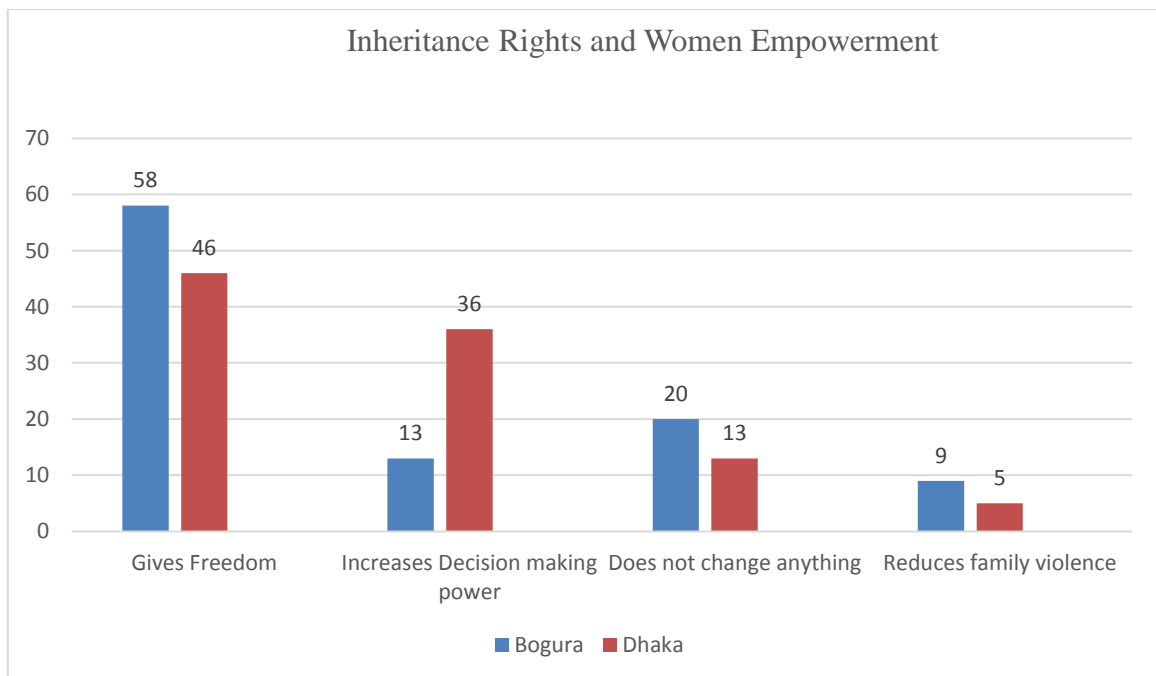


Figure 8: Inheritance Rights and Women Empowerment

Figure 8 shows that most of the respondents in Bogura and Dhaka 58% and 46% respectively reported to have freedom due to property ownership. While 13% respondents in Bogura and

36% in Dhaka reported that property ownership increases decision making power, 9% respondents in Bogura and 5% in Dhaka reported that property ownership reduces family violence. Another 20%

respondents in Bogura and 13% in Dhaka opined property ownership does not change anything.

It was found that mostly educated respondents reported to have positive changes due to property ownership such as it gives freedom, increases decision making power, reduces family violence. Comparatively older respondents with little educational qualification reported no change due to property ownership.

CONCLUSION

Deprivation of rights have become common phenomenon and challenging issue across the world. The study explained the condition of Hindu women in regard to inheritance rights as well as portrayed the deprivation and challenges of Hindu women. The study identified several challenges that hinder Hindu women to exercise inheritance rights. It was also found that rights to inheritance is a complicated issue since religious obligations and traditional customs are deeply rooted in it. Dowry, considered as social disease, has also aggravated the complexity of inheritance rights specifically. Being surrounded by patriarchal society and living a life of subjugation, deprivation of inheritance rights has worsened the condition of Hindu women in wider society. Since rights to inheritance have a great impact on the empowerment and independence of Hindu women; they need to raise their voice to uphold and grant their own rights. Moreover, the state needs to come forward to formulate specific laws to safeguard the rights of Hindu women. Considering overall condition of Hindu women, it is high time to eliminate all sorts of discrimination against women to achieve sustainable development goals and uplift Bangladesh to a developed country.

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