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Exploring perceptions of Mangrove Forest "Sundarbans" goers' Women about Environmental Security

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Abstract

The climatic condition of Bangladesh is triggering the Sundarbans forest to be degraded. This largest mangrove forest of the world is undergoing deterioration as it is used hazardingly by the area inhabitants. Previous research in the region demonstrates that despite women's vulnerable positions caused by cyclones and climate change, and also due to patriarchal attitudes of the society, they can contribute to the protection of endangered forests for environmental security. Furthermore A wide range of discourses on eco-feminism and environment depicts the managerial roles of women towards natural resource in the context of South Asia. Those discourses constrain to make a new perspective on mangrove forest resource environmental security from gender perspective. Nevertheless, a little concentration has been given on attitudes and behaviours of mangrove forest goers' associated with environmental security in the regime of gender and development. This paper depicts a holistic description on numerous activities performed by women and men concerning mangrove forest Sundarbans. Especially, the application of Stand Point theory coined by Sandra Harding will inform the audience on women's access to forest resources; their control on it and their roles for its protection. Also the paper aims to make tangible link amongst women, forest resources and environmental security in the post disaster context of Aila and Sidr. The application of phenomenological approach followed by ethnography portrays the research instruments applied in the research process.

Keywords: Mangrove Forest, Sundarbans, Aila, Sidr, Standpoint and Environmental Security.

1. Introduction

The Sundarbans Forest (beautiful forest) bordered by the Bay of Bangla is situated mostly in the southern part of Bangladesh. The largest part of this forest is surrounded by the southern districts Khulna and Satkhira. Sundarbans forest serves a crucial function as a protective barrier for the millions of inhabitants in the coastal belt of Satkhira and Khulna. Two severe cyclones, Sidr and Aila occurred respectively in 2007 and 2009 in these two districts. In this regard, Forest Peoples Programme (2009) reported that on 25 May that cyclone Aila swept through the villages of traditional resource-users of the Sundarbans forest, Bangladesh. Disasters like Aila and Sidr forced more than a million people to lose their homes and to migrate from their regions. The World Health Organization, WHO (2009) reports that women and children particularly get

affected by disasters which is more severe than the seventy five percent of the displaced individuals.

It is also indispensable to note that the family oriented responsibilities of a woman with less support and resources during pre-disaster are increased as soon as the disaster commences. In the post disaster landscape, women contribute towards protective activities of environment by involving themselves directly in their own community (Brotie, 2010)¹. With the incentives of micro-credit² and natural disaster oriented training schemes from NGOs (ASHA, BARSIK, Brac), women pay attentive attitudes to the significance of the Sundarbans forest resources that shelter them from cyclone. In addition in the research area it appears that “women take better care of the constituents of the mangrove forest rather than men and we will check how and why”.

2. Problem Statement:

Public participation in using forest resource is vital for sustainable forestry policies in a country like Bangladesh located in the most vulnerable level due to climate change. Studies show that women’s involvement in the formulation, planning, and execution of policy regarding forestry remains low at all levels. In India, women who recognized the link between deforestation and recurring floods and landslides formed the Chipko Movement, a path way in the platform of women and environment (Martin, 2007). Although this instance has been criticized by academicians in questioning the idea of women as protector of the environment, it identifies women’s access to environmental resources. It can be assumed that women as changing agent of environmental development with effective leadership play for forest management in the context of Indian Subcontinent. The closeness of women to forest resources (i.e. trees, leaves and timber) and their commitment to environmental ethics in performing forest related responsibilities lead to environmental security.

Women as community resource manager are eligible to arrange gathering of women and can contribute to fruitful decisions in relation to natural environment. In the broader discussion of women, gender and environment it is often assumed that women are closer to and use the environment in more caring and sustainable ways than men. In this regard, Leach (2007) shows that this notion was influential in the development discourse in the late 70s to 80s. This statement has been properly argued in a substantial way by the “Ecofeminists” of the 1970s and 80s. Goutam (2003) argues that forests have a high non market value such as biodiversity and watershed protection. It is well acquainted to community level that ‘natural capital’ like forests carries out global, regional and local services. Forest as renewable resource of human environment ensures the protection of environment. Marten (2005) has considered ecological security an undermining phenomenon as it is imposed by social forces like population explosion, globalization, and urbanization and consumer society. Policy and academic interest in environmental security has generally oscillated along a sinusoidal curve since the late 1970s.

As COP-15 approached, a new upsurge of interest in the linkage between environmental security and climate change started to garner strength after a somewhat brief post- 9/11 lull

¹ Brotie is an organization working with women, forest and environment at Shamnagr.

² A small amount of cash is given to women as loan for their survival by a microcredit enterprise like Grameen Bank.

(Jhaveri 2011, p.977). It has been reported by the American Council for the UNU Millennium Project (June 2006-July,2007) that environmental security continues to move up on national, regional, and international agendas due to increasing scientific evidence of climate change, extreme weather events, the number and intensity of natural disasters, pollution, potentials for pandemics, and nuclear-biological-chemical threats. In this specific study my intension is not to investigate the gender dimension of environmental security, rather to establish an analytical aspect of environmental security in relation to women's activities on sundarbans forest resources.

In this regard a critical question arises on the practicing behaviour of forest resources by women in relation to the cyclone 'Aila and Sidr'. A before after dimension on using mangrove forest by women vis-à-vis to cyclones is a vital attempt of scrutiny by this study. In supporting this approach it seems logical to incorporate men's traits on the practice of forest resource explicitly. In this regard our explorative point of attention seeks for the question of environmental security of the local ecology in relation to utilization of Sundarbans forest by the inhabitants, especially with women.

3. Rationale

Sundarbans as the largest single tract of natural mangrove forest of Bangladesh provides not only with the livelihood of mass people in the local ecology but functions as a safeguard against cyclone and other environmental hazards. It has been incorporated in a lot of policy documents. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as a well accepted apparatuses for international development concentrates on the assurance of environmental sustainability, a significant agenda for Bangladesh as its natural environment especially the southern part is undergoing vulnerability caused by climate change. Additionally, the ministry of Environment and Forest of Bangladesh reports in its webpage that present forest management primarily guided by Forestry Master Plan (FMP) completed in 1993 with the assistance from ADB, UNDP and FAO is encouraging for enhancing environment preservation and conservation. Therefore it is an indication of environmental security by the proper authority. Menon (1991) cited in Dankelman and Jansen (2010, p 22), argued that major areas of human work in communities: food procurement, the protection of life, property and territory, including the collection of water, energy sources and fodder, the maintenance of basic health standards and collection of medicinal plants; women mostly play a predominant role and perform these tasks through their direct interaction with the natural environment. Following these interactions Davidson et al (1992) noted the specific roles of women folk in local communities as benefactors of primary environmental care.

Additionally Denton (2002) argues that active involvement of women in agriculture and their reliance on biomass energy mark them as key stakeholders in actual environmental management system. It evidences the interaction between women and the ecological resources. Accordingly the involvement of women in conserving forest resources is a common phenomenon in rural Bangladesh. Thus environmental security and forest resources as development issue should be researched from the below. Since the problem statement crystal clearly demonstrates that in a post disaster context the effective management of Sundarbans' forest is a crucial need for the local community to sustain the healthy ecosystem, it is also a prioritized phenomenon for the forthcoming generation. In addition, The Sundarban mangrove forests must be brought under

community reserves where local people could be made partners in conservation and management processes (Rahman et al 2010, p 86).

On the other hand Mwangi et al (2011) noted that women are critical actors in the management of forest resources and most gender related studies on forest sustainability are dominated by studies from India and Nepal that have focused on community forestry. Hence The Environment Information System (ENVIS) working Women and Environment at Himachal Pradesh in India enunciates the forest and water are the most important factors in the daily work and life of Hilly rural women and out of these, forests are considered most important. The women play important role in forestry in essentially three areas: Gathering fuel wood, fodder Employment and income, Protection and management (p, 24). Therefore it can be easily perceived that there is scope to study on role of women in forest management in the context of Bangladesh. A study conducted by Akhter et al(2010,p.17) also demonstrates that women are mostly involved in home garden management-related activities and are interested in conserving home gardens because they obtain such substantial benefits as food security, income, health care, and environmental benefits. The core objective of this study is to narrate numerous activities of women and their interactions to Sundarbans forest resource. More specifically, the study is projected to cover the following objectives based on main purpose:

- To explore various activities performed by women in using Sundarbans forest resources.
- To make a relationship on women, forest and environmental security.

Research Questions: With a view to achieving the proposed objectives the present study is going to answer the following questions:

- What is the perception of women about the Sundrabans forest resources and how it is used?
- What is their notion around environmental security?
- What are women's behaviours in their use of forest resources?

4. Literature Review:

Pandey (1993) in the context of rural Himalayan region states that pastoral community are involved to plant; protect and manage forest resources not only to their own land but also at community owned land. It identifies the community's interests in managing the forest resource for a healthy environment. The study also indicates that policy related to forest management needs changes to promote local initiatives and improve women's access to forest resources. Nepal and Dey (2009, pp.11-13) suggests that Bangladesh has set to achieve the seventh MDG of ensuring environmental sustainability even though natural calamity is common phenomenon of this country. According to the MDGs Progress report 2007 and FAO studies, only 13 percent of the country has actual forest coverage. However, National Forest and Tree Resources Assessment, 2007 claims that the forest area is 10 percent of the total area. The study also indicates that the real strength of Bangladesh forestry is locally based, participatory forestry, co-management of protected areas and highly motivated people who increasingly recognize the need for a healthy forest ecosystem that will provide future economic stability. Thus forest can be denoted as a means of livelihood for the rural community.

IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (2000) elicits that Community forest management systems in Bangladesh are characterized by the distinctive cultural and physical environments in which they occur, while external CFM projects also reflect these contextual differences. It is easy to infer from the report that gender dimension of forest management in the rural community is intervened by the culturally set up rules and other social regulations. CIFR, the Center for International Forestry Research (2011) claimed that Women are the main users of forests in developing countries – gathering food and firewood – but they continue to be sidelined in how the forests are managed despite years of efforts to mainstream their involvement, experts said ahead of International Women's Day on March 8. It also shows that greater involvement of women in forest management usually improves the condition and sustainability of the forests.

Buchy and Subba(2003) published that participatory process in resource management should benefit everybody of a given community. The social reality and complex relationship among different actors impede the management of community resource like forest. The authors addressed how institutional model like community forest fail to integrate gender as a variable. Masika and Joekes (1997) suggest that 'Environmental security' is influenced by gender relations. Their study also reveal that men and women in rural areas are primary resource users, but access to resources is socially constructed, so that men and women derive different benefits and uses from natural resources, and in times of environmental shocks and crises may have fewer assets to fall back on, and limited diversification strategies. UNEP (1995) argues that poor women may become trapped into short time horizons with respect to resources over which they have little control, because they lack assurances of future access to resources and because they lack other economic opportunities. A study of poor communities in three Latin American countries conducted by Paolisso and Gammage (1996) indicates that women make significantly larger contributions to managing or ameliorating the negative effects on family welfare of natural resource decline and environmental pollution, particularly among the poor. Halim (1999) convincingly argued that women living in the social forestry arena are dependent to forest resource for their domestic necessities while both men and women are knowledgeable about the forest's capacity for meeting local needs. Of late it has been described by Khan and White (2012) that researches on the forest policy of Bangladesh is strikingly limited and owing to the condition of governmentality, the policy and prescription on forestry is presented as technical instrument for promoting efficiency in forest sector.

5. Methodology

This study has followed a qualitative ethnographic design with a phenomenological approach. Riemer (2008) describes that Ethnography, embedded in an anthropological tradition, is essentially the study of a particular cultural group or phenomenon and ethnographic fieldwork encompasses documenting people's beliefs and practices from the people's own perspectives. This is intended to make the study more flexible and explorative affording me an opportunity to dwell deeper into the responses offered by participants. The application of phenomenological approach permits me together with perceiving and identifying social phenomena (Sundarbans' Forest and local ecology) from the actors' own point of view unfolding the world experienced by the subjects. Reasonably it is required noting that phenomenology as a method of inquiry

emphasises on the subjective experiences of individuals and aiming at understanding their deeper meaning.

5.1 *Participants:*

The population of the study is from Gabura Union comprising of purposeful sampling referring to selecting participants with characteristics strategically apt to the research question. It has offered the interested participants to take part in the research process as to express their ideas, practices and opinions independently. The size of the sample will depend on how many of the participants that are willing to contribute from the community. It implies that respondents who satisfy the research objectives and are willing to participate in the research process will be sampled. A total of twenty (20) women and fifteen (15) men constituted the sample size for study. The underlying principles of including fifteen women as sample indicate that their opinions will contribute implicitly to the study. Moreover to grasp the men's perception explicitly, the research design also prioritises their concern. Feasibly it will create opportunity to the researcher to find out the answer of the second research question. However to acquire as rich data as possible from the gendered point of view I am intended to conduct interviews of both women and men from the community.

5.2 *Data Collection:*

In ethnographic research, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection. Silverman (2010) suggests that although ethnographic fieldwork can use interviews, it always involves observation and recording. Thereby observation, in-depth interview and a focused group discussion as key instrument of collecting data will be used in the fieldwork. As a participant observer on a voluntary basis, immersion in the day-to-day activities with the people being studied will enable me to capture not only their various activities in Sundarbans but also their interactions to the forest resources. Accordingly overall objective is usually to record conduct under the widest range of possible settings (Smith, Rankin and Bertrand, 2005).

Moreover unstructured interviews followed by open ended questions conducted with the sample to accumulate relevant information fitted well with the research questions. Patton (1990) viewed unstructured interview a natural extension of participant observation that relies entirely on the spontaneous generation of questions in the natural flow of an interaction, typically an interview that occurs as part of on-going participant observation fieldwork. Also a focused group interview constituting both men and women member from the community will be arranged. It will encourage a variety of viewpoints on the on the topic in focus. This interview will be operated in the local language. A general challenge with focus group interviews is that the moderator probably will lose some of the control over the course of the conversations. The face-to-face interviews and focused group interview with the community members has afforded us the panorama to grasp a vivid picture of the informant's insider perspectives on the use of Sundarbans forest resource and their dependency on it but more detailed in the post disaster situation.

As a result the cultural and social orientation including the interactions on local ecology, forest resources and environmental protection of the informants has been explored. It is an attempt to make it effective in eliciting individual experiences, opinions and feelings about the

phenomena which are crucial aspects in this study. Thus the study will incorporate *emic perspective*³ to examine the insiders' view of the respondents. At the time of interviewing the face to face discussion will be recorded by the permission of the participant that will include digital recording, note taking and remembering.

5.4 Data Analysis:

Recorded interviews will be transcribed in English. Collected data through observation and interviews would be mostly in words. Thereby words, context, internal consistency, frequency and intensity comments, specificity, trends/themes and interrelations will be considered during the interpretation of the data. Field notes taken from the field work will be brought under consideration. However two main forms of analysing ethnographic data suggested by Angrosion (2009) will be used to produce the result. Those are descriptive analysis and theoretical analysis. Moreover, Atlas Ti software can be used as data analysis tool.

6. Operational Framework: Link between Gender and Development

I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee

-The Lord said in the book of Genesis

The above quotation is a mythological justification for the position of women in the society. At the core of the sociological analysis of gender is the distinction between biological sex and gender.

6.1 Gender Relations - definition:

Ann Oakley (1985) states, “‘Gender’ is a matter of culture, it refers to the social classification of men and women into ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’” (Oakley, Ann 1985: 16). Therefore it can be quite asserted that the term Gender has a social, psychological and cultural connotation. And all the social and cultural “packaging” that is done for a girl and boy from birth onwards is “gendering”.

Giddens (2006) remarks, “Gender Relation is the societally patterned interactions between men” (Giddens 2006: 462). Gender relations are the ways in which the rights, responsibilities and identities within the relationship of men and women are defined by a society.

While conducting study on environmental security, women and forest resources use we observed that men go to forest in search of livelihood more than women. Men were involved in collecting ‘ponas’ such as ‘Galda, Bagda’, collecting wood, honey, ‘Golpata’ from the forests while women were involved in home-based processing of ‘ponas’ such as sorting out the bagda from galda pona or sorting them out from other lives caught in the net while fishing. The men commented that they did not feel secure to take their wives with them due to the fear of tiger,

³ Emic perspective (Harris, 1976) is used by anthropologists to explore the insiders' view (informant view) that enables researcher to have insights of their informants' activities.

crocodile or pirates. Here lies the gender roles sanctioned by that society related to the use of forest resources.

6.2 *Gender and power relation:*

The nature of power relation in gender dimension is inherent in a complex form. Here we will try to expatiate this in two ways. First, a Marxist model of power relation can be established to describe gender dimension. For Marx, the power of men over women only appears when the class division has come out. He was concerned on the inequalities created in a capitalist system. This model shows that women have become a form of 'private property' owned by men through the institution of marriage. Shepard (2004) claims, "women are unpaid laborers who make it possible for men to earn wages. This economic power enables men to maintain dominance over the economically dependent wife and mother" (Shepard 2004: 313). Men become powerful or 'Have' and women tend to appear as powerless or 'Have not'. Here, gender dimension is revealed in the division of labor and the resources shared by men and women along with the ideas and its representation possessed by both of them. Our study revealed that women of the Gabura are engaged in unpaid works such as home-based processing of the ponas, bearing and rearing children and doing household chores. Particularly men are engaged in income earning activities.

Second, it highlights that the structure of power relations in the gender dimension is based on assumptions of what is to be male and female. This view divides human being into two distinctive classes based on gender. It can be simply asserts as a set of binary opposition hold by Western metaphysics. It views that all signifying systems operate according to binary opposition i.e. day/night, model/copy, god/human, good/bad, the one part of which is privileged over than the other.

Forest going women and men remarked of the Gabura union in Sundarbans remarked that women did not go to deep forest as they could not combat the aggression of tiger and row the boat by covering a long distance due to their more feeble physical condition than men.

6.3 *Gender and Environment:*

The discussion on gender and environment is flourished with two paradigms-

- Gender mediates human interactions and all environmental use, knowledge and assessment
- Gender roles, responsibilities, expectations, norms and the division of labor shape all forms of human relationships to the environment.

[Source: www.unep.org]

Through our close observation we can understand that women could not go to town or city for being a women. They were to solely rely on the natural resources of Sundarbans for maintaining their livelihood initiatives. Before Aila they used to grow vegetables around their homestead. But after Aila vegetables could not grow in the land due to salinity intrusion and particularly women's dependency on the forest for livelihood increased dramatically. The widow and abandoned women had become more dependent on Sundarbans than others as they were to

maintain their livelihood by themselves and finding no other way to live on they were to depend on Sundarbans.

François F. Tiayon (2011) opines, while women own a great deal of knowledge on natural resource management, their ability to access and use these resources is often limited by their weaker resource rights. This is because the dominance of patriarchal systems and the destabilization or extinction of matriarchal societies resulting from the pressures of male values and modernity in most tropical areas lead to:

- The masculinization of customary land ownership in agricultural contexts; and
- The setting up of male controlled management systems for common pool resources. (Tiayon 2011)

6.4 *Environmental Security:*

Environmental security is a rational construct used as a concept in multidisciplinary approach. The World Commission on Environment and Development(WCED) 1987 report titled *Our Common Future* that popularised the term 'sustainable development 'and introduced 'environmental security' which was placed in the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992. Nina Graeger was quoted in Freeman 2004 that contributes four reasons for making a theoretical and operational linkage between security and environment that is given below:

First, environmental degradation is in itself a severe threat to human security... Second, environmental degradation or change can be both cause and consequence of violent conflict...Third, predictability and control are essential elements of military security considerations, and these are also important elements in the safeguarding of the environment...Fourth, a cognitive linkage between the environment and security has been established. It has become legitimate for mainstream politicians to speak out in favor of an environmentally responsible security policy (p.110-111).

Gender perspective of environmental security and forest resource in Bangladesh: The gender perspective of security offers a creative solutions to environmental problems as like as eco-feminism which directly link gender with environment that women are inherently closer to nature. It considers that the oppression of women and nature is interlinked. It is a strand of feminism to enhance human security and environmental problems and a joint discussion of environmentalism and feminism. As like feminist talk about why women inferior to men and th environmentalist are interested why nature is treated as inferior to culture or science. Basically in the developing countries relationship between the human beings and nature and women and nature is more intimate and the effects of environmental degradation on women are more immediate and material. Green maintains that, since the philosophical outlook which has justified man's domination over nature is the very same as the one that has justified man's domination over women and the subsequent division of labor, the linkage represents - at most - a symbolic connection. In addition one could argue that a practical or material link exists between the intersection of the interests of feminists and ecologists. One such area relates to the correlation

between women's right to choose whether or not to have children and the environmental problems caused by overpopulation.

Women rely more heavily on natural resources than man as they have fewer alternative sources of livelihood. Men can migrate to urban centres to look for work and diversify into laboring or small business, while women often must remain at home to fulfill responsibilities such as caring for the family, sick and elder. They rely on the resources available to them locally to fulfill their needs. They use the forest resources. United Nations Women in Development (WID) considers women as agent of environmental destruction. Poverty, in this view, is the primary cause forcing women in their traditional role as collectors of firewood, water and food to exploit natural resources. Farming steep hillsides and thereby aggravating soil erosion and flooding during heavy rains becomes, in this context, a matter of economic necessity. World Bank studies of forest destruction through firewood gathering have overstated women's complicity in this kind of ecological destruction. Women, in fact, collect mostly dead wood. It is ironic that a woman's social worth is measured in terms of how she exploits nature, how 'productive' she is in discovering arable land and firewood. As water supplies and other natural resources become depleted due to exploitation the amount of time and energy women and girls spend on household duties dramatically increases. Women have travel further to collect water and fuel.

Different disasters made women vulnerable by reproductive and sexual health problems and increased rates of sexual and domestic violence. The women members in the social forestry program did most of the work in the nursery such as preparing soils, bagging soils, seed sowing, watering, weeding, seedling grading, nurturing, etc. Homestead agro forestry, women perform many activities such as collection and storing of seeds, raising seedlings, planting, watering, fencing, fertilizing, harvesting and processing. It was found that women also took care of the seedlings to save them from theft and being destroyed by cattle, goats and wild animals. Collection and processing of agro forestry products and preparing them for marketing is an integral part of homestead forestry where women do the maximum work from collection to processing. But most critical is the decision-making process. Generally women's consent is ignored during decision-making. In homestead plantations both the wife and husband play key roles in decision-making. Both husband and wife jointly make decisions to plant trees in all farm categories. But for vegetable production women are involved more than men regardless of farm categories. Many authors reported that women were more interested in planting annual crops than trees because of greater immediate benefits.

6.5 *Standpoint Theory: As theoretical framework*

Standpoint Theory borrows its core concepts from Marxist philosophy. In Marxism, Class Struggle is the dynamic in class structure (Marx 1964). This class struggle occurs between two main classes in every epoch of the history of human development (Mode of Production). As such, the clash between Patrician and Plebian in *Slave holding Mode of Production* or the conflict between Bourgeois and Proletariat in *Capitalist Mode of Production*. Bourgeois owns the '*Means of Production*' and Proletariat owns the '*Labor*'. The Proletariat has to sell their labor to Bourgeois for subsistence.

For Marx, knowledge is viewed as, “*Historically constructed and relative as it is based on a given Mode of Production (Hesse-Biber 2012: 11)*”. Bourgeois shape knowledge to perpetuate the social inequality. Here, Standpoint Theory contends that the knowledge of the Bourgeois or the elite class is partial. On the hand, the knowledge possessed by the Proletariat or the slaves is in more complete form. To assert this argument it identifies two points as follows-

- Proletariat is able to comprehend his own world than that of Bourgeois
- Proletariat is capable of attaining the knowledge more about the world in which it has to survive

6.6 *Feminist Standpoint Theory: A Sketch*

Feminist Standpoint Theory emerges evolving two focal points. Firstly, it aims to identify the cultural values and power dynamics of subordinate women. And finally, it shows spotlight on knowledge, particularly cultivated by activities that are typically assigned to women. Feminist Standpoint Theory seeks to reveal the knowledge that is gained by contemporary female activities. As such doing household chores and taking care of families by the women. It emphasizes social ideologies, norms, values and roles, for example, the gender role in a certain rural society. Feminist Standpoint Theory discards that knowledge is the constant outcome of the indispensable features of a group members. Rather it attempts to unveil the causal background of why women are assigned or compelled to conduct certain activities and why these are considered as devalued than their counterparts. In short, “standpoint theory claims that some kinds of social locations and political struggles advance the growth of knowledge, contrary to the dominant view that politics and local situatedness can only block scientific inquiry (Harding, Sandra 2004: 26)”.

6.7 *Feminist Standpoint Theory: Core Concepts*

Firstly, due to the power relation pertaining in every society, women’s lives are structurally as well as systematically different from the men. The power relation existing in the society results in unequal social locations (Wood 2012). In these different social locations, women and men engage in distinct type of activities. As such, women’s task is to take care or conducting domestic work, whereas, the job lies on men is to work outside for earning livelihood. These social locations eventually determine the dominant group, where, another group lies to be dominated. In the contemporary social locations women occupy the dominated group while men belong to the dominant group.

The next one *is* the Social Locations which men and women belong create distinctive knowledge. By explaining the above example, we will be able to clarify this concept. It simply means that, doing household chores or taking care of patient is not inherent to every women. As same, working outside is not inborn to men as well. It is more or less assigned or *labeled* (Becker 1963) to men and women. By performing these activities, a woman or man develops his knowledge regarding those particular activities. For instance, by taking care of family members women are quite knowledgeable on the conception of care giving or nurturing.

And finally, the last one is termed by Sandra Harding (1993) as ‘Strong Objectivity’. It means, “the extent to which values and attitudes of the researcher also enter into the “context of discovery,”(Hesse-Biber 2012: 10). Some Feminist Standpoint Theorists contend that knowledge

from the dominated stratum is much more complete than that of dominant stratum. For example, the knowledge of women is much more complete than that of men. The arguments behind this proposition are, women must comprehend her world than that of men and, women must know the world to survive. These arguments support Marxist notion as discussed earlier.

7. **Forest Going Women's activities in the Sundarbans pointing to Sandra Harding:**

The Sundarbans, the largest mangrove forest in the world, has become the one and only source of livelihood of thousands of people inhabiting adjacent to her. In rural Bangladesh, women are much more conventional and conservative. In the Sundarbans nearest Gabura Union, Satkhira women are not out of the trend of typical rural Bangladeshi women. They used to go to forest for extreme hardship of poverty. These Forest Going Women are locally called as '*Jele-Baoali*'. It means individuals engaged in fish collecting and wood cutting. Most of the forest going women is widow or 'Tiger Widow'. These women's main task is to take care of family members, particularly their children and husbands. They have to go to forest for earning livelihood. Here we will try to find out the activities of the forest going women with the concept of Sandra Harding's theory-

Although women and men move to forest, there are so many differences between their forest going practice. Many Men go to Sundarbans forest for long days ranging 10-15 days. On the other hand, women can go to forest only in daytime. They do not have the access to go along with men for long duration of time. In an In-Depth interview a male respondent perceive regarding this, "*Women, they are feeble, we never take them with us. If they go to forest for this huge time who will take the responsibility of the family*". There is also a division of labor in the activities performing by women and men the forest. Observation report depicts, Men used to collect honey, scorpion, cut '*Gol pata*', collect fish, '*Pona*', cut wood and so many tasks. On the other hand, in the women have nothing to do except collecting '*Pona*' and cutting trees. The power relation in the society plays key role in creating social locations even in the Sundarbans which make women structurally and systematically submissive to men and therefore, they have turned into the dominated group, while men have arrived as dominant ones.

Women and men in Gabura Union engage in different sorts of work which enable them to acquire distinctive knowledge. At home, women used to conduct household tasks whereas, men sit idle, engage in gossiping. These sorts of activities trace impacts when they go for forest. The observation report disclose that, going to the household of these '*Jele-Baoali*' while they were outside on catching "*Pona*", it is found that before going to forest (4:00 in the morning) they clean their house, prepare food for the children and husbands. Moreover, it is found that after returning from forest with wet clothes many women abandon their poultry, feed them and take general situation of the household. They collect Payra fish -local fishes, wood, '*Keorar Fal*' - local fruit from Sundarbans. It expresses a great care for home. Moreover, due to their social location women are of more caring to their field. Most of the interviews show that women used to cut the branch of trees in a especial cutting named Kolomchekur'- A type of cutting a tree like a fountain pen. In this way, the trees can live except that branch. While men answered that they used to cut trees in form of '*Ar Cope*'- A plain cutting of tree. In this form, the whole tree can be ruined. The greatest show of women's care which comes from their distinctive knowledge can be found when they go for catching '*Pona*'. In the time catching '*Pona*' a significant event is '*Ochol Jhara or Ochol Deya*'- The process in which the '*Pona*' are collected from the net. Women come in the

shore of the river and put all the ingredients that have been accumulated in the net in a silver pot filled with water. In this 'Ochol' there exist scorpion, 'meku', 'Methi' and the thing they required, 'Pona'. They separate these 'Pona' from other substances. While separating 'ochol' from the 'pona' women throw the substance or lives like scorpion, 'meku', 'Methi' in the river so that they can live. Because, women have been playing role as caregiver since their childhood. But for men, this trend found less in number. Men actually, failed to recognize the necessity of these lives.

The knowledge possessed by the forest going women is much more complete than that of forest going men. In answering In-Depth interview most of the women opine that they throw scorpion, 'meku', 'Methi' in the river while collecting 'pona' because they have a belief that these species can play a vital for the availability of the 'pona'. Where men answer that they ambiguously throw these species in the dry surface. Almost all of the women agree that their dependence on Sundarbans has been increased many times ever after occurring two deadliest cyclones 'SIDR' and 'AILA'. Women view that before the arrival of these disasters, many of them would not go to Sundarbans for livelihood. After these disasters they are now totally dependent on Sundarbans. They redefine Sundarbans as they include the adjacent river 'Kholpatua' as a part of the forest and they almost daily go there for catching 'Pona'. They now go to Sundarbans even for fire woods after the occurrence of these meanest disasters. In asking to a question that how does a respondent consider Sundarbans, in answering these question many women answer that Sundarbans is like 'Ma'- Mother, Sundarbans is like 'Akchar'- Fence for their household. These are one of the examples of 'Strong Objectivity'.

8. Discussion of the Findings:

8.1 Women's Using of Sundarbans Forest Resource: Perception of Community People:

People living in the nearby area of Sundarbans, in Gabura Union, go to forest for earning livelihood. They perform wide range of activities such as cutting *Golpata*, collecting honey, *Jongla* (a substance of lime) catching fish and so on. Community people like the men going to forest for earning livelihood state that both male and female go to forest for subsistence. The proportion of going to forest is more among men than the female. Their views regarding this is, female particularly widow and abandoned only move to forest for catching fish. Female use their small nets (locally named 'Bera Jal') in near the shore. They don't go inside the deep forest because of the aggression of the Royal Bengal Tiger. As women are feeble they could not be able to combat with tigers as like men. Therefore, women retrained themselves from going inside of deep forest. Furthermore, the big boats (permit card holding boats) take 10-15 days in the rivers of Sundarbans for catching fish. Men don't take women with them because women could not leave her house for such a long day indifferent to men. That's why women move to nearby rivers adjacent to shore to collect *Pona* fishes namely, *Bagda*, *Galda* (*Chati*) *Payra* etc. these statements of the male co workers show Marx's Power relation. Here, men are the sole possessor of power and women have been expressed as powerless.

While interviewing a male wood-cutter remark that, the male takes better care of forest resources. For males, women don't have adequate knowledge on forest resources. When a woman attempts to cut a tree she recklessly cuts all the trees adjacent to that tree to make her ground clear. But a man usually avoid to this. It is the transgression of the first paradigm of proposed by the UNEP. Many male fishermen assert that both men and women are careful in

collecting fishes. But women are less careful than men as they are not the sole bread earners of the family. So, they destroy the additional lives (Ochol) found in the net with fish. But a significant number of men view that women are more careful than men in conserving forest resources while collecting fish or cutting trees. The reason behind this is that, they claim women as- “MEYE RA MAYER JAAT” Here, the binary opposition of western metaphysics is barely revealed. It shows women as emotional and only for this reason they can take care of forest resources than men

8.2 *Forest Going Women's Perception:*

Dependency on Sundarbans increased after Aila as there were no income opportunities in the aila-hitted and poverty stricken Gabura. Women here cannot grow vegetables around their homestead after aila due to salinity intrusion. Moreover they cannot go to town or city in search of job unlike the case of men due to socio-cultural barriers. Therefore they are to rely on Sundarbans' forest resources to maintain their subsistence.

This reality with livelihood initiatives is particularly true for the widow and abandoned women of the locality who are solely and entirely dependent on the forest resources of Sundarbans to earn their bread. They borrow money from local money lenders for purchasing necessary materials for fishing or collecting wood and are contracted to sell the ponas to them at a lower price. The money which they get from selling fishes although not sufficient enough is usually used to meet basic needs of the family. If they have had somehow some savings from the income they use them for small scale poultry rising or livestock rearing.

The gender dimension of the forest resources of Sundarbans also lies at the time of collecting the resources from the jungles. It is the woman who while cutting down a tree from the forests becomes much more careful than men not to destroy a single surrounding tree or plant. Similarly while collecting 'Pona' the women leave other fishes or ponas in the river so that the fishes or ponas can survive. At the time of Aila these women who live by Sundarbans and depend on Sundarbans took shelter under the shade of the green trees of Sundarbans to protect themselves from the cyclonic hit. Therefore they regarded the Sundarbans as their 'Cyclone Center'. They considered Sundarbans as the safeguard of the living and livelihood of the community people at the time of natural calamities such as Sidr and Aila by protecting the sea level to rise up. They commented that if there were no Sundarbans their survival in the area would completely become impossible to maintain. They also mentioned that as the head of the household maintains and protects the family members, the Sundarbans is the head of them as a provider of livelihood means and as a protector from natural calamities.

9. **Concluding Remarks:**

Women are primarily and solely dependent on forest resources use as a vital means of livelihood. This dependency is set up and sanctioned by the socially approved gender roles. The gender dimension also lies in the patterns by and through which they use and take care of these natural resources different than that of men and also in the activities they provide security in protecting of Sundarbans Forest resources. It also focuses on the significance of the Sundarbans forest resources that shelter them from natural hazards like cyclone.

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