
Articles

Leisure and Recreation among Women of Selected Hill-Farming Families in Bangladesh

Niaz Ahmed Khan
University of Chittagong, Bangladesh

Experience of recreation and leisure among women of some poor hill farming families in Bangladesh has been analyzed. Despite the poverty and hard work, these women enjoy recreation in their own unique ways. It is difficult to analyze their recreational behaviour through the conventional approach to leisure studies which views leisure as "free time" or "non-obligatory activity." Women's work is of a routine and compulsory nature, and they hardly have any free time. Nevertheless, leisure and recreation seem to be a part of their day-to-day survival strategies. Women have developed the skill to carve out pleasure from their meetings during everyday work, their social visits and festivals, their handicrafts, and their dressing and food preparation. Suggested is that the socio-cultural construction of gender is the "hidden constraint" that shapes women's everyday life and leisure.

KEYWORDS: *Bangladesh, leisure, recreation, women*

Introduction

This paper reports on the leisure experience among women of some desperately poor, hill-farming families in southeastern Bangladesh. Although there have been a considerable number of studies on rural women in Bangladesh¹, especially on women in agriculture, research on these women's leisure experience has been remarkably absent. Leisure among rural women in Bangladesh is virtually an unexplored field of study. My aim in this paper is to present some empirical findings on the leisure experience of women in selected hill-farming households with the hope of instigating future re-

¹see Hannan & Islam, 1986 for an annotated bibliography on women in Agriculture. For a general review of women's status, see Abdullah & Zeidenstein, 1982; Chaudhury & Ahmed, 1980; White, 1992.

The paper is based on the author's doctoral research. The author is Assistant Professor in the Department of Public Administration at the University of Chittagong, Bangladesh. Currently he is affiliated with the Centre for Development Studies at the University of Wales. The author is grateful to Abul Farah Saleh for his assistance during the field-work and to Mustari Khan for many insightful comments shared in a number of fruitful discussions. Appreciation is also extended to the JLR associate editor and two reviewers who helped in reshaping the paper. The author can be contacted concerning this paper at the Centre for Development Studies, University of Wales, Swansea, SA2 8PP, U.K.

search on this topic. An understanding of these women's experience of leisure will enhance our understanding of leisure in general, and gender and leisure specifically.

I argue that despite the abject poverty, hard work, and everyday struggle involved in a subsistence-oriented life style, women have their own ways of enjoying leisure and recreation. They have an amazing capacity to turn some of their routine work into avenues of recreation, and thereby, transform some of the most mundane and dry work into rewarding leisure experience. This finding does not necessarily mean that there is no reason for concern about the constraints with which women live. However, what could or should be done is a topic beyond the scope of this article.

In presenting the study the methodology is described first. This is followed by an empirical analysis of the forms and nature of recreation and leisure among the women in the case study area. Then the limits of a conventional leisure perspective which views leisure as "free time" or "freely chosen activity" are discussed in the context of rural women's leisure experience in Bangladesh. Finally, there is a brief analysis of the practical constraints on leisure faced by these women, which is followed by the conclusions.

The Case and the Methodology

The field work for the study was based on two community forestry project areas called Betagi and Pomora, located in Rangunia *Thana*² (sub-district) of the District of Chittagong situated in the southeastern hilly region of Bangladesh. The government has rehabilitated 82 families in Betagi and 152 families in Pomora who were previously landless and destitute. Prior to the rehabilitation, the average annual income was estimated to be *Taka*³ 13,800 in Betagi and 15,210 in Pomora. Through rehabilitation, each family has been allotted 1.62 hectares of public hill lands. The participating families mainly practice agro-forestry to develop the lands. The locality belongs to the agro-ecological zone of Eastern Hills of Bangladesh. The hills occupy about 50% steep slopes, 20% very steep slopes, and the rest (30%) is sloping land. Annual temperature varies from 13c to 33c and rainfall ranges between 2,500 mm to 3,000 mm (Rahman, n.d., p.2).

Data were collected as part of doctoral research between January 1994 and August 1994 through a field survey. For the qualitative information, the study primarily relied on the tool of "personal observation" supplemented by informal, unstructured interviews. Observation is claimed to be "basic to all scientific enquiries" (Isokun, 1985, p. 99). This method is "particularly

²*Thana*, previously known as *Upazila*, is an important tier of local government structure in Bangladesh. It stands between the District and Union. A *Thana* comprises a number of Unions, and is run by an executive council staffed by members from the state bureaucracy and elected local government officials.

³1 US\$ = 40 *Taka* (approx.)

appropriate when high degree of analytical content is required" (Casley & Lury, 1987, p. 64). Bell (1987) also noted that "Direct observation may be more reliable than what people say in many instances" (p. 88). However, "complete participation" (Nachmias & Nachmias, 1992, p. 273) or "full integration into the society being studied" (Bell, 1987, p. 7) did not seem practical for this study. Further, as Nachmias and Nachmias (1992, p. 275) argued, complete participation poses some major methodological problems:

First, observers may become so self-conscious about revealing their trueselves that they would be handicapped when attempting to perform convincingly a pretended role. Or they may . . . incorporate the pretended role into their self-conception and lose the research perspective. Second, the decision what specifically to observe is most problematic because the researcher cannot evoke responses and behaviour . . . Third, recording observations or taking notes is impossible on the spot.

The research was conducted within major time and resource constraints. My identity was not wholly concealed and local people had some idea about the purpose of my stay. Therefore, the type of "observation" used in this study was a kind of uncontrolled simple observation to watch and analyze the women's lives and related social structures in a natural setting. Lin (1976) defined such "observation" as a "method of data collection in which the researcher and his [or her] collaborators record information as they witness events during the study period" (p. 205). However, it was more than just "witnessing" or "seeing," and involved a reasonable degree of "subjective sharing" of the experience by the researcher without being "entirely of it" (Bruyn, 1966, p. 14). Goffman (1961, p. 7), too, in his classic study on "social situation of inmates," got "close to" his subjects, but "did not allow [himself] to be committed." Such research involves "the ability of the observer to read between lines for what could be the latent as opposed to the manifest explanation or meanings of the social activity" (Isokun, 1985, p. 99).

I was aware of the common practice of "superficial trips to project areas by the urban professionals and their easily reached environs" (Cernea, 1991, p. 514). These cursory research attempts are termed by Chambers (1991, p. 518) as "quick-and-dirty appraisal in the form of rural development tourism." Therefore, even within the constraints, I endeavoured to make my observation more than just "snapshot" (Chambers, 1991, p. 519). A female assistant and I lived in the study area intermittently for about eight months. The assistant was in her 20s, a recent sociology graduate, and passed her childhood in the study area. Because of the combined benefits of her gender and long affiliation with the area, she had easy access to *andarmahal* or women's traditional working-place inside the home while I could only talk to a woman when accompanied by an adult male member of her family. However, towards the end of the field-work I was also allowed to move in and around particular homesteads with reasonable freedom. It should be noted that although for some years preceding the field-work for this study I was out of contact with the locality, I had previous personal links with the study area.

As a teenager, I frequently visited the area with my father who was a state forester and had official jurisdiction over the area. I know the local dialect quite well. In addition, some of my relatives live in the area. In fact, the field-work helped to rejuvenate and refresh my dormant links with the locality.

The time and venue of the discussion meetings with the women were decided by respondents. Twenty four women from Betagi and 40 women from Pomora villages were interviewed. Each respondent represented her respective family. The age range of respondents was between 17 and 46 years. The majority of them were married. The mean average number of children was three. Although I focused on a particular woman in a family, others were generally present during the meetings. Therefore the meetings frequently took the form of group discussions. Usually, the discussions were divided into four sessions: one introductory meeting plus three follow-up sessions. Each session lasted about half an hour. Usually both the research assistant and I were present in the introductory meeting. During the follow-up sessions, either the assistant or I was present. No formal questionnaire was administered, instead we had a simple check list of possible discussion topics and a field diary where virtually any observed phenomenon of interest was noted. White (1992) and Wood (1994) also widely followed this practice in their extensive field-work on Bangladesh. The discussion topics commonly included the women's daily work patterns, their likes and dislikes regarding the work they have to do, their family and friends, their perception and experience of leisure and pasttime activities, their views on particular political or social events, and so on. During the course of discussions many issues emerged spontaneously—some were quite relevant, some not. Though it was difficult to keep pace with the varied issues and responses which were cropping up during the meetings, we tried our best to make note of as many issues as possible. While talking to the respondents, we preferred to have an open mind and not to be selective about the direction of the conversation. This lack of structure served two major purposes. First, I believe, it gave the respondents a flexible and relaxed atmosphere to vent their emotions and ideas in ways they preferred without being interrupted, guided or directed. Secondly, during data analysis, I realized that we gained a much broader picture of the subject than would have resulted if we had simply administered structured questions. Data on varied aspects of the women's lives and leisure was acquired, although my original focus was very limited and modest. Particular attention was given to observing the facial and body expressions, tones, voices, and moods of respondents over the course of interview sessions. Interviews and informal discussions were generally audio-taped with the permission of respondents. During the field-work, we participated in a number of socio-religious festivals, especially the wedding ceremonies where women participated in significant number. The knowledge of local dialect and culture clearly helped in the use of the observational method.

It must be made clear that the text that follows makes no claim of so-called "objective" and "neutral" representation of the observed phenomenon. As Sparkes (1995, p. 189) cogently argued:

[No] texts [can be] seen as neutral and innocent representations of the realities of others. The days of innocence are gone. All of us, as positioned authors, are clearly implicated in the construction of our text, and this needs to be acknowledged.

The Personal Narrative Group (n.d., p. 201) also has warned against the claim that it was "possible and desirable to be impartial observers and recorders of . . . subjects' lives" and has insisted that "the perspective of the researcher—in terms of gender, class, culture, disciplinary orientation—be taken into account and acknowledged." I responded to the issue of neutrality and objectivity in three ways: by being aware of and acknowledging the situation, by cross-checking the information gathered from observation and interviews, and by relating our findings with other regional studies. Our long acquaintance with the local people coupled with the awareness of the problems associated with "writing people" (Sparkes, 1995) helped to reasonably avoid, or at least partially control, the recording of artificial responses and distorted depiction. However, many of the intricate details of the women's leisure and recreational behaviour could not be adequately addressed in this study. The study was carried out on individual initiative; that is, with no institutional funding available. The data were collected as part of a broader research scheme and this paper uses only a small portion. Hence, the findings presented in this paper, though rooted in the empirical situation of the field, do not necessarily allow generalizations.

The Forms and Nature of Recreation and Leisure: Views from the Field

Mirroring the findings of many studies on Bangladeshi rural women (e.g., Ahmed, 1992; Food and Agriculture Organisation, 1989; Khandakar, 1994; Mies, 1986; Quddus, Solaiman, & Karim, 1985; Wallace, Ahsan, Husain, & Ahsan, 1987), this study also found that women are "invisible" workers, toiling from dawn till dark without recognition of the economic value of their labor. Their work or labor-inputs are basically of two broad categories: household chores and agro-forestry. The household chores category included cooking for the whole family, child care, cleaning the house and utensils, washing clothes, fetching water, livestock and poultry rearing, fuel-wood collection, and handicrafts. The agroforestry activities category included managing home gardens and some horticultural crops, processing of harvested crops (mainly paddy), helping the males in various work on the farm and forest plantations which included preparing land for planting, digging narrow ditches for watering vegetable gardens, preparing seed beds, collecting cow-dung to use as fertilizer, making protective gabion, and grafting lemon and other plants (also see, Quddus, Ali, Bhuiyan, & Hossain, 1992, pp. 35-36 for details of women's activities in Betagi and Pomora).

Women in the study-area, as in other parts of rural Bangladesh, work hard and are confined to spaces mostly around the homestead. Very limited institutional or formal opportunities for leisure exist in the locality. For ex-

ample, one cinema and an occasional *jatra* (folk theatre) are the only major institutional leisure services. Generally women do not have access to these formal leisure services because of socio-religious restrictions and communication barriers. However, they do not consider this inaccessibility to be any significant deprivation, loss, or constraint. The ideas of free time or formal leisure services are somewhat alien to women. Shaw's (1994, p. 11) explanation may be very relevant in explaining the situation:

women who have limited time, money or access to facilities may adjust their expectations to fit reality of their lives. Thus, they may not necessarily perceive or report such factors as leisure constraints.

Put differently, the senses and values women in the study area attach to leisure may not necessarily conform to the mainstream interpretation of leisure. The following are examples of typical responses by women when asked to explain what they meant by leisure and recreation:

leisure is . . . joy—a [sense of] happiness you feel deep down your heart by doing something or by making someone happy. I make cane baskets with the help of Rasu and Fazila [name of her two daughters] and buy clothes from the sale proceed for them . . . I feel good to see them smiling.
 Freetime? No . . . I am always busy [but] when I go to *Ush* [hill-fountain] to fetch water, I meet neighbors and talk with *sakhi* [friends].

As noted, women did not show any particular interest in formal leisure institutions (e.g., cinema or theatre) and did not express any significant sense of deprivation. Women generally consider these institutions as “places of men’s recreation” and one respondent commented, “what’s there for a woman in *Jatra* [folk-theatre]?” Women seem to largely lack a “sense of entitlement” (Deem, 1986; Henderson, 1994; Shaw, 1994) to institutional and more formal sources of leisure. They do, however, create their own symbolic worlds of recreation by modifying and conditioning some of their routine work. When engaged in this work, they experience the key elements of leisure—the “feelings of relaxation, enjoyment, and rejuvenation” (Freysinger, 1995, p. 69). Recent research has presented interesting insights when analyzing varied meanings and ramifications of leisure experiences. Freysinger (1995) and Kelly and Kelly (1994), for example, noted that leisure is a desired change which results in the feelings of joy and some degree of self determination. In the study area, women do not enjoy substantial freedom of choice of activities because their work patterns are determined by the prevailing social and cultural structures related to gender. Women do, however, have some power of manipulation and adjustment. For example, one woman reported:

If I want to spend a bit longer time in talking to [friends] by the *Ush*, I would normally try to complete my [routine] *goal* [cow-shed cleaning] and *ghoror kam* [household chore] earlier or work some extra time at night . . . Sometimes I arrange with my daughter to do some work for me while I meet the vendors or other women who come from neighboring villages [to my house] for [share]tending their cow or goats.

Kelly and Kelly (1994) rightly noted that "even though the concept of freedom has been central to philosophical approaches to leisure since Aristotle . . . , few would argue that leisure is wholly free of obligation or work totally without discretion" (p. 251). Women's work in the locality is not free, but observations of and conversations with the women indicated that they can negotiate some flexibility through various adjustments and therefore there is some degree of self determination in their lives. The sense of joy or satisfaction they experience from family care activities or from meeting friends also give women the gratifying and comforting feelings that they have really "achieved something," their work is "of worth and use to the family," and that there are "other persons who share their ideas" of good and bad.

In addition to the moments of leisure carved out of necessary labor such as fuelwood gathering and farm work, there were four other principal avenues of leisure for women: meetings, social visits and festivals, handicrafts, and dressing and food preparation. In the next sections, each of these avenues of work or obligation is described, noting how leisure is pursued by women engaged in the productive activity.

Meetings

Women, especially the middle aged women, from the neighborhood meet together while collecting fuel (leaves, barks, shrubs, twigs), fodder, and wild-food from the nearby jungles and shrub lands. Younger women, especially the teenaged housewives, are not encouraged to go out for fuel-fodder collection because of *Purdah*⁴ restrictions. Other opportunities for such meetings appear when women go to fetch water from one of the five local hill-fountains known as *Ush*. There is acute water scarcity in the locality and *Ush* are the only locally available sources of water. On these occasions, women meet together and discuss personal, family, and village affairs as they go about the work of fuel collection or fetching water. The topics of discussion are diverse, and often these discussions serve as an outlet for women to vent their resistance and indignation against various forms of exploitation by local elites, such as money lenders, corrupt public officials, local government leaders, timber traders, and so on. Women seem to be largely aware of the "odds of life in rural Bangladesh" (see Schendel, 1981) including "the process of exploitation which surround their life and living" (Khan, 1996, p. 15) and "the considerable inequalities and of where everyone is positioned" (Kerkvliet, 1990, p. 14). Women appear to be generally accustomed to these

⁴Literally *purdah* means veil. It is a complex institution. It connotes a physical "system of isolation of women from outsiders" (Begum, 1988, p. 11) and also a mental process of internalization of the values of modesty, shyness, honor, and shame (Feldman & McCarthy, 1981, p. 26). Though it mainly draws on Islamic religious tradition, the *Hindus* also maintain it (Chaudhury & Ahmed, 1980, p. 6). Adherence to *purdah* rules is contingent on factors such as age, status of the particular woman in the family, and financial position of the particular family. For example, young wives tend to be very fastidious while an aged woman or one with a superior status in the family, such as a mother-in-law, enjoys flexibility in *purdah* boundaries.

harsh realities of life and hardly attempt any overt resistance. They do, however, attempt to relieve their indignation in some subtle, informal, limited, and indirect ways. In the meetings during fuel or water collecting, for example, women express some of their tensions, frustration, and anger through foot dragging, back-biting, character assassination, and jokes and puns (see Khan, 1996 for details). Following are the comments of some women when a local money-lender, notorious for his usurious rates of interest and for his violent measures in realizing loans from the poor farmers, slipped into a coma in a local hospital following a fatal motor accident:

Who says he is in coma? Closing his eyes, he is calculating money and thinking "whom can I suck tomorrow?"

Don't you worry! He will not die without recovering money from people. He will not even let God come near him 'til a single coin is left out there [to be realized].

During such discussions, women share their ideas with one another which not only create opportunities for self-expression, but also symbolize some degree of group solidarity. Scott (1985) and Kerkvliet (1990) have also observed similar "low profile techniques" of "everyday forms of resistance" among rural poor in two villages in Malaysia and Philippines. These forms of interaction and resistance are also a source of comfort, relaxation, and recreation for women. In fact, the wit and fun elements in these meetings manifest some characteristics of cognitive or intellectual "play" as discussed by Huizinga (1950). Through meetings and discussions, women create "a closed space . . . , either materially or ideally, hedged off from the everyday surroundings" wherein they express themselves as they continue to "play" (Huizinga, 1950, p. 19).

Another form of recreation for women is to meet the village beggars who are mostly destitute, aged women travelling from door-to-door around the village. Younger women of the families, who are excluded from fuel-fodder collection trips, are particularly keen to talk to the beggars. The beggars are a source of information to women. They bring news and views from around the locality. Generally the beggars are offered a meal, and while they take the food, women, especially girls and teens, encircle them and chat about almost everything. The topics of such a discussion may range from the news of a local murder or pogrom to corruption by public officials to market prices of food stuffs.

Social Visits and Festivals

Women, especially housewives, almost universally cherish the experience of visiting houses of close kin. For a young, newly married housewife, for example, the greatest recreation can be a *Naior*—a short, periodic visit to her parents from her husband's home. During such visits, women generally take a break from the burden of daily work and pass the time by meeting kin and friends. However, these visits are not mere holidays or pastimes. Women value these social connections and rejuvenate these links through

such visits which help them in case of crises and exigencies. If there is a major crisis in her family life, for example, a woman can ask for assistance and protection from her kin. She can also get counsel and financial assistance from the kin during these visits. In fact, such visits and attendance of festive occasions are a part of women's attempt in building up a network of connections and support which is, as White (1992, p. 93) rightly noted, their "social capital" against crises.

Socio-religious festivities also provide opportunities for recreation and leisure. During the *Eid* and *Puja* festivals, for example, the Muslim and Hindu women visit the local elites' or patrons' houses and occasionally receive some dole or charity. To a large extent these visits are socially scheduled and culturally determined. For example, there are specific social and cultural norms and standards regarding the time of such a visit and the expected behavior from the guest and the host. Such visits are especially observed among the share-cropping families. A woman from these families, generally the share-cropper's wife or sister, visit the house of the landlord, who is often a local, landed elite. She participates in various household chores in the patron's house, passes some time in friendly talks, and receives some gifts from the patron's family at the time of departure. Such visits are seen by women as a welcome change from the monotony of their daily work and an opportunity for some extra income. These visits also reinforce the patron-client ties in the country side (see Khan, 1996).

Handicrafts

The majority of women in the study area were engaged in some form of handicraft, especially sewing, embroidery, and bamboo and cane work. Although handicraft is mainly an economic activity performed for the financial welfare of the family, observations revealed that such activity also provided women with an opportunity for recreation, relaxation, and some degree of freedom to test their ideas and innovations. They seem to enjoy the work, and, on an average, they spend about two hours engaged in handicraft work daily. While engaged in handicrafts it was observed that they talked to each other about varied issues. The atmosphere was relaxed with frequent sounds of giggles and laughter. Jokes and witty remarks about friends, relatives, and neighbours were commonly heard. It was also observed that women admired each other's work. On many occasions they were seen to help and teach youngsters the techniques of handicraft. If someone made something new, for example inventing a new design for embroidered quilt or applied a new technique in sewing, she was found to be excitedly talking about it or demonstrating the skill.

Dressing and Food Preparation

Even in the face of abject poverty and hard work, the younger women have a capacity to enjoy themselves within their limited means. The two most

common forms of such recreations are occasional dressing up and preparing assorted home baked cakes known as *pitha*, especially in the winter season. They, however, are not allowed to display the *saj* (dressing up) in public. They remain within the homestead or, at best, can visit neighboring families to meet other women folk. They use cheap cosmetics, generally *alta* (red colour solutions), *churi* (bangles), *fita* (hair band), and *rang* (lip-colors) which they buy from the village vendors. Sometimes they prepare some of the cosmetics themselves by using indigenous materials (e.g., *alta* and *rang*). The vendors are very popular among women. They walk from door-to-door carrying boxed goods, such as utensils, cosmetics, food stuff, and toys, on their shoulders. When the vendors come, women gather together. If the vendor is an adult man, women generally stand behind a screen built for their use to maintain *purdah* and conduct the discussion and transaction from the background. Vendors, like beggars, are also a source of information for women.

The limits of a Conventional Leisure Perspective in the Analysis of Poor Rural Women's Leisure Experience in Bangladesh

The popular concept of leisure as "free time" or "freely chosen activity" is not readily applicable to women in this case-study, and this poses the first problem in trying to conceptualize women's leisure in this particular context. Roberts (1970, p. 6) offered a typical definition of leisure:

Leisure time can be defined as time that is not obligated, and leisure activities can be defined as activities that are non-obligatory When . . . obligations [towards work and family] is met, a man [woman?] has "free time" in which his behaviour is dictated by his own will and preferences, and it is here that leisure is found.

Many of the recreational activities of the poor rural women in Bangladesh do not fall within the strict meaning of the above definition. Observations indicated that leisure experience is gendered and culturally situated. First, women's activities are mostly obligatory and regulated by persistent institutions of culture, religion, and customs where their freedom of action and choice is very limited. Second, they have spatial and physical restrictions on movements and their activities are primarily confined within the homestead. Harrington and Dawson (1995, p. 6) rightly noted that "it must be understood that for most women the 'social context' for leisure is the home." Third, owing to a host of constraints women's choice of so-called free activity is also very limited. Approaching work and leisure as a dichotomy (see Parker, 1971) tends to obscure the value of the subtle pleasure, recreations, gratifications, and awards women do achieve from some apparently obligatory household chores and other routine activities, as well as the extent work or obligation permeates their lives. Thus, the emphasis of analysis, especially in the case of rural Bangladeshi women's leisure experience, needs to be on the rather reclusive interaction of recreation and pleasure with daily routine

rather than on the visible and quantitative dimensions of leisure such as time, activity, or space. One obvious reason is that the unpaid, overlapping, domesticized, and invisible nature of women's work in rural Bangladesh makes it difficult to make clear distinctions between free time activity and obligatory activity or between leisure and work. This is, however, certainly not to undermine the importance and usefulness of focusing on time and activity in some situations. However, by narrowing the definition of leisure to free time or activity, we run the risk of failing to see the deeper manifestations of leisure and recreation among the poor farming families which are not always so easily recognizable.

For example, as noted previously in the study area, women most often meet together, chat, and exchange varied experience during the time of collecting cooking fuel from the neighboring jungles. Although the obligatory work of collecting fuel is one of the most tiring jobs, the pleasure and recreation women gain from these meetings are greatly rewarding for them. If we analyze the task of fuel collection on the basis of its visible appearance alone, observations most probably would be limited to the obvious hard manual labour involved in this obligatory activity. What would be missed are the pleasurable rewards and gratifications women achieve from these informal gatherings. Thereby, we could end up with a superficial and inaccurate understanding of the situation. In other words, caught up in the dogma of rigid work-leisure distinctions, one may fail to see the leisure women can carve out of even such a cumbersome activity. Though fuel collection and informal gathering are "activities" in the sense of interactive engagements, these also symbolize pleasure for women. Harrington and Dawson (1995, p. 5) use the concept of "elasticity" while discussing women's role in household and maintenance work. They argue that,

time devoted to housekeeping and childcare is usually not 'leisure' but rather constitutes a compulsory (obligatory) use of non-paid work time, although there is a certain amount of 'elasticity' here. Some housekeeping tasks are taken on for the gratifications entailed in doing them...and [have their] pleasurable rewards.

The rigid distinction between obligatory activity and time and free activity and time may not be helpful in explaining the rural Bangladesh situation because, as noted before, women's work is generally obligatory, unpaid, and occurs beyond the formal framework of market and money-exchange. Therefore, one helpful approach in analysis may be to examine women's lives with the concept of "elasticity" as a framework which can help us see the "pleasurable rewards" women achieve from their "activities." Indeed, leisure may be seen as the "pleasurable rewards" which women skilfully manage to exploit from their day-to-day survival strategies and activities. In his classic study on the "instinct of play in human culture," Huizinga (1950, p. 4) also focused on people's amazing and almost universal capacity to create and indulge in fun and play as a "characteristic social function of life." Re-

cent analyses of leisure have certainly criticized the common work-leisure dichotomy. Kelly and Kelly (1994, pp. 250-251), for example, maintained that,

relationships among domains [of work, family, and leisure] have often been studied in an either/or framework that has obscured their possible commonalities . . . [Recently there has been] development [of] the critique of the common work-leisure dichotomy in favor of approaches that view the two as more overlapping than totally separate in time, space, and meaning.

There has also been a strong argument that women (and men) attempt to negotiate constraints to achieve some degree of satisfaction and recreation (e.g., see Henderson, 1994; Jackson, Crawford, & Godbey, 1993). The concept of "negotiated constraints" can provide a useful theoretical perspective in partially explaining women's leisure behavior in the study-area.

Related to the idea of negotiation and manipulation is the supplementary argument that women's leisure behavior is shaped by the particular socio-cultural context in which they live. The "context" is commonly comprised of the social settings, physical locations, types and provision of leisure services, and particular socio-cultural structures. These elements of context are referred to as "containers" for women's leisure (Deem, 1986; Henderson, 1994; Henderson, Bialeschki, Shaw, & Freysinger, 1989). The containers in the study area are generally not conducive to women's leisure experience. However, women endeavor to negotiate with the surrounding environ to "fit [themselves] in" (Henderson 1994, p. 5) the container. In fact, there is substantial evidence that people under constraints and pressure develop the skill to modify their conditions of life and to alter the surroundings. Goffman (1961), for example, in his research noted that hospital mental patients and other inmates made many "secondary adjustments" and thereby made their own "worlds" of enjoyment and freedom within the strictest institutional and authoritative control. They would, for instance, make informal social contacts and communications during medical therapy sessions or use a gym period as an opportunity for a "day time nap" by taking the advantage of "relatively soft gym mats" (Goffman, 1961, pp. 187-200). More importantly, these time and places of adjustments and modifications "seemed pervaded by a feeling of relaxation and self determination . . . Here one could be one's own man (Goffman, 1961, p. 206).

Within formalised, institutionalized, and authoritative environments, people negotiate their own "little worlds," which Goffman (1961) referred to as "underlife" and find informal ways of self expression. As Kelly and Kelly (1994, p. 251), among many others, argued, such self determination is the key element in a leisure experience.

Constraints on Women's Recreation and Leisure

As Jackson (1993) noted, leisure constraint research has developed very rapidly in recent years and has had a strong impact on the field. A full length discussion on the conceptual- methodological perspectives of leisure con-

straints in general and women's experience of constraints in the study area in particular is beyond the scope of the paper. Here, only a broad, preliminary picture is presented.

Mirroring a number of major studies (e.g., Henderson, 1994; Jackson, 1988, 1993; Shaw, 1994), Jackson and Henderson (1995, pp. 31-32) defined a constraint to leisure "as anything that inhibits people's ability to participate in leisure activities, to spend more time doing so, to take advantage of leisure services, or to achieve a desired level of satisfaction." A substantial literature, firmly rooted in theoretical and empirical research (e.g., Deem, 1986; Henderson, 1994; Jackson, 1988; Jackson & Henderson, 1995; Searle & Jackson, 1985), has focused on the contextual and structural ways and means "in which women are disadvantaged or oppressed within a patriarchal society, and how their subordinate status within that society limits their access to, and enjoyment of leisure" (Shaw, 1994, p. 8). Shaw, Bonen, and McCabe (1991) and Jackson and Henderson (1995), among many others, argued that sex (i.e., being biologically male or female) in itself is not a constraint to leisure. Rather the way in which one's sex is defined and experienced in society creates circumstances that in turn can be perceived as constraining. Therefore, these researchers have emphasized the need for examining particular structural contexts in which leisure (or lack of it) occurs. In general terms, women's activities in rural Bangladesh occur in a male-dominated, oppressive, and conservative surrounding where their work is often unseen, undermined, and rigidly differentiated from men's work (Ahmad, 1991; Chaudhury & Ahmed, 1980; Hartmann & Boyce, 1983; Mies, 1986; Quddus et al., 1985). In fact, in industrialized nations too, there is growing evidence that women's work is undervalued and that structural factors and familial ideology constrain women's leisure (Deem, 1986; Kay, 1996; Rees, 1992). Kay's (1996) recent research on the interrelationship between employment and leisure for British women employed outside the house showed that "female employment is strongly differentiated from male employment patterns" and "structural factors in both work and family inhibit" women's access to leisure (pp. 49-50). In Bangladesh, structural factors such as the cultural norms and social traditions, illiteracy, lack of training, and women's unequal access to assets relative to men in their families have forced them into a precarious state of dependency and subordination (Government of Bangladesh, 1979, 1990; White, 1992; Chaudhury & Ahmed, 1980). Subordination limits women's freedom of choice of activities and imposes a variety of obligatory work. Women, as discussed, do not have access to institutional or more conventional sources of leisure. However, they, at least to some extent, negotiate around these constraints. The negotiation, as illustrated in the previously discussed examples, is mainly in the form of modifying their routine work pattern and carving out pleasure from it. Moreover, being socialized and enculturated beings as all humans are, women do not quite consider some of the deeply rooted structural limitations as constraints (e.g., the male domination of societal systems and decisions, cultural norms restricting women's access to resources). Therefore, they do not appear to mentally suffer

from any significant sense of discontent or deprivation over these particular constraints.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to show that women of the hill-farming families, one of the poorest of the rural communities in Bangladesh, enjoy recreation and leisure in their own unique way. Virtually no research has been conducted on the leisure experience of these women. It is difficult to analyze their leisure and recreational behavior through the conventional approach to leisure studies which has a rather myopic view of leisure as free or non-obligatory time and/or activity. It is not helpful, and probably not possible, to rigidly demarcate the boundaries of free time and work or compulsory and non-obligatory work. People are never fully or truly free. These women are no exception. What is more significant is to note that they seem to have found some ways of stealing away from the mental sense of obligation and pressure generated by their cumbersome daily work performed in a largely hostile and disadvantageous environment, and of creating their own mental worlds of joy within their daily struggle.

Leisure and recreation among the hill women seem to be an integral part of their day-to-day strategies for survival. Women have developed the skill to carve out pleasure from the everyday forms of struggle which surround their life and living. This interesting area of study calls for further research, as at present, our ignorance is profound.

References

- Abdullah, T. A. & Zeidenstein, S. A. (1982). *Village women of Bangladesh: Prospects for change*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Ahmad, A. N. M. M. (1991). Women's participation in politics: Bangladesh Perspective. *Chittagong University Studies*, 12(1), 1-18.
- Ahmed, M. R. (1992). The unseen workers: Socio-cultural profile of women in Bangladesh agriculture. *Society and Natural Resources*, 5(4), 375-390.
- Begum, N. N. (1988). *Pay or purdah: Women and income earning in rural Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Winrock & Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council.
- Bell, J. (1987). *Doing your research project: A guide to first-time researchers in education and social sciences*. England: Open University Press.
- Bryman, S. T. (1966). *The human perspective in sociology: The methodology of participant observation*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc.
- Casley, D. J., & Lury, D. A. (1987). *Data collection in developing countries*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Cernea, M. M. (Ed.). (1991). *Putting people first: Sociological variables in rural development*. London and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Chambers, R. (1991). Shortcut and participatory methods for gaining social information for projects. In M.M. Cernea (Ed.), *ibid.* pp. 478-497.
- Chaudhury, R. H., & Ahmed, N. R. (1980). *Female status in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies.
- Deem, R. (1986). *All work and no play? The sociology of women and leisure*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

- Feldman, S., & McCarthy, F. E. (1981). Conditions influencing rural and town women's participation in the labour force. In C.B. Seely (Ed.), *Women, politics and literature in Bengal*. East Lansing: Asian Studies Center, Michigan State University.
- Food and Agriculture Organisation. (1989). *Women in community forestry: A field guide for project design and implementation*. Rome: FAO.
- Freysinger, V. J. (1995) The dialectics of leisure and development for women and men in mid-life: An interpretive study. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 27(1), 61-84.
- Goffman, E. (1961). *Asylums: Essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates*. Middlesex: Penguin Books Limited.
- Government of Bangladesh. (1979). *The second five year plan 1980-1985*. Dhaka: Ministry of Planning.
- Government of Bangladesh. (1990). *The fourth five year plan 1990-1995*. Dhaka: Ministry of Planning.
- Hannan, F. H., & Islam, N. (1986). *Women in agriculture: An annotated bibliography*. Comilla: Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development.
- Harrington, M., & Dawson, D. (1995). Who has it best? Women's labor force participation, perceptions of leisure and constraints to enjoyment of leisure. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 27(1), 4-24.
- Hartmann, B., & Boyce, J. K. (1983). *A quiet violence: Views from a Bangladesh village*. Dhaka: University Press Limited.
- Henderson, K. A. (1994). Broadening an understanding of women, gender, and leisure. *Journal of Leisure of Research*, 26(1), 1-7.
- Henderson, K. A., Bialeschki, M. D., Shaw, S. M., & Freysinger, V. J. (1989). *A leisure of one's own: A feminist perspective on women's leisure*. State College, PA: Venture.
- Huizinga, J. (1950). *Homo ludens: A study of the play element in culture*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Isokun, M. I. (1985). *Administration of justice: A study of the Nigerian system of justice with special reference to the informal justice system in Bendel state, Nigeria*. Doctoral thesis, Swansea: University of Wales.
- Jackson, E. L. (1988). Leisure constraints: A survey of past research. *Leisure Sciences*, 10, 203-215.
- Jackson, E. L. (1993). Recognizing patterns of leisure constraints: Results from alternative analyses. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 25(2), 129-149.
- Jackson, E. L., Crawford, D. W., & Godbey, G. (1993). Negotiation of leisure constraints. *Leisure Sciences*, 15, 1-11.
- Jackson, E. L., & Henderson, K. A. (1995). Gender-based analysis of leisure constraints. *Leisure Sciences*, 17, 31-51.
- Kay, T. (1996). Women's work and women's worth: The leisure implications of women's changing employment patterns. *Leisure Studies*, 15, 49-64.
- Kelly, J. R., & Kelly, J. R. (1994). Multiple dimensions of meaning in the domains of work, family, and leisure. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 26(3), 250-274.
- Kerkvliet, B. J. (1990). *Everyday politics in the Philippines: Class and status relations in a central Luzon village*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Khan, N. A. (1996). Of 'Murubbi' and 'Kamla': Patronage and Social Forestry in Bangladesh. *Papers in International Development* 19. Swansea: University of Wales.
- Khandakar, K. (1994). Women in Social Forestry. In M.R. Ahmed (Ed.), *Social Forestry and Community Development* (pp.103- 107). Chittagong: Institute of Forestry.
- Lin, C. (1976). *Foundation of social research*. McGraw-Hill Book Company (worldwide distribution).
- Mies, M. (1986). *Indian women in subsistence and agricultural labor*. Geneva: International Labour Office.
- Nachmias, C. F., & Nachmias, D. (1992). *Research methods in social sciences*. London, Melbourne, and Auckland: Edward Arnold.

- Parker, S. (1971). *The future of work and leisure*. New York: Praeger.
- Personal Narratives Group, (Eds.) (n.d.). *Interpreting women's lives: Feminist theory and personal narratives*. Indianapolis and Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Quddus, A. H. G., Ali, S. M. I., Bhuiyan, A. M. A., & Hossain, M. (1992). *Greening the hills: The Betagi-Pomora agroforestry experience*. Dhaka: Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council & Winrock International.
- Quddus, M. A., Solaiman, M., & Karim, M. R. (1985). *Rural women in households in Bangladesh: With a case study of three villages in Comilla*. Comilla: Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development.
- Rahman, A. (n.d.) *Agroforestry system under the Betagi and Pomora community forestry projects of Bangladesh*. mimeo Chittagong: Bangladesh Forest Research Institute, Chittagong.
- Rees, T. (1992). *Women and the labour market*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Roberts, K. (1970). *Leisure*. London: Longman
- Schendel, W. V. (1981). *Peasant mobility: The odds of life in rural Bangladesh*. Assen: Van Gorcum.
- Scott, J. C. (1985). *Weapons of the weak: Everyday forms of peasant resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Searle, M. S., & Jackson, E. L. (1985). Socioeconomic variations in perceived barriers to recreation participation among would-be participants. *Leisure Sciences*, 7, 1-24.
- Shaw, S. M. (1994). Gender, leisure, and constraint: Towards a framework for the analysis of women's leisure. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 26, 8-22.
- Shaw, S. M., Bonen, A., & McCabe, J. F. (1991). Do more constraints mean less leisure? Examining the relationship between constraints and participation. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 23, 286-300.
- Sparkes, A. C. (1995). Writing people: Reflections on the dual crises of representation and legitimation in qualitative inquiry. *Quest*, 47, 158-195.
- Wallace, B. J., Ahsan, R. M., Hussain, S. H., & Ahsan, E. (1987). *The invisible resource: Women and work in rural Bangladesh*. Colorado: Westview Press.
- White, S. (1992). *Arguing with the crocodile: Gender and class in Bangladesh*, London: Zed Books Limited.