

Inheritance, Gender, And Environmental Dimensions of Land in Bangladesh: Societal Attitudes and Women's Struggles for Equity

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ABSTRACT: *Inheritance rights play a crucial role in ensuring economic stability and gender equality in society. In Bangladesh, women's inheritance rights are deeply influenced by religious laws, cultural traditions, and societal attitudes. While legal frameworks provide provisions for women's inheritance, socio-cultural factors often limit their practical implementation. Inheritance rights in Bangladesh remain a contested domain where women's legal entitlements often conflict with entrenched societal attitudes and cultural norms. Despite constitutional guarantees and legal frameworks, gendered disparities in land and property inheritance persist, reinforced by patriarchal traditions, social stigma, and community pressures. This paper explores women's perspectives on inheritance rights, focusing on how cultural expectations and societal resistance shape their ability to claim and exercise ownership. Drawing on environmental and socio-legal dimensions, the study highlights the intersection between inheritance disputes, access to land as a vital resource, and women's empowerment in rural and urban contexts. It argues that women's exclusion from inheritance not only perpetuates economic inequality but also limits their role in sustainable land management and environmental stewardship. By examining narratives of lived experiences, policy frameworks, and cultural barriers, the paper underscores the urgent need for transformative approaches that integrate gender justice, environmental sustainability, and legal reform. The findings suggest that shifting societal perceptions and fostering inclusive cultural practices are essential for ensuring equitable inheritance rights and enhancing women's contributions to both family welfare and environmental resilience.*

KEYWORDS: *Inheritance Rights, Women's Rights, Bangladesh, Cultural Norms, Gender Equality, Islamic Law*

I. INTRODUCTION

Inheritance rights determine the distribution of wealth across generations and significantly impact women's socio-economic status. Despite legal reforms, Bangladeshi women face numerous barriers to securing their rightful inheritance. Inheritance rights play a crucial role in shaping economic independence, social status, and overall well-being, particularly for women in Bangladesh. Historically, inheritance laws in the country have been influenced by religious, cultural, and patriarchal norms that often place women at a disadvantage. Despite legal frameworks such as the Muslim Personal Law and the Hindu Inheritance Act, societal attitudes and traditional customs continue to limit women's rightful claims to inherited property. While Bangladesh has made progress in gender equality through legal reforms and policy measures, deep-rooted cultural practices and family structures still restrict women's access to inheritance, reinforcing economic dependence and social vulnerability.

The disparity in inheritance rights stems from multiple factors, including religious interpretations, familial pressure, and socio-economic conditions. In many cases, women are discouraged from claiming their inheritance to maintain family harmony or due to fear of social backlash. Additionally, rural communities often follow customary laws that override formal legal provisions, leading to widespread gender-based discrimination in property distribution. Such practices perpetuate financial insecurity among women, affecting their empowerment, education, and economic participation. The first aim of this study is to examine the societal attitudes and cultural norms that influence inheritance rights for women in Bangladesh and the second aim is to uncover the uses of sustainable land management and environmental stewardship.

II. HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND RELATED WORKS

Bangladesh's inheritance laws are primarily derived from religious doctrines, with the majority of the population following Islamic inheritance laws (Sharia). Hindu and Christian communities follow their own religious guidelines. Historically, these laws have favored male heirs, limiting women's financial autonomy and economic empowerment. The paper [1] examines the legal, social, and institutional

barriers affecting women's access to property in Bangladesh, particularly focusing on Muslim and Hindu women under various laws. It highlights the conflict between constitutional guarantees of gender equality and discriminatory personal laws, which often marginalize women in property inheritance. The study emphasizes the need for legal reforms to harmonize personal laws with constitutional rights and improve awareness and accessibility for women, especially in rural areas. It concludes with policy recommendations aimed at promoting gender equality in property ownership and enhancing women's empowerment. The paper [2] examines women's inheritance rights in Bangladesh, highlighting ongoing discrimination despite existing laws. It emphasizes the need for women's property ownership to enhance their agency and societal development. The study identifies significant limitations in inheritance laws, particularly for Muslim women. It calls for state intervention to ensure equitable property rights for women. The paper [3] discusses the critical importance of women's land rights in Asia, highlighting the negative impacts of gender-biased legislation and discriminatory practices on women's economic and social status. It emphasizes that securing land rights for women is essential for rural development, food security, and poverty alleviation. The role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in advocating for women's land rights and monitoring government compliance with relevant policies is also underscored. The paper calls for culturally-responsive land legislation and the active participation of women in decision-making processes to address injustices in land access. [4] Evaluates the debates surrounding gender-equal inheritance policy in Bangladesh, highlighting socio-political drivers and power dynamics that hindered its adoption. It discusses the influence of religious sentiments on policy formulation, particularly regarding inheritance rights for women. The government's failure to implement a gender-equal policy resulted from negotiations with fundamentalist groups to maintain political stability. The research employs qualitative methods, including interviews and secondary data analysis, to understand the complexities of the issue. The paper [5] identifies key actors and events affecting the formulation and withdrawal of gender-equal inheritance policies. It discusses the tension between international mandates for gender equality and opposition from Islamic fundamentalist parties. The paper concludes that political Islam significantly complicates the creation of gender-equitable policies in Bangladesh. The paper [6] investigates gender gaps in property ownership, focusing on land and housing, using data from the Demographic and Health Survey across 41 developing countries. It highlights that women's property ownership is crucial for their well-being and economic empowerment, yet significant disparities persist, often influenced by legal frameworks and cultural norms. The study emphasizes the need for legislative reforms and interventions to address these gaps, particularly in regions with traditional gender roles that hinder women's access to property. Overall, it contributes to understanding the relationship between gender equity and property rights.

The paper [7] discusses women's inheritance rights under Islamic law in Bangladesh, highlighting their marginalization despite legal entitlements. It emphasizes the need for awareness and education regarding these rights among women. Recommendations include government legal aid and moral education to support women's inheritance rights. The research identifies cultural and social barriers that hinder women's access to inheritance. It concludes that implementing Islamic provisions can benefit all, not just Muslims. It also investigates that Hindu women in Bangladesh face discrimination in inheritance, holding limited property rights compared to men who have absolute ownership. The paper argues for equal property rights for Hindu women to ensure their economic liberty and empowerment. Legislative amendments are suggested to facilitate Hindu women's absolute interest in property inheritance. The study highlights the socio-economic challenges faced by widows regarding property rights and inheritance. Existing laws perpetuate gender inequality, obstructing Hindu women's rights to inherit property fully. The paper [8] emphasizes women's critical role in economic development through improved property rights. It advocates for integrating gender and property issues in development programs for better outcomes. The research identifies key issues: gender equality in property rights, urban property rights, and women's economic roles. Recommendations include targeted research to address gaps in knowledge and practice. The International Housing Coalition aims to improve housing conditions and urban development in developing nations. The report [9] addresses barriers to women's access and ownership of land and property in Nepal, highlighting the challenges faced by women in Morang, Nawalparasi, and Surkhet. It emphasizes the need for legal reforms and capacity-building initiatives to enhance women's property rights and reduce socio-economic inequalities. The research involved household surveys, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions to gather insights from various stakeholders, including government officials and civil society members. The findings aim to inform policy recommendations and support initiatives for empowering women in land ownership. The thesis [10] examines factors affecting

land inheritance among men and women in rural Bangladesh. It highlights the significance of land ownership for economic security and social status. The study reveals that women are less likely to inherit land than men. Factors influencing inheritance include parental land ownership and a woman's education level. The research indicates a need for further data collection to understand inheritance dynamics better. The study [11] examines rural women's social status and gender awareness in Bangladesh, highlighting significant disparities in recognition of gender discrimination. It identifies personal income and physical beauty as key factors influencing women's social status. The research emphasizes the need for increased gender awareness through education and access to resources. It concludes that development agencies should focus on enhancing women's literacy and media exposure to improve gender awareness. The paper [12] discusses women's land rights in Bangladesh, focusing on institutional frameworks and land registration processes. It highlights barriers to women's recognition of land tenure rights due to social norms and legal inconsistencies. The study emphasizes the importance of land reform and women's political participation in improving tenure security. [13] The paper examines the contested issue of inheritance rights in Bangladesh, influenced by legal pluralism and feminist institutionalism. It highlights the complexities arising from multiple interpretations of inheritance laws in Islam and Hinduism. The literature on gender and inheritance laws in Bangladesh highlights legal biases, customary practices, and societal norms that disadvantage women. Studies indicate that:

- Islamic inheritance law grants women half the share of men.
- Hindu inheritance laws largely exclude women from direct property rights.
- Customary practices often deter women from claiming their legal rights due to familial and societal pressures.
- Legal reforms and judicial interventions have sought to improve women's inheritance rights but face resistance.

III. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

A. Islamic Inheritance Law

Under Islamic inheritance law, a daughter inherits half the share of a son. Widows receive one-eighth of the deceased husband's property if there are children and one-fourth if there are none. Despite these provisions, patriarchal practices often prevent women from accessing their rightful inheritance.

B. Hindu and Christian Inheritance Laws

Hindu women in Bangladesh traditionally have no direct inheritance rights unless they belong to specific sub-groups, such as the Dayabhaga school, which allows limited inheritance. Christian women have better inheritance rights, though practical implementation remains challenging.

C. State Laws and Reforms

The Bangladesh government has enacted various legal reforms to enhance women's inheritance rights, including the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance of 1961 and subsequent amendments. However, resistance from religious groups and customary practices continue to hinder their effective implementation.

IV. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES AND CULTURAL NORMS

A. Patriarchal Mindset and Family Dynamics

In many Bangladeshi families, sons are considered primary heirs, while daughters are expected to marry and be supported by their husbands. This cultural expectation often leads to women being denied their inheritance, either voluntarily or under social pressure.

B. Economic Dependence and Lack of Awareness

Women, especially in rural areas, are often unaware of their legal rights due to limited education and economic dependence on male family members. This lack of awareness perpetuates the cycle of gender-based economic disparity.

C. Social Stigma and Family Honor

Many women forego their inheritance rights to maintain familial harmony. Claiming inheritance is sometimes seen as dishonorable, leading to social ostracization or familial conflict.

D. Influence of Religious Leaders and Community Norms

Religious leaders and community elders play a significant role in shaping societal attitudes. While some promote equitable inheritance practices, others reinforce traditional norms that disadvantage women.

V. CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN IN SECURING INHERITANCE RIGHTS

A. Legal and Procedural Barriers

Legal proceedings related to inheritance claims are often lengthy and complex. Women who seek legal recourse face bureaucratic hurdles, financial constraints, and social backlash.

B. Coercion and Forced Relinquishment

Many women are pressured to renounce their inheritance in favor of male relatives. This coercion can be emotional, psychological, or, in some cases, even physical.

C. Lack of Implementation of Legal Reforms

Despite legal provisions, enforcement remains weak. Corruption, judicial delays, and societal resistance contribute to the ineffective implementation of inheritance laws.

VI. CHANGING TRENDS AND EVOLVING ATTITUDES

A. Role of Education and Awareness Programs

Educational initiatives and legal awareness campaigns have started changing societal attitudes towards women's inheritance rights. NGOs and advocacy groups play a crucial role in empowering women with legal knowledge.

B. Women's Economic Participation and Financial Independence

As more women engage in the workforce and gain financial independence, societal attitudes toward inheritance rights are gradually shifting. Economic empowerment enables women to assert their legal rights more effectively.

C. Judicial Interventions and Policy Advocacy

Bangladeshi courts have increasingly ruled in favor of women's inheritance claims. Policy advocacy efforts are pushing for legal amendments to ensure gender-equitable inheritance laws.

A. Influence of Globalization and Human Rights Movements

Global human rights movements and international organizations have pressured Bangladesh to align its inheritance laws with gender equality principles. This has led to increased discourse on women's rights and legal reforms.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCING WOMEN'S INHERITANCE RIGHTS

A. Legal Reforms and Harmonization of Laws

A unified legal framework that ensures equitable inheritance across all religious communities is necessary. Reforms should address discriminatory provisions and promote gender equality.

B. Strengthening Legal Implementation and Enforcement

Improving the judicial system's efficiency and providing legal aid to women can enhance the enforcement of inheritance laws.

C. Community Engagement and Sensitization

Engaging religious leaders, local authorities, and community groups in awareness campaigns can help shift cultural norms and attitudes toward gender-equitable inheritance practices.

D. Economic Empowerment and Skill Development

Providing women with economic opportunities, vocational training, and financial literacy programs can reduce dependency and enable them to claim their inheritance rights.

E. Educational Initiatives

Incorporating women's inheritance rights into educational curricula can foster awareness from an early age and contribute to long-term societal change.

VIII. THE ROLE OF ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE IN ADDRESSING INHERITANCE RIGHTS

Environmental science can play a transformative role in strengthening women's inheritance rights in Bangladesh, where land and property ownership are deeply tied to both social equity and environmental sustainability. Since most inheritance disputes involve land and agricultural property, applying environmental perspectives ensures that legal rights are not only protected but also aligned with sustainable resource management [14].

One key approach is Sustainable Land Management (SLM) for Gender Equity. By integrating environmental science into land-use planning, inheritance claims can be documented alongside sustainable farming practices, soil conservation, and biodiversity protection [15]. This ensures that inherited land benefits women economically while promoting ecological balance.

Another crucial contribution is Geo-Spatial Mapping and Land Documentation. Many disputes arise due to unclear boundaries or fraudulent land transfers [16]. Environmental science techniques such as satellite imagery, GIS (Geographic Information Systems), and remote sensing can provide accurate, transparent maps of inherited property. These tools prevent manipulation, secure women's rights to land, and strengthen ecological monitoring [17].

Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) also offers a pathway to empower women. By involving women inheritors in the stewardship of forests, fisheries, and agricultural land, environmental science ensures that inherited resources are managed equitably and sustainably. This builds both ecological resilience and social justice [18].

Environmental science also supports Policy and Legal Frameworks for Sustainable Inheritance. By analyzing the intersection of land degradation, climate vulnerability, and gender discrimination, researchers can recommend reforms that secure women's land rights while ensuring climate-smart agriculture and disaster-resilient land use.

Through these approaches, Bangladesh can protect women's inheritance rights while simultaneously addressing pressing environmental challenges. Inheritance rights and environmental stewardship, when combined, foster not only gender justice but also long-term ecological sustainability [19].

TABLE I. ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE APPLICATIONS IN INHERITANCE RIGHTS FOR WOMEN IN BANGLADESH

Environmental Science Approach	Application in Inheritance Rights	Decision-Making Role	Impact on Women's Rights
Sustainable Land Management (SLM)	Integrates inheritance land with eco-friendly agriculture and soil conservation	Ensures land is productive and ecologically stable	Provides women with secure, sustainable livelihoods
Geo-Spatial Mapping (GIS, Remote Sensing)	Maps and documents inheritance land boundaries transparently	Prevents fraudulent land disputes and ensures fair allocation	Protects women's property claims through scientific evidence
Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM)	Involves women inheritors in shared management of land, water, and forests	Builds inclusive decision-making structures	Empowers women as environmental stewards and landowners
Environmental Policy Analysis	Studies links between land rights, climate resilience, and gender equity	Recommends reforms that align women's inheritance with sustainable practices	Strengthens legal and institutional support for women
Climate-Smart Agriculture in Inherited Land	Applies environmentally friendly farming techniques to women-owned inherited land	Promotes long-term resilience to climate change	Enhances women's economic empowerment through sustainable use
Eco-Legal Documentation Systems	Uses environmental data and scientific validation for land ownership records	Reduces forgery and clarifies inheritance claims	Provides women secure access to land titles and rights

IX. CONCLUSION

Inheritance rights are a fundamental aspect of gender equality, yet in Bangladesh, societal attitudes and cultural norms continue to limit women's access to their rightful inheritance. Despite existing legal frameworks that grant women inheritance rights, traditional patriarchal values, religious interpretations, and familial pressures often override legal provisions. Women frequently face social stigma, economic coercion, and legal complexities when asserting their claims, leading to financial insecurity and dependence on male family members. The persistence of discriminatory inheritance practices not only affects women's economic stability but also hinders broader gender equality efforts in the country. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach that includes legal reforms, awareness

campaigns, and stronger enforcement mechanisms. Ensuring women's inheritance rights demands collaboration between policymakers, religious leaders, and civil society to create an environment where legal rights are respected and upheld in practice. A shift in societal attitudes is essential to achieving true gender equity in inheritance matters. Education, legal literacy, and financial empowerment programs can help women understand and claim their rights without fear of social backlash. Furthermore, strengthening legal institutions and providing accessible legal support can ensure that inheritance laws are effectively implemented. By bridging the gap between legal provisions and cultural acceptance, Bangladesh can take significant strides toward a more just and equitable society where women are no longer deprived of their rightful inheritance. This denial of inheritance not only reinforces economic inequality but also marginalizes women from meaningful participation in land ownership and sustainable environmental management. Recognizing land as both a social and ecological resource, the paper highlights that empowering women through equitable inheritance has far-reaching implications: it strengthens gender justice, enhances family and community welfare, and promotes more sustainable use of environmental resources.

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