

English translation:

Irena (I): People say that in the South Asian countries, the oppression against women is stronger. Women have a lot more opportunities there (in the USA). Here (in Bangladesh), girls don't have too much power, and they are not allowed to do certain things. From childhood they are drilled with the idea that they cannot do certain things because they are girls. That's the reason why when a girl from South Asia goes there, people ask a lot of questions – “Did you do this?” “Were you allowed to do that?” etc. Is that still the same?

Gulshan (G): No, that's not true. This is about freedom. It depends on where the girl is from. In the rural areas, people are still very conservative and may have restrictions on what girls can do and what they cannot. There, a girl's place is in the house, where she manages the household and she doesn't have that much of an opportunity to venture out. But people who live in the urban areas -- they are different. They are educated; they get jobs. A lot of women work in private banks. They also get married and run a household. So they are doing both.

I: So it is not like that ... only men can go out and women can't? You sometime get this notion that only men can go out in the streets; women have to always have a male chaperone when they are outside their homes. Or sometimes women are not allowed to study. There are a lot of places that do that.

G: Well, this does happen, but it happens in the villages...in the rural regions. It doesn't occur much in the urban areas. They are doing quite well here, in social terms. They enjoy freedom.

I: So do you like Bangladesh more or foreign countries?

G: I definitely like Bangladesh more because this is my country. I was born here, I want to die here and I will never get the respect that I get here anywhere else. Visiting other countries for holidays and tours is nice, but I want to live in Bangladesh and take my last breath in my own land. I love my country very much.

I: You live a comfortable life. So, say if I asked the same questions of a rickshaw¹-puller or someone who is not as financially stable as you, do you think they would also say that they want to live in Bangladesh and not abroad? Like, say, in Iraq, foreigners are going and commenting on women's rights. But it's only the lower-class citizens that don't have these rights. At the higher level, women do work and enjoy their freedom. So the Americans think that they can help those who cannot do anything themselves. So, do you

¹ Ricksha/rickshaw: a two-wheeled cart seating one or two persons, drawn by a single individual. Rickshaws in Bangladesh are cycle-powered.

think if anyone asked about the situations here, someone would have a different response? Your lifestyles are different, and so you are saying something else. Do you think people from the lower class would say the same thing or not?

G: Lower-class citizens have less education, so they don't really understand what's good and what's bad. So naturally, they would think that foreigners coming to Bangladesh and giving them different things is a good thing. But actually that is not right. They are lured into changing their religion, distorting their own culture, etc. They don't really understand the issues because of a lack of education. They only understand the value of money, so anyone who gives them money can get them to do whatever they want. This is only happening because of their lack of education.

I: But here....

G: It's only affecting the lower-class people who are not educated.

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