

# Examining the Intersectional Experiences of Ethnic Minority Women Within the Gendered Paradigm of Educational Institutions: A Case Study of Rajshahi University.

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore how ethnic minority women are facing discrimination at Rajshahi University. The research methodology involved the use of a qualitative case study design, which employed interviews to collect data from a sample of 17 undergraduate ethnic minority women at Rajshahi University. The study aimed to identify the influence of discriminatory outlook towards ethnic minority women in their academic experiences. There are significant biases against ethnic minority women in their academic experiences. The implications of this research highlight the need for increased attention to gender dynamics about ethnic minorities in society and the importance of creating more inclusive and equitable learning environments for all in society so that no one is facing discrimination based on their ethnic identity as well as gender status. This study contributes to the literature on gender and education by providing insight into the experiences of ethnic minority women and offering recommendations for authorities to promote a more equitable environment that eradicates the problems indicated in this research.

**Keywords:** Ethnic minority women, Discrimination, Rajshahi University, Gender Dynamics, Gender Identity, Discriminatory Outlook.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Background

Ethnic minorities are social groups where a person belongs to and either identifies with or is associated with by others as a result of a variety of cultural and other variables, such as language, diet, religion, heritage, and physical characteristics usually associated with race (ScotPHO, 2023)

This research is intended to explore the pathways that lead us to know the intersectional experiences of ethnic minority women within the gendered paradigm of educational institutions especially the field of Rajshahi University.

One of the reasons behind choosing the University of Rajshahi is that in Rajshahi University there resides a diverse array of ethnic minorities who take part in every university activity as the majority of others. Another reason is that there is barely any research has been conducted to extract the experiences of ethnic minority women.

Now the quest is to investigate how ethnic minority women are facing discrimination as both a woman and a member of an ethnic minority group at the same time.

### **Research Questions:**

- a. How do the intersectional identities of ethnic minority women influence their educational journey in higher studies of an ethnic minority and a woman simultaneously?
- b. What are some effective ways ethnic minority women use to overcome the challenges of being a woman from an ethnic minority at the University of Rajshahi?

### **Research Objectives:**

This research intends to unearth how ethnic minority women face challenges as well as discrimination in Rajshahi University and how these kinds of barriers affect their academic lives.

Conducting this research will help an individual know about:

- a. To investigate the unique challenges faced by ethnic minority women in accessing and participating in higher education at the University of Rajshahi.
- b. To find out possible tactics and suggestions for improving the equality and inclusivity of the educational experiences that women from ethnic minorities get at the University of Rajshahi.

### **Problem Statement:**

We need to understand the specific challenges and experiences of ethnic minority women at the University of Rajshahi in the context of gender equality. This research aims to highlight their unique struggles and strengths to promote a fair and inclusive educational environment.”

### **Limitations of The Study:**

Here are the potential limitations of this research. Those limitations are stated below:

**Unwillingness:** Ethnic minority women are very much unwilling to share their problems outside their community concerning their security.

**Time:** To complete a research adequate time is required. A certain period was offered to complete this research. Time can be considered as a limitation. This research has been done with the consideration of that limited time

**Finance:** Research cannot be completed without adequate finance. Finance is limited in academic research.

**Experience:** This research has been completed as a student of final year student of International Relations. In that case, the experience can be considered another limitation

## **CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Literature Review**

One such study, “Needs of Ethnic Minority Students for Improvement in Secondary Schools” by Md. Mahbulul Kabir and Samir R. Nath (2005), examines the factors influencing the academic performance of ethnic minority students in secondary schools. This research identifies key needs for improvement, including the development of a strong foundation in Bangla as a second language, enhancement of

classroom teaching quality, and curriculum reinforcement tailored to slow learners (Kabir & Nath, 2005).

Another pertinent study, “Ethnic Minorities and Teaching: An Examination of the Low Numbers in the Teaching Profession” by A. Y. “Fred” Ramirez (2009), addresses the professional shortfall of ethnic minorities in teaching roles. Ramirez argues that a coordinated effort among states, school districts, and higher education institutions is necessary to increase the representation of ethnic minorities in the teaching profession (Ramirez, 2009).

In the study “Educational Marginalization in Bangladesh,” Samir Ranjan Nath (2008) highlights that 17.6% of ethnic minority children aged 5 to 14 were employed, with most working in family businesses. Notably, 65% of these children were also enrolled in school, underscoring the dual burden of work and education faced by this demographic (Nath, 2008).

Xiaoxu Liu’s research, “Ethnic Minority Students’ Access, Participation and Outcomes in Preparatory Classes in China: A Case Study of a School of Minzu Education” (2010), explores the enrollment patterns and fairness of access to preparatory classes among ethnic minority students. Liu finds that urban minority children have higher enrollment rates, raising questions about equitable access within and between ethnic minority groups (Liu, 2010).

Roxana D. Baltaru’s study, “Minority Ethnic Staff in Universities: Organisational Commitments, Reputation and the (Re)structuring of the Staff Body” (2015), investigates the impact of organizational commitments on the participation of ethnic minorities in university staff roles. This longitudinal analysis of 120 universities reveals how institutional characteristics and commitments influence the representation of underrepresented ethnic groups in academia (Baltaru, 2015).

Aslan Zorlu’s research, “Ethnic Disparities in Higher Education” (2016), examines the academic performance of ethnic minorities in Dutch colleges and universities. The findings indicate that ethnic minorities from non-Western countries perform worse on standardized tests and have higher dropout rates compared to their peers (Zorlu, 2016).

Despite the valuable insights these studies provide, none specifically address the intersectional experiences of ethnic minority women within the gendered framework of educational institutions, particularly in the context of Rajshahi University. To address this gap, we aim to construct a conceptual framework tailored to exploring the unique experiences and challenges faced by this group.

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research design:**

The main goal of this study is to examine the difficulties and discrimination faced by ethnic minority women at Rajshahi University. We’re going to perform this investigation inductively because there isn’t much existing literature. The qualitative method of research will be used in this study.

### **Area of study:**

Because of the dedicated field, this research is going to take place at the University of Rajshahi. Interviews took place on the University campus.

### **Participants of the study:**

The participants of this study are 17 ethnic minority women students of Rajshahi University. Not more than

22 ethnic minority women will be interviewed throughout this research.

#### **Data collection:**

Data will be collected by conducting interviews of ethnic minority women at the University of Rajshahi. Some questions will be asked and the answers will be later analyzed.

#### **Data analysis:**

Collected data will be analyzed by the researcher and the answers of the interviewee will be filtered according to the analyzing order and will be recorded in the computerized software for further proceedings.

#### **Interview Questions:**

1. Can you describe any situations where you felt discriminated against due to your gender (women) identity?
2. Can you describe any situations where you felt discriminated against due to your ethnic background?
3. Did you encounter any situation where you felt you were treated differently for being a woman and belonging to an ethnic minority at the same time?
4. Would you like to recommend anything that may influence to solve these issues?

## **CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION**

#### **Discussion:**

This research aims to identify the intersectional experiences of ethnic minority women within the educational context, specifically focusing on the University of Rajshahi. It seeks to understand the unique challenges and discrimination faced by identity as both women and members of minority groups.

In this research process, 17 ethnic minority women participated and they are from different faculties such as faculty of arts, faculty of science, faculty of social science, faculty of business studies, and faculty of engineering.

The respondents were asked to answer the questions that are described below:

At first, the respondents were asked to respond with 'yes' or 'no' questions. If the answer is 'yes' then they were asked to answer in brief what they faced in Rajshahi University.

#### **The answers of the respondents are illustrated in the following order:**

##### **Respondent 1 (Female):**

Respond to the first question: No comments

Respond to the second question: Yes, she was discriminated against. When she was first allotted to the university hall the other girls in her hall were not too friendly to her and they talked about her food habits.

Respond to the third question: No comments

Respond to the fourth question: According to her, if the seats are arranged quickly, the minority girls will be

able to mix with the common girls very quickly as well, and if the teachers will come it would be great to mitigate this problem.

**Respondent 2 (Female):**

Respond to the first question: No comments

Respond to the second question: Yes, she was discriminated against. When she was first allotted to university hall she was allowed to stay in “gonoroom”. There her seniors did not want to share a doubling bed with her and she felt neglected that’s why she shared a doubling bed with another ethnic minority girl.

Respond to the third question: No comments

Respond to the fourth question: According to her if the teachers and students will come it will be helpful to solve this problem.

**Respondent 3 (Female):**

Respond to the first question: No comments

Respond to the second question: Because of her ethnic minority identity, she is not freely mixed with her classmates and other students.

Respond to the third question: No comments

Respond to the fourth question: According to her, if minorities are considered in a general way and the University administration will create a particular organization to deal only with ethnic minority issues it would be great.

**Respondent 4 (Female):**

Respond to the first question: No comments

Respond to the second question: Yes, she was discriminated against. When she goes to the campus with her minority friends everyone looks at them with cross eyes and many times, they face bullying from them.

Respond to the third question: No comments

Respond to the fourth question: According to her, if the departments will talk about the ethnic minority’s culture, and tradition along with studies it would be good.

**Respondent 5 (Female):**

Respond to the first question: No comments

Respond to the second question: Yes, she was discriminated against. At Rajshahi University sometimes she faces bullying from other students and outsiders. They are mocking her as a “Chinese, Chang-Chung”

Respond to the third question: No comments

Respond to the fourth question: According to her, if campus administration creates an organization and tries to arrange a seminar for ethnic minority issues as well as if all the departments will uphold the ethnic

minority issues to their students, I would be good.

**Respondent 6 (Female):**

Respond to the first question: Yes, she was discriminated against in her classroom. In the decision-making process, female students are considered weak not only but also in the ICT sector female students are considered as not capable. Sometimes in her class male students get privileged and this kind of circumstance decreases female student's confidence levels.

Respond to the second question: Yes, she was discriminated against. She said the people of the northern part of Bangladesh are not well-known about indigenous people. She also said that she faces bullying because of her language at Rajshahi University.

Respond to the third question: Yes, she was discriminated against as both a woman and a member of an ethnic minority group. She said that this kind of circumstance varies in different situations. She also said that she is more discriminated against because of her ethnic minority identity.

Respond to the fourth question: According to her, if we consider an ethnic minority equal to others and sometimes arrange seminars for ethnic minority people it would be beneficial.

**Respondent 7 (Female):**

Respond to the first question: No comments

Respond to the second question: Yes, she was discriminated against in her department because of her ethnic minority identity.

Respond to the third question: She felt that she was only discriminated against because of her ethnic minority issues.

Respond to the fourth question: According to her arranging seminars as well as various cultural events helps to solve this problem.

**Respondent 8 (Female):**

Respond to the first question: No comments

Respond to the second question: Yes, she was discriminated against. Once she went to the University administration building for an application but the administration officer delayed her application 3-4 days without any reason and sometimes, she faced ignorance because of her "quota" facilities in their admission test.

Respond to the third question: No comments

Respond to the fourth question: According to her, if campus administration creates an information cell for ethnic minority people in the University it would be good.

**Respondent 9 (Female):**

Respond to the first question: No comments

Respond to the second question: Yes, she was discriminated against because of her ethnic minority identity.

She said that often she faces bullying when she is on the road on campus.

Respond to the third question: No comments

Respond to the fourth question: According to her, if campus administration creates an organization and often arranges seminars furthermore opening an information cell for ethnic minority students would be good.

**Respondent 10 (Female):**

Respond to the first question: No comments

Respond to the second question: Yes, she was discriminated against. When she first went into her classroom in university many students were mocking her as a “chakma-chakma”. In addition, when she was allotted in university hall other female students never accepted her as a roommate.

Respond to the third question: Yes, she was discriminated against as both a woman and an ethnic minority identity. She lived outside her campus after finishing her classes she went to her room on foot beside the roads some people bullied her and some bikers tried to touch her body.

Respond to the fourth question: According to her, if all the people in the University change their attitude towards ethnic minorities and their challenges, traditions, and culture upheld through particular organizations on campus it would be good to solve this problem.

**Respondent 11 (Female):**

Respond to the first question: No comments

Respond to the second question: Yes, she was discriminated against. In University when she talks in her indigenous language with others many times other students bully her because of her language.

Respond to the third question: Yes, she was discriminated against because of women as well as ethnic minority identities.

Respond to the fourth question: According to her, if the university administration includes ethnic minority culture, tradition, and language in the academic syllabus it will help to inform the students about indigenous people in Bangladesh.

**Respondent 12 (Female):**

Respond to the first question: Yes, she was discriminated against as a woman. Once she went University Medical Center with her friend the medical staff was not friendly with them and the staff did not give priority to them.

Respond to the second question: When she first went to her department one teacher asked her if she knew to Bangladeshi language.

Respond to the third question: She thinks that she is not so discriminated against as a woman but she thinks that she is much discriminated against because of her minority identity.

Respond to the fourth question: According to her, teachers can play a significant role in overcoming this problem.

**Respondent 13 (Female):**

Respond to the first question: Yes, she was discriminated against as a woman in her department. She said that on her campus there is a law named “Sandhya Ain” which means women’s halls are closed within 9 p.m.

Respond to the second question: Yes, she was discriminated against. Sometimes teachers call her “Upojati” in the classroom. She never accepted this word easily.

Respond to the third question: No comments

Respond to the fourth question: According to her, if campus administration will give separate “gonoroom” only for ethnic minorities in every hall it would be beneficial.

**Respondent 14 (Female):**

Respond to the first question: Yes, she was discriminated against. She said that because of “Sandhya Ain” women do not come out from their halls after 9 p.m. as men’s halls are open for 24 hours.

Respond to the second question: Yes, she was discriminated against because of ethnic minorities “quota” facilities and she feels that her classmates neglect her. Respond to the third question: No comments

Respond to the fourth question: According to her, if campus administration is quickly allotted ethnic minorities in halls, it will be helpful.

**Respondent 15 (Female):**

Respond to the first question: No, she was not discriminated against and said that she gets privilege because of women.

Respond to the second question: When she is walking on the roads sometimes, she faces bullying from the people.

Respond to the third question: No comments

Respond to the fourth question: According to her, if campus administration will give separate “gonoroom” for minorities in every hall and if the departments will uphold minority issues it can play a significant role.

**Respondent 16 (Female):**

Respond to the first question: No comments

Respond to the second question: Yes, she was discriminated against. She faced barriers to getting allotted in the hall because of her ethnic minority identity.

Respond to the third question: No comments

Respond to the fourth question: According to her, if a seminar is arranged for ethnic minorities, it will create awareness among all the students.

**Respondent 17 (Female):**

Respond to the first question: Yes, she was discriminated against in her friend circle because of women.



Respond to the second question: Yes, she was discriminated against. Once her classmate was bullying her and often many students mocked her as “Chinese”.

Respond to the third question: She is neglected because of women and physical capability as well and she is ignored because of her ethnic minority identity.

Respond to the fourth question: According to her, at first, we must change our attitude towards minorities, and particular organizations on campus can help to overcome this problem

## **CHAPTER FIVE: RESULT**

### **Result**

Analyzing question number 1. Can you describe any situations where you felt discriminated against due to your gender (women) identity?

Out of 17 respondents, only 5 respondents said that they had faced discrimination due to their woman identity.

This indicates that 29% of females have faced discrimination at Rajshahi University.

The majority of female participants said that they have not encountered any discrimination due to their woman identity.

However, some females said that they are facing discrimination in their classroom, University Hall policies like (Sandhya Ain), dress code, and in their friend circle, and they also claimed that University Medical Center staff are not too helpful due to their women identity.

Analyzing question number 2. Can you describe any situations where you felt discriminated against due to your ethnic background?

Out of 17 female respondents all of the respondents said that they had faced discrimination due to their ethnic background.

This indicates that 100% of ethnic minority women have faced discrimination at Rajshahi University.

All the respondents said that they are facing discrimination in their halls where general women are not too friendly with ethnic minority women because of their food habits furthermore general women do not want to share their bed with ethnic minority women. Ethnic minority women also claimed that general students, outsiders on campus even their classmates mocked them as “Chinese-Chinese”. Sometimes ethnic women feel neglected because of their “quota” facilities in university admission tests in addition they face bullying because of their indigenous language.

Analyzing question number 3. Did you encounter any situation where you felt you were treated differently for being a woman and belonging to an ethnic minority at the same time?

Out of 17 female respondents, only 3 respondents said that they had faced discrimination due to as both women and members of ethnic minority groups.

This indicates that 17% of respondents have faced discrimination for being a woman and ethnic background.

Most of the respondents said they are not facing discrimination too much for being a woman but they are highly facing discrimination for being an ethnic minority. They claimed that this kind of circumstance varies in the situation. One of the respondents claimed that she is neglected because of women and physical capability as well and she is ignored because of ethnic minority identity.

## CHAPTER SIX: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

### How to overcome this problem

Firstly, all the respondents recommended that campus administration establish a particular organization and often arrange seminars for ethnic minority issues it would be great. Secondly, respondents claimed that they needed an information cell for ethnic minorities. Thirdly they said that they need separate “gonoroom” in every hall for ethnic minorities because of their food habits furthermore campus administration must consider allotting room quickly for minorities. Fourthly they said that if all the departments uphold ethnic minority culture, tradition, and language among their students it will create awareness in the students in addition if departments include ethnic minority issues in their syllabus, students will know about indigenous culture, and tradition through their learning. Lastly, they hope everyone will change their attitude toward ethnic minorities and treat them equally.

### Conclusion

This research has uncovered that ethnic minority women are facing discrimination at Rajshahi University in their academic experiences. The research methodology involved the use of a qualitative case study design, which employed interviews to collect data from a sample of 17 undergraduate ethnic minority women at Rajshahi University. Based on participants this research examined how ethnic minority women are facing discrimination due to their ethnic identity. According to participators, this research provides recommendations for authorities, educational institutions, and policymakers to work towards a more equitable and inclusive environment for ethnic minorities.

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