

Perception of BRAC graduates studying in *Madrassah* on
some selected social and cultural issues: a comparative
study

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Abstract

This study aimed at exploring perception of BRAC graduates studying in grade IX in *Madrassah* on some social and cultural issues. The issues were chosen based on empirical knowledge of the author that are generally perceived and practiced especially by women from religious point of view. Forty-four BRAC graduates (girls) studying in *Madrassah* were selected as study group. Equal number of girl students from each of three other categories of student, i.e., BRAC graduates studying in high school, non-BRAC students studying in high school and in *Madrassah* were chosen as control groups. The respondents were interviewed in groups. The study reveals that majority of the BRAC graduates studying in both *Madrassah* and high schools had progressive perception on most of the issues. Some of both the groups of BRAC graduates had some degrees of religious fanaticism and superstitious beliefs on some of the issues. BRAC graduates studying in *Madrassah* had more progressive perception on most of the issues compared to the non-BRAC students studying in *Madrassah*. Non-BRAC students studying in high schools had more progressive perception on the issues compared to the other three groups. Perception of mothers and their daughters on the issues was not seemed to be associated. It was realised that *Madrassah* education alone was not responsible for the backward perceptions of the respondents, rather influence of religious fanaticism and fundamentalism from time immemorial were also responsible. As the girl students studying in higher classes in schools and in *Madrassahs* still have backward perceptions on social, religious and cultural issues, the government and/or NGOs should take it into consideration to strengthen development efforts.

INTRODUCTION

BRAC, as a private sector development organisation in Bangladesh has been operating two models of education programme in non-formal sector. The first model, called Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE), is a four-year course for children aged 8-10 years old. The second model, called Basic Education for Older Children (BEOC), is a three-year course for children aged 11-14 years. Both the models cover five-year cycle of primary education equivalent to the formal primary education system. BRAC targets the children of poor and illiterate families.

One of the major aims of the programme is to build a strong foundation of ethical values among its learners (NFPE, 1999) rather being communal and class bias. The curriculum of BRAC's education programme has been developed accordingly and the practices are secular as well in every respect. BRAC intends to enroll all of its graduates to formal system to continue their study. Although, a high proportion of BRAC graduates enroll in formal school, it was observed through preliminary field visits that an extent of BRAC graduates enrolls in *Madrassahs*. The trend of enrollment in *Madrassah* was found higher in some regions.

The *Madrassah* Education System

There are two types of education in *Madrassah* education system. One is 'Kaumi *Madrassah*' which does not follow the government curricula, and offers only religious studies. The other one is 'Alia *Madrassah*' which offers both religious and general following government curricula. The religious studies include Arabic literacy, Akida, Arabic grammar, Fiqh, etc., and the general education include Bangla, English, Mathematics, Social Studies, Geography, History, General science, etc. The levels in Alia *Madrassah* system are: Ebtedayee (Primary level) , Dakhil (Secondary level), Alim (HSC level), Fazil (Degree level) and Kamil (Masters level). The *Madrassahs* train religious personalities who, after successful completion of the course, acquires the title 'Mawlana'.

The Ebtedayee, Dakhil and Alim levels are under the *Madrassah* Education Board and are given equal status of primary, secondary and higher secondary levels respectively, but the Fazil and Kamil levels are not under University and are not given equal status of Degree and Masters levels in formal system.

It was expected that although BRAC graduates enroll in *Madrassah*, their perception on social and cultural issues would not be backward. The BEP management, however, keen to know perceptions of the BRAC graduates studying in Dakhil *Madrassah* on some selected social and cultural issues. The issues were chosen from the empirical knowledge of the author, which are generally perceived and practiced especially by Bangladeshi women from religious points of view. The perceptions, however, have been compared among the BRAC graduates studying in high school and non-BRAC students studying in Dakhil *Madrassah* and in high school.

The selected broad social and cultural issues are listed below. Each issue contains a number of specific issues, which are attached in Appendices 1.

1. Humanity
2. Gender
3. Family planning
4. Marriage and divorce
5. Cultural activities

Objectives of the study

The study aimed to explore the perception of BRAC graduates studying in Dakhil *Madrassah* on some selected social and cultural issues.

The specific objectives were to:

- i) record background of the study population,
- ii) compare perception of the BRAC graduates studying in grade IX in Dakhil *Madrassah* on the issues with other three groups of students studying in the same grade, i.e., BRAC graduates studying in high school, non-BRAC students studying in *Madrassah* and non-BRAC students studying in high school, and to
- iii) explore perception of their mothers on the issues.

METHODOLOGY

Study area: The study has covered three different regions of BRAC Education Programme (BEP), such as Bogra, Mymensingh and Chandpur. From the selected regions, 7 Dakhil *Madrassahs* and 6 high schools were included.

Sample population and sampling procedure: The *Madrassahs* and the schools were chosen purposively based on availability of BRAC graduates studying in grade IX. The BRAC graduates studying in Dakhil *Madrassah* were chosen as programme group. The BRAC graduates studying in the same grade in high school, the non-BRAC students studying in the same grade in Dakhil *Madrassahs* and in high schools were chosen as control groups. From each category, 44 students were selected. Thus, 176 students were chosen as sample. As the number of male BRAC graduates studying in Dakhil *Madrassah* were inadequate, only the girl students were interviewed. Thus, the findings represent only the perception of girl students.

As one of the objectives of the study was to explore perception of the guardians on the same issues, the mothers of the selected students were also interviewed. The justification of choosing

the mothers was that the frequency of interaction of girls assumed to be much higher with their mothers compared to their fathers. Moreover, the selected issues often influence women in Bangladesh especially in rural areas. The mothers were chosen purposively based on the category of students. Finally, 98 mothers were interviewed. It should be mentioned here that the mothers of the non-BRAC students studying in high school were not included to save time and money. Moreover, exploring perception of the mothers was not the main objective of the study. The following Table shows a distribution of sample population by category of students.

Table 1. Distribution of sample population by category of students.

Category of students	No. of students	No. of mothers
BRAC graduates studying in <i>Dakhil Madrassah</i>	44	32
BRAC graduates studying in high school	44	32
Non-BRAC graduates studying in <i>Dakhil Madrassah</i>	44	34
Non-BRAC graduates studying in high school	44	-
Total	176	98

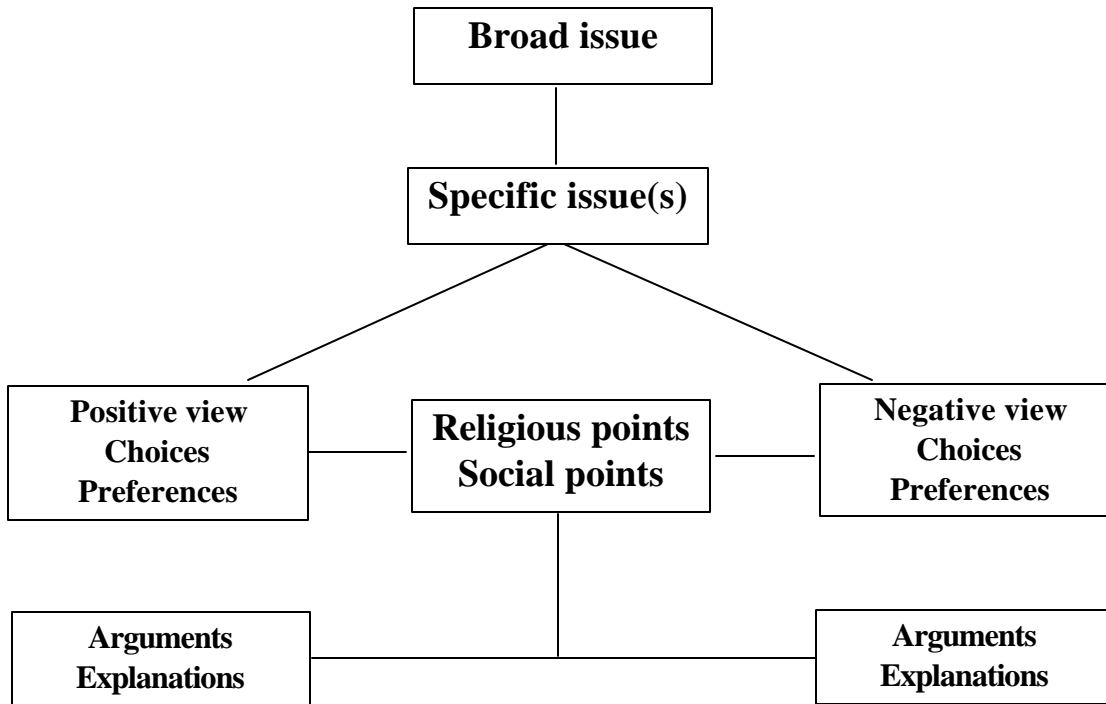
Data collection technique and instrument: In each *Madrassah* and school, two group discussions with two categories (BRAC graduates and non-BRAC students) of students were held. Thus, 24 group discussions with the students and 15 group discussions with their mothers were held. Besides the group discussions, 23 mothers were interviewed individually. The discussion meetings and the individual discussions were conducted using a structured checklist. The checklist was designed in such a manner that the same instrument would be used in collecting data from all the sample respondents.

Although, the main information were collected through group discussions, socioeconomic background information of the respondents were collected through individual interviews. Data related to household's economic status of the respondents were collected through using PRA wealth ranking technique that is widely used in social studies.

Field activities and quality of data: As the respondents were girls and women, two experienced female field investigators were involved in collecting data. The investigators were given four days training especially on data collection techniques. The concern researcher directly supervised the data collection activities.

Analytical framework

Although data were collected through group discussions, contradictory views on issues of the respondents within the groups were considered and recorded accordingly. At the same time, their argument(s) supporting their views were also recorded and discussed. The following figure shows analytical framework.



FINDINGS

Socioeconomic background of the respondents

Parent's education: Data on parental education of the students show that fathers of 35 of 88 BRAC graduates had no schooling. On the other hand, fathers of 10 of 88 non-BRAC students studying in Dakhil *Madrassah* and in high schools had no schooling. As BRAC prefers the children of poor and illiterate households, the number of illiterate fathers was found to be higher compared to the fathers of the non-BRAC students. It was further found that majority fathers of all the groups of students had 1 to 10 years of schooling (Annex - 1).

Similarly, mothers of more than half (48 out of 88) of the BRAC graduates had no schooling. On the other hand, mothers of only 17 of 88 non-BRAC students had no schooling. The number of illiterate mothers of the BRAC graduates also was found to be higher compared to the mothers of the non-BRAC students studying in *Madrassah* and high schools. Education of mothers of both the groups of BRAC graduates was more or less similar. Annex Table 1 also shows that the mothers of the non-BRAC students studying in *Madrassah* and in high schools were more educated compared to the mothers of the former BRAC students.

Parent's occupation: Majority of the students of all the groups were either farmer or trader. Some of their fathers were service holders, which was slightly higher amongst the fathers of the non-BRAC students studying in *Madrassah* and in high school. The Table also shows that almost all the mothers of all the groups of students were housewives.

Household's economic status: The Table shows that most of the students (165 of 176) of all the groups were from the families that ranked marginal and good. The Table further shows that not a single student came from the families that ranked 'very poor', and a few (10 of 176) of them came from the families that ranked 'poor'. The findings indicate that the children of the poorest families did not continue schooling up to higher grades. However, data on the same

variable shows that non-BRAC students studying in *Madrassah* and in high school came from better off families compared to former BRAC students.

Parental praying status: It was assumed that the tend of enrollment in *Madrassah* would be higher amongst the children whose parents would more regular in praying. The assumption is supported by data, which shows that most parents of the non-BRAC students studying in *Madrassah* were more regular in praying compared to the parents of the former BRAC students. Interestingly, the parents of the non-BRAC students studying in high school were more regular in praying compared to the parents of BRAC graduates studying in *Madrassah*. The findings indicate that the poor, illiterates and little educated people were not regular in praying.

Student's status in maintaining *purdha* and praying: It was attempted to assess what extent of the selected students used veil (curtain or *Burkha*) in maintaining *purdha* while they went outside their homes and how many of them prayed. Annex Table 1 shows that 17 of 44 BRAC graduates studying in *Madrassah* used veil regularly in maintaining *purdha* and 23 of the same group covered their heads by scurf. On the other hand, only 3 of 44 BRAC graduates studying in high school used veil and 9 of the same group covered their heads by scurf. The remaining 32 did not use either veil or scurf. Similarly, more than half (23 of 44) of the non-BRAC students studying in *Madrassah* used veil in maintaining *purdha* and 20 of the remaining covered their heads. An interesting finding was that 9 of 44 non-BRAC students studying in high school used veil to maintain *purdha* and 24 of them used scurf. The remaining 11 students of the same group did not maintain *purdha* that was three times lower than the BRAC graduates studying in high school who did not maintain *purdha* using veil or scurf.

Perception of the students and their mothers on selected issues

The following section of this paper analyses perception of the respondents on the selected social and cultural issues that are followed by their argument(s) and/or reasons. It should be mentioned here that arguments and reasons behind perception of all the group of respondents (the students and their mothers) were almost similar. Thus, the arguments/reasons described in this paper will be treated for all the group of respondents. It should further be mentioned here that the respondents expressed their arguments from both social and religious points of views.

Issues related to humanity

Most graduates of both the groups of BRAC (41 of 44 studying in *Madrassah* and 43 of 44 students studying in high school) perceived that both Muslim and non-Muslim beggars should be given equal emphasis to give alms. Similarly, most (37 of 44) of the non-BRAC students studying in *Madrassah* and almost all (43 out of 44) non-BRAC students studying in high school perceived a similar view (Annex Table 2). Some of the non-BRAC students studying in *Madrassah* perceived the reverse. They opined that only Muslims beggars should be given alms.

Almost all the mothers of BRAC graduates studying in *Madrassah* and in high school and mothers of 29 of 44 non-BRAC students studying in *Madrassah* perceived a similar view.

They expressed logic behind positive opinion from religious point of view that "*the poor and beggars should not be differentiated by religion.*" They referred from the prophet's advice that "*as a human being, nobody should be hated.*" They also noticed some points from social point of views that "*all the beggars whether Muslim, Hindu or Christian have equal rights to survive.*" The respondents, who differed, pointed out that as they were Muslims, only Muslim beggars should be given alms, and it was their moral responsibility.

Most of the BRAC graduates (39 of 44) studying in *Madrassah*, almost all of them studying in high school and almost all the non-BRAC students studying in high school perceived that all the neighbours should be invited to attend their family occasions. They argued that neighbours should not be differentiated by religion. Most mothers of all the groups of students perceived a positive view and expressed similar argument.

Although 25 of 44 non-BRAC students studying in *Madrassah* perceived a positive view on the above issue, the remaining 19 of them perceived a negative view. In this connection they mentioned that being non-Muslims, their culture might be different from them (respondents) - thus, they (non-Muslims) should not be invited in their family occasions.

Thirty-five of 44 BRAC graduates studying in *Madrassah*, almost all of them studying in high school and most of the non-BRAC students (40 of 44) studying in high school perceived that the non-Muslim neighbours should be allowed to pray or should not be disturbed in their praying. All of them presented their logic behind this from social point of view. They told that everyone had equal rights to perform their own religious functions. At the same time, they mentioned that during their praying (through beating drum and musical instruments); they should consider the time of Azan as well as Namaj.

On the issue, 9 of 44 BRAC graduates and 16 of 44 non-BRAC students studying in *Madrassah* perceived negative. They mentioned that they (students) felt disturbed in praying and reading Qur'an while they (non-Muslims) beat drum and played musical instruments. A few of the respondents commented that "*The non-Muslims should be replaced from their locality.*"

Although most of the selected mothers of all the groups of students perceived a positive view on the issue, only few of them perceived a negative view, and they expressed similar logic as the students expressed.

The selected students and the mothers were asked what should be done if non-Muslims fall in crisis. In response to the question, almost all the students of all the groups opined that "*Irrespective of race and religion, all human being in the society should be helped.*" They expressed from religious points of view that "*Every human being is created by Allah and Allah would be pleased if they would help all his created creatures.*" Some of them pointed out that "*Helping human being is a religious norm.*" They added some other points from social points of view that helping endangered was a duty of human being and everybody should help each other.

On the same issue, 5 of 34 mothers of the non-BRAC students studying in *Madrassah* perceived a negative view. They mentioned that helping non-Muslims was an offence. They further mentioned that all Muslims were the symbolic brothers in relationship but the non-Muslims never could be the same.

About two-third (30 of 44) BRAC graduates studying in *Madrassah* and a similar number of BRAC graduates (29 of 44) studying in high school perceived that between a *Mowlana* and a non-Muslim scholar, they (students) should respect to the *Mowlana*. Similarly, about half (21 of 44) of the non-BRAC students studying in high school and most (42 of 44) of the non-BRAC students studying in *Madrassah* respectively perceived a similar view. Eight of 32 mothers of the BRAC graduates studying in *Madrassah*, 13 of 33 mothers of the BRAC graduates studying in high school and 21 of 33 mothers of the non-BRAC students studying in *Madrassah* perceived the same view.

As the reasons, both students and mothers mentioned that as they were Muslims, they always should prefer to the Muslims. Moreover, the *Mowlanas* carry vast knowledge about Islam, Qur'an, *Sariat*, etc. They further added that the *Mowlanas* pray for them and teach Arabic or Qur'an to their children.

The remaining students and the mothers of each group, who perceived the reverse, expressed their views from social point of view. They mentioned that not only *Mowlanas* but all persons having excellence of different religions should equally be respected. Since both are meritorious, they should not be differentiated by religion.

Issues related to gender

The aim of the following part of this paper was to assess perception of the respondents on the issues related to gender that were influenced by religious point of view.

Thirty-six of 44 BRAC graduates studying in *Madrassah* and 33 of 44 BRAC graduates studying in high school perceived that women could get out of their homes without accompanying men. Thirty-nine of 44 and 31 of 44 non-BRAC students studying in *Madrassah* and high school respectively perceived similar view about women's mobility.

Similarly, 28 of 32 mothers of the BRAC graduates studying in *Madrassah*, all the mothers of the BRAC graduates studying in high school and 23 of 34 mothers of the non-BRAC students studying in high school had similar perception on the issue.

On another but a similar specific issue, 36 of 44 BRAC graduates studying in *Madrassah* and almost all the BRAC graduates studying in high school perceived that women could work outside their home. On the issue, 36 of 44 and almost all the non-BRAC students studying in *Madrassah* and in high school respectively had a similar perception.

Most of the mothers of both the groups of BRAC graduates and 23 of 34 mothers of the non-BRAC students studying in *Madrassah* perceived the same.

The reasons they expressed behind their positive view on the above issues were the same. They placed a number of points from both social and economic points of views. They pointed out that women's mobility especially for economic purposes could contribute in solving their economic

crisis. It also was considered as one of the most influential determinants of human rights. It helped women to be self-dependent. At the same time, some of them especially the students in *Madrassah* conditioned that while women get out of their home, they always should follow the norms of *purdha*.

The students and the mothers, who perceived the negative, noticed that it was a contending activity of *Sariat*. In this regard, they also raised some other points from social point of view - women should keep tidy their in-house activities and should take care of their children. Otherwise, it could make misunderstanding among husbands and wives. They also noticed that it was widely recognised that women would perform inside activities and men would perform outside activities for earning.

The respondents were asked who should take major decisions in a family. Thirty-six of 44 and 39 of 44 BRAC graduates studying in *Madrassah* and high school respectively perceived that both father and mother jointly should take family related decisions. Thirty-two out of 44 and almost all the non-BRAC students studying in *Madrassah* and in high school respectively perceived similar view.

The respondents argued favouring their positive view that both father and mother together could take very strong, fruitful as well as very good decisions. As both of them were equally dignified and both made a family, everybody should have equal contribution to take major decisions in families. They further argued that decisions taken by a single person often might not be correct and effective.

Although, most mothers of all the groups of students had similar view on the issue, very few of them and some of the students studying in *Madrassah* perceived that only fathers should take major decisions in a family. An interesting finding was that although almost all the respondents were female, nobody opined that mothers should take decisions in a family. In support of their

view, they told that since fathers were men and considered as the heads of families, and earn money, they (fathers) should take major decisions.

Majority (29 of 44) of the former BRAC students and non-BRAC students (27 of 44) studying in *Madrassah* perceived that women should not eat their meals before their husbands. On the same issue, 17 of 44 former BRAC students and 10 of 44 non-BRAC students studying in high school had similar view.

Around half (15 of 32) of the mothers of BRAC graduates studying in *Madrassah*, around one-third (12 of 33) mothers of BRAC graduates studying in high school and half of the mothers (15 of 34) of non-BRAC students studying in *Madrassah* had similar perception. The remaining students of the selected groups expressed that if women would be hungry, they should eat meals before their husbands. They suggested that if needed, women should preserve food for their husbands.

The respondents, who perceived that women should not eat meals before their husbands, placed some logic from both social and religious point of views. They conceived it as a sinful work and a religious norm especially for women. They further noticed that since husbands were venerable, women should not eat meals without permission of husbands. Moreover, it loses loving devotion towards wives. At the same time, they added some other interesting points such as; it as a disregarding activity against husbands and would be ominous for husbands.

Although, working women in different NGOs ride bicycle and motorcycle in their workplaces, majority of the BRAC graduates (26 of 44) and non-BRAC students (31 of 44) studying in *Madrassah* perceived that women should not ride bicycle and motorcycle. Similarly some (9 of 44) non-BRAC students studying in high school perceived the same. On the contrary, almost all the BRAC graduates studying in high school perceived that women could ride bicycle and motorcycle.

Most mothers of the BRAC graduates studying in *Madrassah* and in high school and more than half (18 of 34) of the mothers of the non-BRAC students studying in *Madrassah* voted favouring working women for riding bicycle and motorcycle in their work places.

The students and their mothers, who supported riding bicycle and motorcycle by women, almost all of them placed arguments from both social and economic points of views. They opined that to perform job-related activities, women could ride bicycle or motorcycle. It could help them to be established in the society and be self-dependent. On the other side, the students and the mothers who voted against riding bicycle and motorcycle by women expressed some points from both social and religious points of view. They noticed that it was an inimical activity of *pardha* and was a sinful work especially for women, thus Muslim women should not ride bicycle and motorcycle. They notified it as a dominant activity of men . They further added that it was not really safe for women.

The respondents were asked whether women should become members of village organisations formed by different NGOs. In response, almost all the BRAC graduates studying in *Madrassah* and in high school conceived that women could become members of village organizations. Similarly, almost all and majority (29 of 44) of the non-BRAC students studying in high school and *Madrassah* respectively opined similar view. Most mothers (29 of 32) of the BRAC graduates studying in *Madrassah* and almost all the mothers of the BRAC graduates studying in high school and majority (24 of 34) mothers of the non-BRAC students studying in *Madrassah* expressed similar opinion.

The respondents, who perceived the positive, strongly suggested that women should involve in income earning activities to be self-dependent. As NGOs finance women, they should take the opportunity to improve their socioeconomic conditions. They further expressed that through organising groups, women could save money for their future, could rear poultry, and could earn money for their livelihood. At the same time, some students of all the groups studying in *Madrassah* and their mothers conditioned to maintain *pardha*.

The respondents and the mothers, who perceived reverse, placed their views from religious points of views. They opined that organising women groups was an inimical activity of *Sariat*. Being members of village organisations, women had to go to many public places and pay interest on lending. Thus, it hampered *purdha*.

An attempt was made to know what type of education the respondents preferred for both boys and girls differently. Data show that about half (21 of 44) of the BRAC graduates studying in *Madrassah* and some (7 of 44) BRAC graduates studying in high school preferred religious education for boys. The remaining (23 of 44) students studying in *Madrassah* and in high school (33 of 44) preferred general education for boys. Amongst the non-BRAC students, most of them (39 of 44) studying in *Madrassah* and a few of them (4 of 44) studying in high school respectively preferred religious education for boys. The remaining (5) non-BRAC students studying in *Madrassah* and in high school (33) preferred general education for boys.

On the other side, most of the BRAC graduates (42 of 44) studying in *Madrassah* and more than half of them (24 of 44) studying in high school preferred religious education for girls. Amongst the non-BRAC students, almost all of them studying in *Madrassah* and about one-third (14) of them studying in high school preferred religious education for girls. The remaining of the non-BRAC students (30) studying in high school preferred general education for girls. Some of the BRAC graduates (4) and non-BRAC students (7) studying in high school preferred technical education for boys. The findings indicate that students studying in *Madrassah* preferred religious education and students studying in high school preferred general education for children.

Majority (19 of 32) mothers of the BRAC graduates studying in *Madrassah* and in high school (23 of 32) and one-third mothers (12 of 34) of the non-BRAC students studying in *Madrassah* preferred general education for boys. The remaining mothers of the students of each group preferred religious education for boys. On the other hand, majority mothers (25 of 32) of the BRAC graduates studying in *Madrassah* and a few mothers (6 of 32) of the student studying in

high school and almost all the mothers of the non-BRAC students preferred religious education for girls.

The justifications for choosing different types of education by both the students and their mothers were almost similar. In favouring *Madrassah* education the students studying in *Madrassah* and their mothers firmly argued that the children simultaneously could learn religious and general education in *Madrassah*. More specifically, they pointed out that in *Madrassah*, they could learn many things related to Islam, i.e., about almighty Allah, the Prophet, Qur'an, and rules of praying (Namaz). They also could receive different directions about honesty, *Hadith*, *Haram*, *Halal*, *Zakat*, etc.

Both the BRAC and non-BRAC students studying in high schools and their mothers pointed out some logic for choosing general education for children. They argued that scope of higher education through general education was higher than *Madrassah* education. They mentioned that the *Madrassah* graduates had very limited scope to have a government job. The students who preferred technical education, mentioned that technical graduates had higher scope to get employment in the job market.

Issues related to family planning

Most of the BRAC graduates studying in both *Madrassah* and in high school and the non-BRAC students studying in high school opined that they had no objection against family planning methods. On the other hand, some non-BRAC students (11 of 44) studying in *Madrassah* opined the reverse. Almost all the mothers of the BRAC graduates of both the groups (63¹) and most mothers (32 of 34) of the non-BRAC students supported family planning.

As the logic of the positive response, the respondents argued from both social and economic points of views. They pointed out some benefits of small families, such as small families were

¹ One of the 64 selected mothers of BRAC graduates left out from discussion meeting.

happy families, there was no economic crisis in the small families, and mothers easily could take care of their children and could maintain their families with less troubles.

The respondents who were against family planning, argued from religious point of views. They noticed that using contraceptives were obstructing activities of Islamic norms. They believed that the almighty Allah would provide food for all of his creatures. They conceived that according to Islam, use of family planning methods is equivalent to killing lives that is considered as a great sin.

In response of another question on a similar issue, almost all the students of all the groups and almost all of their mothers opined that all human being should attend Janaza of the expired people who used family planning methods. They expressed that as Muslims it was their duty and responsibility. In support of their opinion they argued, if people (expired people) violated religious norms, Allah would punish them. Thus, human being should not punish expired people.

Issues related to cultural activities

Majority of the non-BRAC students (33 of 44) studying in *Madrassah* and almost all the students of other selected groups perceived that national anthem in all educational institutions should be sung at the beginning of classes. Majority mothers (27 of 31) of the BRAC graduates studying in *Madrassah* and almost all the mothers of BRAC graduates studying in high school and majority mothers (25 of 34) of the non-BRAC students studying in *Madrassah* expressed similar view. The students and the mothers, who perceived the positive, argued that the national anthem should be sung to respect their national flag, their country, the nation and martyrs. Some of the respondents who perceived the negative, mentioned that national anthem could be sung in high school but it should not be sung in *Madrassah*.

About half (20 of 44) of the BRAC graduates studying in *Madrassah*, majority (37 of 44) of the BRAC graduates studying in high school perceived that cultural activities could be organised in educational institutions. On the other hand, a few students (3 of 44) of non-BRAC students

studying in Madrassa and majority (33 of 44) of the students studying in high school perceived a similar view. Although more than half of the BRAC graduates (24 of 44) and most (41 of 44) of the non-BRAC students studying in *Madrassah* voted against cultural activities to be organised in educational institutions, some of them had no objection in organizing these activities in high school and primary school. Similarly, the students who voted for cultural activities to be organised in educational institutions, some of them had mixed reaction regarding these activities in *Madrassahs*.

Most of the mothers of BRAC graduates studying in both *Madrassah* and in high school were more liberal on cultural activities to be organised in educational institutions, but some of them showed mixed reaction on organising cultural activities in *Madrassahs*. Although some (10 of 34) of the mothers of non-BRAC students perceived the positive, majority (24 of 34) of them perceived the reverse.

The mothers and the students who biased on cultural activities argued that it would help keep the minds of their children fresh. On the contrary, the students and the mothers who were against holding cultural activities argued that cultural activities were completely contending activities of Islam.

On an important cultural issue, almost all the BRAC graduates studying in *Madrassah* and high school perceived that the Victory day, Shaheed day and Independent day could be observed by the nation. Amongst the non-BRAC students 37 out of 44 studying in *Madrassah* and almost all of the students studying in high school opined the same. Only 7 of 44 non-BRAC students studying in *Madrassah* took place in opposition. Amongst the mothers, almost all of each group of students perceived that the national days should be observed by the nation.

The respondents in favour of observing the national days, told that they should respect the self-denying martyrs through observing the national days and it contributes to enhance their patriotism. Similarly, the respondents who took place in opposition, argued that through

observing the national days, people did not solicit for the exemption of their (martyrs) sin rather they putted flowers on their graveyards and enjoyed the days by singing and dancing. Due to this the angels in graveyards would punish the martyrs.

Almost (43 of 44) all the former BRAC and a similar number of non-BRAC students studying in high school perceived that pictures of the famous persons could be hanged in offices or in educational institutions. On the contrary, majority (30 of 44) of the former BRAC and non-BRAC students (32 of 44) studying in *Madrassah* expressed the opposite view.

The perception on the issue of selected mothers of the students of each group was found to be mixed. Majority (21 of 31) mothers of the BRAC graduates studying in *Madrassah* and in high school (27 of 32) opined that pictures of famous persons could be hanged in offices or in educational institutions. Only 3 out of 34 mothers of the non-BRAC students studying in *Madrassah* had the same opinion. In support of the positive response, the respondents mentioned that the famous persons should be respected for their outstanding contribution to the society and the nation. On the contrary, in support of the negative response, the respondents mentioned that hanging pictures of creatures especially in *Madrassah* is a sinful activity. They further noticed that if pictures of expired person were hanged in offices or in houses, the 'angel of kind' would not exist. It also would create problem while praying. They further noticed that if their pictures were hanged in any houses, the angels would punish the expired persons in the graveyards.

Issue related to marriage and divorce

Last of all, attempt was made to know the views of the respondents about *Hilla* marriage. Although, the respondents were aware that it was a norm of *Sariat*, majority students of the selected groups took place in opposition. Interestingly, some of the students who supported this norm, disliked it. On the other hand, majority mothers of all the groups of students did not support *Hilla* marriage.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

BRAC curriculum aimed at building a strong foundation of ethical values amongst its learners (Verma, 1996) rather being communal and class biased. It was expected that although the BRAC graduates continued their study in *Madrassah*, they would not largely be affected by religious fanaticism.

This study aimed at exploring perception of former BRAC students studying in grade IX in *Madrassah* on some selected social and cultural issues. The issues were selected from the empirical knowledge of the author those were generally believed and practiced from religious point of views. As the number of male BRAC graduates studying in the same grade in *Madrassah* were limited, only the girl students were chosen as sample. Thus, the findings of this study reflect perceptions of girls only.

However, it was realised through a comparative analysis that not all but some BRAC graduates studying in both *Madrassah* and in high school were likely affected not only by religious fanaticism but also by some superstitious beliefs on some of the issues. They differentiated human being by religion and gender. Their perceptions not only were influenced by religious factors but also social as well as factual exposures of the respondents. For example, most students and their mothers perceived that every people should use contraceptives for birth control, because they were aware of merits of small families and demerits of large families. The perceptions of their mothers however, on the issues were progressive than those of the daughters. It was further realised that *Madrassah* education alone was not responsible for such backward perceptions, rather role of fundamentalism and existing religious fanatics from time immemorial were the influential factors for such perceptions on the issues.

Although, the non-BRAC students studying in high school had progressive perception on most of the issues, it was more backward amongst the non-BRAC students studying in *Madrassah*. A surprising finding was that although the BRAC graduates studying in high school, some of

their perception was backward on some of the issues compared to the BRAC graduates and non-BRAC students studying in *Madrassah*.

A question may be raised why *Madrassah* students had such backward perceptions on the issues compared to the students studying in high school. An easy answer of the question would be that religious education might be the influential factor for such backward perceptions especially of the students studying in *Madrassah*. At the same time a contradictory question is raised why perception of some BRAC graduates studying in high school on some of the issues was similar to the students studying in *Madrassah*. Although, answer of the question is not so easy but it indicates that *Madrassah* education alone was not influential factor for the dichotomised perceptions of the students on the issues rather some hidden factors were responsible for such perceptions.

It should be mentioned here that a particular group of students did not have the backward or progressive perception on all the issues. For example, a group of students who perceived that non-Muslim beggars should not be given alms, but the same group perceived that the neighbours should not be differentiated by religion.

A better answer of the raised question was given such a way that "the core and surface of the society is still prone to superstitious beliefs, the mind is accustomed to surrender than to question. Emotion together with blind faith makes it hard for intellect to make any headway there and work effectively (Hassan, 1995).

According to Hassan (1995), the effect of fundamentalism also was responsible for such a backward perception among women in our society. More elaborately she notes; the students completing *Madrassah* education acquires the title '*Mowlana*' who ascend the ladder of religious elite of the country. They are most influential persons in the Muslim culture and have access in most of the social aspects of the society. However, through the process of *Madrassah* education, they develop a state of mind that may be described as alienation. An

alienated person has the propensity to over-bearing and aggressively demonstrative. This is what they are doing in the form of 'fatwas'. A fatwa, is, thus an outlet for an alienated Mawlana when he seeks to demonstrate his importance for arrogance in the society.

Another study explored that such findings were the effect of so-called 'Islamic tradition'² that continuing since the beginning. Hassan (1991) noted ".....in early Islam, the Islamic tradition has, by and large, remained rigidly patriarchal until the present time, prohibiting the growth of scholarship among women particularly in the realm of religious thought." This means that the sources on which the Islamic tradition is mainly based, namely, the Qur'an, the Sunnah, the Hadith, and Fiqh, have been interpreted only by Muslim men who have arrogated to themselves the task of defining the ontological, theological, sociological, and eschatological status of Muslim women.

As the women in our country are far behind their male counterparts in areas related to cultivation of mental faculties (Momen, 1995, p-14), until now the majority of the Muslim women have accepted this situation passively, almost unaware of the extent to which their human rights have been violated by their male-dominated and male-centered societies, which have continued to assert that Islam has given women more rights than any other religion.

Since girl students studying in higher classes in schools and in *Madrassahs* have backward perceptions on some social and cultural issues, necessary measures should be taken to eradicate such superstitious beliefs and religious fanaticism from the society.

² some rules and regulations that are believed and practiced by people

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ANNEX

ANNEX - 1.

Table 1. Socioeconomic status of the students

Explanatory variables		Former BRAC student		Non-BRAC student	
		<i>Madrassah.</i>	High school	<i>Madrassah</i>	High school
Parent's education					
Father	Nil	19	16	6	4
	1-5	11	14	14	10
	6-10	13	14	17	22
	11+	1	-	7	8
Total		44	44	44	44
Mother	Nil	31	17	10	5
	1-5	7	22	19	14
	6-10	6	5	14	23
	11+	-	-	1	2
Total		44	44	44	44
Parent's occupation					
Father	Farmer	31	22	23	11
	Labour	-	-	1	-
	Service holder	6	4	8	12
	Teacher	-	-	3	-
	Trader	5	13	5	16
	Others	2	5	4	5
Total		44	44	44	44
Mother	Housewife	44	44	45	45
Total		44	44	44	44
Household economic status					
	Very good	-	-	-	1
	Good	10	11	18	12
	Marginal	28	32	24	30
	Poor	6	1	2	1
	Very poor	-	-	-	-
Total		44	44	44	44
Parent's praying status					
Father	Regular	22	23	36	27
	Sometimes	17	9	2	9
	Jumma	4	11	5	7
	Nil	1	1	1	1
Total		44	44	44	44
Mother	Regular	33	27	43	35
	Sometimes	11	14	1	8
	Nil	-	1	-	1

Total	44	44	44	44
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		Former BRAC student		Non-BRAC student	
		<i>Madrassah</i>	BRAC-HS	<i>Madrassah</i>	High school

Status of Purdha					
Students	Use veil	17	3	23	9
	Covering head by scurf	23	9	20	24
	Not use veil	4	32	1	11
Total		44	44	44	44

Status of own praying					
Students	Regular	32	5	32	11
	Sometimes	12	34	12	29
	None	-	5	-	4
Total		44	44	44	44

Annex - 2.

Table 2. Distribution of students by groups by perception on selected issues

Questions and answers	Former BRAC student		Non-BRAC student	
	<i>Madrassah</i>	BRAC-HS.	<i>Madrassah</i>	High school
Issues related to humanity:				
Who should be given alms?				
Only the Muslims	3	1	7	1
Both	41	43	37	43
Should non-Muslim neighbours be invited in any of your family occasions?				
Yes	39	44	25	43
No.	5	-	19	1
What should be done if non-Muslims pray in your locality?				
Should be given opportunity	35	44	28	40
Should be protected	9	-	16	4
What should be done if non-Muslims fall in crisis?				
Should be helped	44	44	43	44
Should not be helped	-	-	1	-
Who should be respected amongst a Mowlana and a non-Muslim famous wise person?				
Mowlana	30	29	42	21
Both	14	15	2	23
Issues related to gender:				
Should women get out without accompany of men ?				
Yes	36	33	39	31
No	8	11	5	13
Should women can work outside home?				
Yes	36	44	36	43
No.	8	-	8	1
Who should take major decisions in a family?				
Father	8	5	12	-
Mother	-	-	-	-
Both	36	39	32	44
Who should have a job in a family?				
Men/boy	11	9	22	2
Both	33	35	22	42
Should women eat food before their husbands?				
Yes	15	37	17	34
No	29	17	27	10
Should women drive bicycle/motorcycle?				
Yes	18	44	13	35

No.	26	-	31	9
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Questions and answer	Former BRAC student		Non-BRAC student	
	Madrassah	High school	<i>Madrassah</i>	High school
Should women be members of village organisations?				
Yes	42	43	29	43
No	2	1	15	1
What type of education children should be given?				
Boys: <i>Madrassah</i>	21	7	39	4
General education	23	33	5	33
Technical	-	4	-	7
Girls: <i>Madrassah</i>	42	24	44	14
General education	2	20	-	30
Technical education	-	-	-	
Issues related to family planning:				
Should people use family planning methods?				
Yes	41	43	33	41
No.	3	1	11	3
Should people attend Janaza to the people who used family planning methods?				
Yes	44	44	43	43
No	-	-	1	1
Issues related to cultural activities:				
What is your opinion about national anthem to be singed in educational institutions?				
Should be singed	44	44	33	44
Should not be singed	-	-	11	-
What is your opinion about cultural activities to be organised in educational institutions?				
Can be organised	20	37	3	33
Should not be organised	24	7	41	11
Should the victory day, Shaheed day and Independent day be observed ?				
Can be observed	44	44	37	44
Should not be observed	-	-	7	-
Should pictures of famous persons be hanged in offices?				
Can be hanged	14	43	12	43
Should not be hanged	30	1	32	1
Issue of Hilla marriage and divorce:				
Do you support the role of Hilla marriage ?				
Yes	11	3	21	8
No	33	41	23	36

Annex - 3

Table 3. Distribution of mothers by groups by perception on the selected issues

	Madrasah	High school	Madrasah
Issues related to humanity:			
Who should be given alms?			
Only the Muslim beggars	-	-	5
Both	32	32	29
Should neighbours of other religious be invited in any of your family occasions?			
Yes	30	28	30
No.	2	4	4
What should be done if Hindus pray in your locality?			
Should be allowed	28	30	30
Should be protected	4	3	4
What should be done if someone of other religious fall in crisis?			
Should be helped	32	33	29
Should not be helped	-	-	5
Who should be respected amongst a Mowlana and a non-Muslim famous person?			
Mowlana	8	13	21
Both	24	20	13
Issues related to gender:			
Should women get out without accompany of men ?			
Yes	28	33	23
No	4	-	11
Should women work outside of their homes?			
Yes	28	32	21
No.	4	1	13
Who should take major decisions in a family?			
Father	1	1	3
Mother	-	-	-
Both	31	32	31
Who should have a job in a family?			
Men/boy	4	4	19
Both	28	29	15
Should women eat meal before their husbands?			
Yes	17	21	15
No	15	12	19
Should women ride bicycle/motorcycle?			
Yes	28	28	18

No.	4	4	16
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	Former BRAC student		Non-BRAC student
	<i>Madrassah</i>	High school	<i>Madrassah</i>
Should women become members of village organisations?			
Yes	29	32	24
No	3	-	10
What type of education children should be given?			
Boys: <i>Madrassah</i>	13	9	22
General education	19	23	12
Technical	-	-	-
Girls: <i>Madrassah</i> education	25	6	34
General education	7	26	-
Technical education	-	-	-
Issues related to family planning:			
Should people use family planning methods?			
Yes	31	32	32
No.	-	-	2
Should people attend Janaza to the people who used family planning methods?			
Yes	31	32	34
No	-	-	-
Issues related to cultural activities:			
Should national anthem be singed at the beginning of class?			
Should be singed	27	32	25
Should not be singed	4	-	9
What is your opinion about cultural activities to be organised in educational institutions?			
Can be organised	28	32	10
Should not be organised	3	-	24
Should the victory day, Shaheed day and Independence day be observed ?			
Can be observed	31	32	34
Should not be observed	-	-	-
Should pictures of famous persons be hanged in offices or in schools?			
Can be hanged	21	27	3
Should not be hanged	10	5	31
Issue related to marriage and divorce:			
Do you support the role of Hilla marriage ?			
Yes	9	3	11
No	22	29	23

