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Women's Beauty Parlor Entrepreneurship as a Social Change Activity for Ethnic Workers amid Covid-19



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ABSTRACT

This study entails in-depth interviews with women entrepreneurs who own beauty parlors in Dhaka, to understand whether they perceive their entrepreneurship as a social change activity entailing empowerment and social inclusion for ethnic women workers. In other words, this study tries to understand why a large proportion of ethnic women are employed in beauty parlors of Dhaka by examining the perspective of women beauty parlor owners who employ them. Only Dhaka is considered in this study as most high-end beauty parlors are located in Dhaka. The interviews indicate that the owners perceive their entrepreneurship as a social change activity entailing empowerment that positively impacts the lives of their women workers regardless of ethnicity. According to the respondents, the motivation for creating employment for ethnic women workers is driven by the need to empower them; social inclusion plays no role in generating employment for ethnic women workers. The findings also show that women beauty parlor owners are countering patriarchal structuring by employing ethnic women workers. The study was conducted post Covid-19 so it takes into account the impact of the pandemic.

KEY WORDS: *Women's Entrepreneurship; Ethnic Workers; Beauty Parlor; Dhaka; Feminist Theorizing.*

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Introduction

In this study the term ethnic women refers to women coming from ethnic minority groups stationed in Chittagong Hill Tracts, Sylhet Division, Rajshahi Division and Mymensingh district; these ethnic minorities migrated to Bangladesh from Burma and Central India before British rule and are minorities as Bangladesh was created as a Bengali nation-state. It was initially believed that the preference for employing ethnic workers in beauty parlors of Bangladesh was due to their appearance being similar to Chinese appearance; the demand for Chinese appearance is believed to be derived from the fact that the first parlor in Bangladesh-‘May Fair,’ was established by a woman named Carmel Hsieh of Chinese descent and run by Chinese workers. However, with time the take on this has changed and creation of parlor jobs for ethnic people is viewed as a step towards advancing a community that in the past had few job opportunities. The workers in beauty parlors are mostly from the Garo ethnic community in Mymensingh, Tangail, Netrokona, Sherpur and Sylhet. In recent times the beauty industry had thrived due to social media. Now almost all the beauty parlors in Bangladesh have Facebook pages which they use to promote their business. Social media has been successful in promoting beauty products and services as the number of social media users has increased drastically in Bangladesh. Between 2020 and 2021 more than 9 million users joined social media in Bangladesh. We are Social (a socially-led creative agency) reported in the ‘Digital Report’ that the number of social media users in February 2021 was 45 million; which is 27.2% of the total population of Bangladesh. Beauty influencers have also played an important role in promoting demand for beauty products and services in Bangladesh since 2014, via Facebook communities.

The beauty sector in Bangladesh received recognition from the government as an industrial sector on 8 June 2020 due to its growing importance. In 2020 number of registered salons stood at 350,000 and 18% of the working women were employed in beauty services; the turnover of the sector stood at BDT 5 billion. The president of Beauty Service Owners Association of Bangladesh (BSOAB) expressed her satisfaction with this decision and put forward that the sector is contributing to the advancement of Garo women by providing employment; she also stated: ‘It is notable that 99% of the management of the sector is run by women.’ Employment at beauty parlors has indeed made a positive impact on the lives of ethnic women. Ethnic women start their careers at beauty parlors as trainees with

no pay (in some cases with pocket money amounting to BDT 500) but with food and accommodation facilities; they have the potential to get BDT 15,000 per month as they gain skills and expertise. Mess houses are arranged by the employers for their workers; the most important point that makes the ethnic workers at home at beauty parlors is the strong community feeling; Kavita Snal an ethnic worker from Amlitala, Madhupur quoted, 'I can share joy and sorrow with the people from my community, often from my own village. I also feel secure amidst my people.' An empirical study (Akhter, Ahmed & Hossain, 2011) entailing a sample of 240 female tribal workers from six divisional towns of Bangladesh also confirms that these workers have a competitively higher salary compared to other ethnic people and they also have access to a comparatively healthy physical environment provided by their owners. Therefore, the rise in demand for beauty parlor services has resulted in employment for a large number of ethnic women. Ethnic women employed in beauty parlors are in a better position economically than ethnic women who live in ethnic communities; a study (Amin et al., 2016) conducted for the International Labor Organization (ILO) identifies the push and pull factors determining the employment of beauty parlor workers in the urban economy. The study finds economic problems, environmental hazards, land lost from new settlers in hilly areas or from river erosion, political and social pressure, poverty, intragroup conflict and lack of modern educational as well as health facilities as push factors; pull factors identified are better living opportunity, improved communication, access to jobs, better career options, high wage rate, good education and health facilities along with chain migration through relatives and friends.

This growing beauty industry suffered badly due to the outbreak of Covid-19, health and safety protocols necessitated limited customers in parlors leading to huge loss in revenues. An owner seeking anonymity quoted the following in a recent media report: 'Because of two consecutive lockdowns we have lost 90% of our revenue. Some Tk35 lakhs. I have had to pay my workers less than half their salary, and could not give them their Eid bonus last year, which I paid out of pocket this time around.' The government recognized the beauty industry on 8th June 2020, enabling beauty entrepreneurs to apply for loans under the SME stimulus package, but bank officials have not eased the process by which women entrepreneurs can access loans thereby discouraging women to apply for loans. The pandemic has therefore led to unemployment for ethnic women who were employed in parlors; they have returned to their homelands to become

farmhands for landowners; an ethnic woman who recently lost her job as a beauty parlor worker where she earned BDT 8000 per month, quoted the following in a media report: 'I began working at a beauty parlor in Bogra at the beginning of this year. However, as the parlor shut down due to countrywide lockdown, I became unemployed and had to come back home three months ago. Now, I work as a farmhand and support my family side by side with father, who pulls his van for a living.' She added that she now earns BDT 200-300 on a daily basis after she toils from dawn to dusk, she put forward other ethnic women like her have also lost parlor jobs and have become farmhands exposed to uncertainties and precarious work.

The demand for the beauty industry and its impact on the lives of ethnic women in Bangladesh highlights the importance of research in this area. Shane and Venkataraman posit that researchers should focus on individuals and opportunities and think of them as the first order forces to explain entrepreneurship, their definition of the field of entrepreneurship encompasses the examination of opportunities; and the set of individuals who take on these opportunities (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). This paper also adopts a similar framework by delving into the perspective of individual beauty parlor owners and the study of their utilization of opportunities.

The study is also aligned with the approach of Calás, Smircich and Bourne, who position entrepreneurship as a social change activity, rather than solely as an economic engine with social impact (Calás, Smircich & Bourne, 2009). The study finds that women beauty parlor owners in Dhaka are countering patriarchal norms and structures by creating opportunities for ethnic women workers and eliminating the barriers that ethnic women workers face in terms of language and social security thereby generating social change.

This study uses qualitative research method to gather in-depth information about what motivates beauty parlor owners to employ ethnic women and sheds light on how they view their entrepreneurship. The use of both inductive as well as deductive approach and in-depth interviews in this study facilitated creation of categories from the data, and analysis of relationship between categories. The primary areas of interest in this study are: (1) individual perceptions of entrepreneurship, social change, empowerment and social inclusion; (2) ethnicity details of workers (3) increase or decrease in employment of ethnic women workers with time as well as (4) impact of Covid-19 on ethnic women workers.

Literature Review

Women's entrepreneurship and empowerment in the Sri Lankan beauty salon sector (Silva et al., 2021) has been examined in line with Sen's (1999) notion on freedom and its intersection with gender and economy; the study discusses women's entrepreneurship as a significant notion for women empowerment. The opportunities provided by women's cooperatives in offering self-employment contributing to women's social inclusion and empowerment in India has been examined (Datta & Gailey, 2012). This paper adopts an aim which is similar to the aforementioned studies to examine social inclusion and empowerment created by women for women in the beauty industry of Bangladesh; as there is no research in this area in the context of Bangladesh. Most studies on women beauty parlor entrepreneurs in Bangladesh deal with the development or potentiality of this type of entrepreneurship in Bangladesh; more specifically the existing studies examine the socio-economic conditions of women beauty parlor entrepreneurs and determine way forward (Al-Hossienie, 2011; Chowdhury & Rahman, 2014; Nasima & Alam, 2014; Alam & Kabir, 2015; Afroze et al., 2014) examined the socio-economic context of women beauty parlor entrepreneurs to identify challenges faced by them and factors leading to their success; to arrive at policy recommendations.

Studies on women beauty workers have examined: rural-urban migration of Garo beauty workers (Marwa, 2018); socio-economic conditions of tribal women workers (Akhter, Ahmed & Hossain, 2011); job satisfaction of beauty workers (Afroz, 2017; Zabir et al., 2018), job satisfaction of indigenous workers (Ahmed et al., 2013); rights, working conditions of ethnic workers as well as perception on ethnicity (Amin et al., 2016).

Customer satisfaction at beauty parlors has also been a common theme of study; the following studies have been implemented in this regard: dimensions of services provided in beauty salons which foster relationships with customers have been identified (Shahbazi & Akrami, 2013); relationship between salespersons' interpersonal skills and their sales performance in parlors and salons has been examined (Islam et al., 2016); measurement of service quality and customer satisfaction (Khan & Tabassum, 2010), measurement of customer satisfaction (Sultana, Islam & Das, 2016; Huq, Aktar & Sarker, 2015).

Among the aforementioned studies some have relied on purely quantitative methods- (Zabir et al., 2018; Akhter, Ahmed & Hossain, 2011; Ahmed et al., 2013; Islam et al., 2016; Alam & Kabir, 2015; Nasima & Alam, 2014; Afroz, 2017; Ahmed et al., 2013; Shahbazi & Akrami, 2013; Khan & Tabassum, 2010; Sultana, Islam & Das, 2016; Huq, Aktar & Sarker, 2015). These quantitative studies have used statistical methods and tools entailing factor analysis. Qualitative studies to gain perceptions of beauty parlor entrepreneurs and beauty parlor workers on issues such as challenges faced, migration and ethnic identity have been conducted (Amin et al., 2016; Marwa, 2018; Afroze et al., 2014; Al-Hossienie, 2011). Purely qualitative studies to examine the perspective of beauty parlor owners regarding their entrepreneurship and their perception regarding social inclusion and empowerment for ethnic women workers have not been used; and this paper aims to do so by delving into the entrepreneurship efforts of select beauty parlor entrepreneurs in Dhaka. This study utilizes both inductive and deductive approach to understand the entrepreneurship of women beauty parlor owners and their perspective regarding social inclusion, social change and empowerment for ethnic women workers.

Scope of the Study

The study seeks to answer the underlying question: What do women beauty parlor owners think about their entrepreneurship and its impact on employment generation for ethnic women workers in terms of social inclusion, social change and empowerment? The paper addresses the following sub-questions:

1. Do women beauty parlor owners think of their entrepreneurship primarily as an economic engine, or do they also think of it as a social change activity?
2. What views do women beauty parlor owners have regarding social inclusion and empowerment for ethnic women workers?
3. How has the supply of ethnic women workers changed in the beauty parlor industry with time according to women beauty parlor owners?
4. What is the impact of Covid-19 on ethnic women workers according to women beauty parlor owners?
5. What are the ethnicity details (ethnicity type, religion and region) of the ethnic women workers according to beauty parlor owners?

6. What is the proportion of ethnic women workers working in beauty parlors according to women beauty parlor owners?

Methods

Data Collection

The first stage of data collection entailed desk research. Academic papers and media articles were consulted for this research. Search terms such as 'Women's Entrepreneurship,' 'Female-driven Entrepreneurship,' 'Entrepreneurship as a Social Change Activity,' 'Women Beauty Parlor Owners,' 'Women Beauty Parlor Entrepreneurs,' 'Beauty Parlors in Bangladesh,' 'Beauty Parlor Business in Dhaka,' 'Beauty Parlor Business in Bangladesh' as well as 'Beauty Parlors and Ethnic Women in Bangladesh' were used to find relevant academic papers and media articles. The data collected from secondary sources was used to develop the research questions and the semi-structured questionnaire; the research questions determined the questions of the semi-structured questionnaire.

The primary source of data for the study comprised of semi-structured in-depth interviews with eight women beauty parlor owners in Dhaka. Snowball sampling approach was utilized to gain access to these owners; this method depended solely on personal connections and referrals. The use of semi-structured questionnaire that was prepared based on research questions and study of existing literature is a deductive approach.

Although a semi-structured questionnaire was used, the questions in the questionnaire were mostly open-ended, the interviews were mainly driven by the respondents and their perceptions; an inductive approach.

Data Analysis

The data analysis phase involved three rounds of coding. The data collected was coded at first based on the respondents' phrases and expression. The second round of coding entailed the authors' understanding of the data collected; this round refined the data analyzed in the first round with the author/researcher's informed knowledge about the subject matter based on research questions and study of literature. The final round of coding involved the identification of common themes or patterns.

Limitations

The interviews for the study were conducted during March 2021, therefore the respondents could only put forward their thoughts regarding the first lockdown which the government of Bangladesh declared from 23rd March to 30th May 2020. Bangladesh is currently experiencing a second lockdown but this study does not take this into account. The study involved eight interviews as it was difficult to reach more respondents due to the pandemic. Most parlors have health and safety protocols that allow only a certain amount of people in their parlors for a certain slot of time. Some interviews were conducted over phone, however the author had to connect with these respondents' multiple times over phone to complete each interview as the respondents have busy schedules. Although the sample size is small, the respondents put forward same points; data saturation was obtained. Here the definition of data saturation is the one put forward by Dworkin, according to Dworkin saturation is reached when no new or relevant data can be obtained through the data collection process (Dworkin, 2012). Dworkin also puts forward that a number of books and articles recommend 5-50 respondents as adequate in qualitative research.

The study also suffers from a certain degree of bias as only the views of beauty parlor owners or employers have been taken into account; the views of workers have not been incorporated. This has been intentional; the aim is to study the perspective of women beauty parlor owners in Dhaka.

Thematic Analysis

First-round of Coding

The broad themes found after the first round of coding entailing respondents' phrases and expression have been provided below.

Garos women and their characteristics

Garos women coming from matrilineal societies dominate the beauty parlor industry as workers in Dhaka. Beauty Parlor owners stipulated that the characteristics of Garos women make them ideal candidates as beauty parlor workers. The following characteristics of Garos women were highlighted by the owners:

- i. Sincerity

- ii. Professionalism
- iii. Physical strength
- iv. Honesty
- v. Independence

One beauty parlor owner quoted the following: 'From a business perspective, I would say that I need Garo women as they are the very best. When I think about the long term, they have the potential to grow.' Also, about the popularity among customers she stated: 'Majority of my customers are foreigners, and they love the service provided by Garo women. I admire the confidence that Garo women show while they deal with customers.'

All of the owners interviewed praised the physical strength and sincerity of Garo women, one of them stipulated the following: 'Garo women can work for hours and are honest and sincere, they barely waste time on other activities when they are assigned tasks.'

When the respondents were asked about the ethnicity details of workers, they could only specify that mostly Garo women from Mymensingh dominate the beauty parlor industry; most of the respondents could not specify ethnicity details of other ethnic women workers, only two out of the eight parlor owners could specify the names of the other ethnic minorities; they mentioned that they have women workers from Chakma, Murong and Marma communities. The respondents also highlighted that the matrilineal societies from which the Garo women come from, make them independent; in fact, most of these women are the sole bread earners for their family and most of them have children living with them in Dhaka. One respondent quoted the following: 'One of my Garo worker has a son who is studying in Canada, and the children of most of my Garo workers are studying in private schools.'

Four out of the eight respondents put forward that their ethnic workers come from Garo communities solely. All of the workers of one of these respondents are Garo (meaning that she has no Bengali workers); among the other three, two have 83% Garo women workers and one has 60% Garo women workers, the rest are Bengali. The other four respondents interviewed specified that their workforce consists of 37.5%, 50%, 80% and 95% ethnic women respectively. Most of the respondents put forward that ethnic women mainly provide beauty services to customers whereas Bengalis are responsible for management and cleaning.

Salary and benefits for women workers

One respondent stated ‘I have highly skilled Garo workers who receive 50 thousand BDT as salary per month.’ She stated that she increases the salary of her workers when they can do eyebrows. This same respondent provides accommodation for her single women workers near her parlor. She said that she is content about the fact that she can provide a safe working place and a safe living place for her workers. Another respondent stated that her Garo workers are financially stable and are slightly above the social strata that women beauty parlor workers in Dhaka usually belong to. She put forward that most of the children of her Garo workers study in private schools.

All of the respondents stipulated that they tried to ensure that their workers received at least subsistence wages during the pandemic. When the pandemic started and the Bangladesh government announced lockdown, the beauty parlor entrepreneurs had no option but to close down their parlors. Five out of the eight respondents stated that they had to lay off workers and one respondent stated that she had to shut down one branch permanently. Three respondents informed that they ensured that all their workers received 50% of their monthly wages during the pandemic. Three out of the eight respondents said that most of their workers went back to their home towns and engaged themselves in agricultural activities during the lockdown period.

One respondent stated that after her parlor was reopened after the lockdown, she ensured safety of her workers by providing them health and safety training so that they could stay safe during the pandemic.

Change in supply of ethnic women workers with time

All the beauty parlor owners stated that the supply of ethnic women workers remained the same with time; they still dominate the beauty parlor industry like before. According to the respondents’ ethnic women prefer jobs in beauty parlors due to three main factors, firstly the provision of services in beauty parlors does not require the ethnic women workers to be fluent in Bengali, they just need to understand the requirements of the customers and answer questions put forward by customers in few syllables. Management staff in beauty parlors are responsible for handling customers and they are mainly Bengali. Secondly respondents stated that ethnic women feel insecure as they come from minority communities, and this security issue is a major issue which causes them to take on beauty parlor

jobs, as they deem beauty parlors as safe spaces which are run and managed by women. Thirdly beauty parlors have always been dominated by ethnic women due to the facts discussed above, this means that ethnic women have passed on their beauty service skills to the next generations and have also developed a network among themselves (usually ethnic women workers obtain job referrals or news of parlor jobs from their relatives or friends who work in beauty parlors, they also learn to provide beauty services from these relatives or friends) and this is another significant reason that has caused the supply of ethnic women to be the same with time.

Covid-19 has also not changed the supply of ethnic women workers in beauty parlors. In fact, a respondent who started her parlor business post Covid-19 stated that among the 18 workers that she hired, 15 are ethnic women workers. The owner started her business in October 2020 and stated the following: 'We started organizing our interior in September 2020 and initiated business from October 2020. We got a lot of applications from ethnic women, as a large proportion of women who worked in beauty parlors became jobless at that time.'

Passion

All the respondents started their business out of passion, a respondent quoted: 'My passion is beauty and well-being.' Another respondent stated the following: 'My interest was and is in the beauty business, I used to stay updated about the beauty industry; the new techniques, hair colors and hair styles.' One respondent put forward that she knew what she wanted to do right from her school days; she went abroad and received hairdressing training and immediately after coming to Dhaka opened her beauty parlor business. Some of the respondents highlighted that being beauty parlor entrepreneurs allowed them the flexibility to manage time between care work and their business.

The respondents in fact did not analyze the risks and opportunities associated with the beauty business before starting their business. They started their business out of passion, some of the respondents started their business on a small-scale and then gradually expanded. All of the respondents have tried to overcome challenges that they faced and are still trying to overcome challenges amid the pandemic to run their beauty parlors.

Empowerment

All respondents interviewed stated that they view their entrepreneurship as a social change activity which generates employment for women and empowers them. One respondent stated the following: ‘At the start of my career I was a formal job holder; later I became an entrepreneur. I started veteran business then I thought why not start my own beauty parlor business as I love to work with and for women. When I started hiring workers for my beauty parlor, I felt happy knowing that they will be able to take home salaries with which they will be able to feed their family members. I talk with my women workers sometimes and tell them to love themselves and build themselves. I do not think of my beauty parlor business as a money-making machine.’ Another woman beauty parlor owner stated: ‘I view my whole entrepreneurship as a social change activity. I am making the lives of my ethnic workers easier and I am making them independent; this is a lovely feeling.’

All of the respondents stated that they do not run their businesses for the sole purpose of extracting profit, rather they enjoy the fact that they can work with and for women and bring about positive changes in the lives of women.

Second-round of Coding

The broad themes found after the second round of coding which entails the researcher’s understanding of the data collected have been presented below:

Supply of and demand for Garo women workers

The respondents highlighted that Garo women have dominated the beauty parlor industry in the past and are still dominating the beauty parlor industry, they are readily available and their supply has not changed with time. In fact, the supply of Bengali women has increased with time in the beauty parlor business but the supply of Garo women remains the same. The demand for Garo women is driven by the fact that their characteristics match the requirements for beauty parlor worker jobs.

Opportunities

The women entrepreneurs interviewed do not think of their entrepreneurship opportunities in purely economic terms, as maximization of profits and mitigation of risks; rather they were and are willing to take on risks involved with the beauty parlor business to pursue their passion. The

pandemic caused some of them to close down branches and lay off workers but they still continued their business overcoming the challenges. The owners think of their entrepreneurship as providing opportunities for women and especially ethnic women as ethnic women have cultural and language barriers which makes it difficult for them to secure jobs elsewhere, and they also have a disadvantage in terms of social security as they feel threatened by the Bengali community.

Social change activity, social inclusion and empowerment

All of the respondents interviewed highlighted that they view their entrepreneurship as a social change activity which affects the lives of other women positively regardless of ethnicity. The respondents responded quickly when asked about empowerment; they stated that they think that their entrepreneurship empowers ethnic women. They stated that ethnic women are different from Bengali women as they belong to matrilineal communities, this means that they have to be in charge of their family, in most cases they are the sole earners in their families and their children and husband are dependent on them. Respondents stated that the matrilineal communities play a strong role in developing strength and independence among ethnic women as they have to be in charge of their families and their own lives. The respondents admired the strength and independence of ethnic women, and they said that they feel great when they can economically empower ethnic women by paying them salaries as these ethnic women are usually the sole earners in their families.

When asked about social inclusion, the respondents answered that social inclusion is not something that comes to their mind when they hire ethnic women, they think that the employment of ethnic women is driven by demand for and supply of ethnic women in the beauty parlor industry.

The fact that the respondents viewed their entrepreneurship as a social change activity is clear when we look at efforts of the women beauty parlor entrepreneurs during the pandemic. All of them ensured at least subsistence wages for their workers, during the lockdown so that the workers could survive the pandemic.

Effect of Covid-19 on women workers

The pandemic and especially the lockdown has been a critical time for women beauty parlor workers. Most of them had to travel to their home towns; the ethnic women workers who are from hilly areas had to go back to their hometowns and engage in agricultural activities. When the beauty

parlors were reopened, the workers had to travel back to Dhaka. Although employers tried to ensure that the workers could survive the lockdown period, lots of workers lost their jobs, and although the compensation they received was enough for them during the lockdown, they had to search for jobs after beauty parlors were reopened. Workers working at the beauty parlors during the pandemic are putting their lives as well as the lives of their family members at risk. Employers are trying their best to ensure health and safety measures by taking in a limited number of customers for allocated time slots and ensuring that health and safety protocols are maintained, but the nature of the job of beauty parlor workers involves a great amount of risk as it entails physical contact with customers.

Final-round of Coding

The common themes found after the final round of coding have been discussed below.

Entrepreneurship as social change activity

Women beauty parlor owners view their entrepreneurship as a social change activity. They do not think of their entrepreneurship solely as an economic engine; economic factors are not the only driving force for beauty parlor owners rather the desire to impact the lives of other women is one of the main factors.

Ethnic women workers and empowerment

Respondents perceive their entrepreneurship as an activity that leads to empowerment of their ethnic workers. One of the main reasons cited by the respondents in terms of empowerment for ethnic women workers is that these women are usually the sole bread earners of their family; and as their employers, beauty parlor entrepreneurs feel good that they can contribute to the financial independence and empowerment of ethnic women workers. Even amid the pandemic, beauty parlor entrepreneurs have tried to ensure subsistence wages or fifty percent salaries for their ethnic workers. One owner has also rented rooms for her ethnic workers so that they can stay together and near their workplace.

Ethnic women and social inclusion

Beauty parlor owners do not think of social inclusion when they hire ethnic women, purely economic factors drive the demand for and supply of

ethnic minorities in the beauty parlor business. Ethnic women and particularly Garo women have worked in beauty parlors in Bangladesh from the very start of the industry; they prefer the beauty parlor industry as it requires manual service from them and their language does not become a barrier. Demand for ethnic women especially Garo women is driven by the characteristics that Garo women have; these characteristics are ideal for satisfying customers. Employers appreciate the hardworking nature and sincerity of Garo women; they put forward that Garo women can work for hours at a stretch which Bengali women cannot; an owner quoted the following: 'Ethnic women can do so many tasks in a day without any complaints, whereas Bengalis get tired easily.' All of these factors make ethnic women and especially Garo women ideal candidates for beauty parlor jobs.

Impact of Covid-19 on the lives of ethnic women workers

Covid-19 impacted the lives of all beauty parlor workers adversely, but ethnic women workers were more severely hit by the blow of the pandemic. Ethnic women workers who do not have permanent settlements and family members in Dhaka, had to go back to their hometowns. They had to travel to their hometowns during the lockdown period when public transportation was halted. Most of the ethnic women workers are from the remote hilly regions of Mymensingh and Chittagong in Bangladesh, which meant that they had to face many hurdles during their journey back to their hometowns. Although employers tried to ensure that all their workers could survive the lockdown period by providing subsistence wages, ethnic workers not having permanent settlements in Dhaka had to bear the brunt due to their hometown locations. A lot of ethnic workers also lost their jobs during the pandemic, which meant that they had to search for new jobs. Ethnic workers who were laid off during the pandemic face a greater degree of disadvantage compared to Bengali women in terms of finding new jobs due to the language barrier and also because they are especially skilled in parlor jobs but unfortunately all the parlors were and are still downsizing during the pandemic which means that the chances of finding employment have become narrower for them. Parlor owners have tried to protect their ethnic workers from the effect of the pandemic by trying to ensure at least subsistence wage; but the huge loss in revenues in the beauty industry has led to job loss for ethnic workers.

Findings and Discussion

The study confirms that women beauty parlor owners offer opportunities that contribute to empowerment for ethnic women workers. Their entrepreneurship empowers ethnic women by providing social security and economic security. The study is in line with Calás, Smircich and Bourne, it suggests that entrepreneurship may bring about social change (Calás, Smircich & Bourne, 2009). Calás, Smircich and Bourne posit entrepreneurship as social change and use feminist theorizing to view entrepreneurship as social change. This study can also be interpreted using feminist theorizing. According to Calás, Smircich and Bourne, the radical, liberal and psychoanalytic feminist theorizing positions entrepreneurship as an aspect of social structure. These theories show that the male dominated structure of society puts women at a social disadvantage. Women beauty parlor owners are bringing about social change in society by eliminating barriers that ethnic women face in terms of access to jobs. Women beauty parlor owners are empowering ethnic women by providing them with jobs and safe spaces to work, countering patriarchal structuring. The male dominated structure of society creates barriers for ethnic minorities based on their language and social security (especially in the case of ethnic women) in terms of access to jobs and other facilities, but women beauty parlor owners are removing these barriers by providing safe work spaces and in some cases accommodation to ethnic women and fostering a strong community feeling.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that women beauty parlor entrepreneurs are playing a significant role as change makers and bringing about positive change in the lives of their ethnic workers. The parlor owners themselves put forward that they are perceiving their entrepreneurship as a social change activity that empowers ethnic workers; however, the owners put forward that social inclusion is not a factor which influences their decision to hire ethnic workers. The motivation for hiring ethnic workers is driven by the characteristics of ethnic workers which perfectly match job requirements. Furthermore, parlor owners are trying to mitigate the effect of the pandemic on their workers by ensuring subsistence wage but the huge loss in revenues is causing parlor workers to lose jobs. Women beauty parlor entrepreneurs are countering patriarchal norms and barriers when they are creating jobs for

ethnic women, as the barriers that ethnic women face in terms of language and social security are narrowed down or eliminated when they work in the beauty parlors of Dhaka. The government therefore should step forward and address the needs of the beauty industry amid the pandemic by ensuring easy access to loans.

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Appendix

Semi-Structured Questionnaire

- 1. When did you start your business?**
- 2. Why did you choose the beauty parlor business?**
- 3. How many workers do you have?**
- 4. How many of your workers come from ethnic minority communities? (Please mention name of ethnic groups)?**
- 5. Specify reasons for hiring ethnic women workers?**
- 6. What do you think about entrepreneurship? Do you think of it primarily as an economic engine or do you think of entrepreneurship as a social change activity? Does your entrepreneurship lead to social inclusion and empowerment for ethnic women?**
- 7. Has the supply of ethnic women workers in your parlor changed with time?**
- 8. How has Covid-19 impacted ethnic women workers at your parlor?**