



(The study is conducted by the 6th batch participants of Gender and Governance Training Program of Democracywatch)

**Women's Decision Making Power
Regarding Their Own Life:
Study on the Female Students
Studying in University of Dhaka**

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Preface

Democracywatch, a trust and a registered NGO was established in 1995 with the aim of strengthening Democracy in Bangladesh. We ventured out to achieve this through creating awareness of democratic process, values, human rights and good governance and thereby foster democratic culture. These are to be implemented through education, training of youth especially women, concluding research, increase capacity of democratic institutions and advocacy. Democracywatch trained around 25000 youths so far in “Life skills” and “Lifestyle” course on basic skills for developing as a confident, aware and competent human being ready to contribute as leaders towards ushering in a better society. Democracywatch developed a special gender and governance training to add its leadership program. Awareness of gender issues is one of the main themes of training the youths of tomorrow. So an innovative training program called Gender and Governance Training Program (GGTP) and later named as Gender and Governance Sensitization Program (GGSP) was introduced in 2005 funded by CIDA. After two terms of funding by CIDA the Royal Danish Embassy, the Program for Asian Project (PAP) gave us the necessary support. Young public university graduates both male and female came forward to undertake this innovative and purposeful training program. Our rich pool of resource persons includes renowned academics and researchers on gender, politics, sociology and law. These immensely enriched trainings attracted well attributed women and men. The training period was only four months. It was highly regarded as it incorporated some additional components which are not readily found in other short courses i.e. research on gender issues and internship with reputable development and economic organizations. Both of these gave the participants of the course practical knowledge and hand on experience. This inculcated in many of the participants being well placed in renowned international and national NGOs and also engaged in big corporate. We feel elated that the course has been successful in creating female and male leaders in our society within such a short time.

We are proud to present the research reports that each batch has produced. These researchers are rather empirical with small sample size, as it had to be finished within the course period on a shoestring budget. These studies need to have a sympathetic view by its readers. Nevertheless topics selected often created a lot of interest among the stakeholders and academics when they were presented by the students at our seminars. Hope this study is useful to some in their own work and in giving an insight on women’s plight in our society.

To end I thank Mrs. Taherunnesa Abdullah, Magsaysay Award Winner, Prof. Salahuddin M. Aminuzzaman, Prof. A.S.M Atiqur Rahman of Dhaka of Dhaka University, Mr. Saiful Islam our Monitoring and Evaluation Team Leader and the gender unit for helping the students in completing the reports of these researchers. The students would have been at a loss without their all out support. I congratulate and thank all the participants for their hard work and willingness to learn about importance of gender in all spheres of the society and contribute in achieving it.

Last but not the least my deepest gratitude to our donors Norad, CIDA, PAP and Royal Danish Embassy for their support.

Taleya Rehman
Founder Executive Director
Democracywatch

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The research titled “**Women’s Decision Making Power Regarding their Own Life: Study on the Female Students Studying in University of Dhaka**” is a part of training program organized by Gender and Governance Unit of Democracywatch. Every research requires direct and indirect contribution of various people. We are glad to convey our gratefulness especially to Ms. Taleya Rehman, Executive Director, Democracywatch for her kind initiative to conduct this research. We give special thanks to Prof. A.S.M Atiqur Rahman for his continuous supervision. Without his contribution and advice it was impossible to complete this work. We pay upgrading thanks to Ms. Tahrunnesa Abdullah, advisor of G.G.U. We are thankful to the female students who generously gave their time and shared valuable information. Last but not least we wish to acknowledge the sincere cooperation of Ms. Mansura Akhter, Coordinator, Habiba Mubashera, Program Assistant and Mohammed Mahbub-Un-Nabi, Assistant Program Officer of G.G.U.

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Summary

The Beijing+5 Conference organized by the United Nations has identified decision making power of women as one of the critical areas of concern which affect women's empowerment. If a woman does not get proper opportunity of exercising decision making power regarding her life related issues it becomes difficult for her to take important as well as correct decisions in professional, social and national life with enough confidence. This study aims to find out the present status of women's decision making power regarding their own life. It is expected that the findings of this research will help to raise awareness among all the stakeholders about the importance of granting freedom of choice to women regarding their own lives, as a way of making them skilled decision makers in other areas of social and professional life.

The study has been concentrated to the female students studying in University of Dhaka because it is presumed that higher education automatically leads to more empowerment of a woman.

Data was collected through survey, focus group discussion and case study.

More than half of the respondents decided to study in the University of Dhaka by themselves whereas 22 % took the decision in consultation with family members. Majority of the respondents are satisfied about this decision.

Nearly half of the respondents themselves chose the subject they are at present studying. Thirty-two percent respondents were compelled to take the subject they are studying due to special circumstances such as educational authority has allocated their subject according to their position in the merit list. This is also confirmed by FDG. More than two-third of the respondents are so far satisfied with the subject they are studying.

In case of the decision of going abroad for higher studies, 38% of the respondents stated that they would take such a decision completely by themselves and another 30% stated that they would take the decision in consultation with their guardians. FGD reports that more than half of the respondents commented that if they get chance of going abroad for higher studies they will take decision in consultation with family members.

All the respondents who are currently involved in income generating activities took the decision to do so by themselves. All of them spend the money they earn by themselves according to their needs and interests and they are satisfied with the decision. FGD also reports that these girls have the freedom to spend their earnings.

Almost all the respondents want to be service holder in future. FGD reports the same. Nearly half of the respondents wants to go for a career in the non-government sector and 20% preferred for government service. Half of the respondents would take the decision of selecting the field of career by themselves and another one fourth would take such a decision consultation with family members.

More than three-fourth of the respondents select their dress themselves and majority of the respondents are so far satisfied with such decision. FGD also reports the same.

More than three-fourth of the respondents take the decision themselves of making and or continuing friendship with boys and majority of them are satisfied with the decision. This is also observed among the FGD participants.

Only one third of respondents claimed that the decision of fixing time limit for returning to home is taken by themselves and three-fourth of the respondents are satisfied with such a decision. Thirty six percent of the respondents take the decision themselves for attending or enjoying academic or cultural programs and two-third of the respondents are satisfied with such a decision. Among FGD participants three fourth take the decision themselves. Three fourth of the respondents are involved in co-curricular activities and half of them took the decision of involving in such activities by themselves.

In survey report more than half respondents and three fourth FGD participants claimed that they do not have any romantic relationship. Half of the respondents mentioned that the decision of their marriage will be taken in consultation with the family which is mentioned by two third participants of FGD.

Though majority of the respondents do not have complete freedom in taking their decisions independently, but at least they have access in decision making process. They can disclose their preferences, utilize their intellectual ability to make the right choice and hence get the opportunity to justify their views. So, it can be conceived that, women are not so much ignored in taking decisions regarding their own life, which is really an encouraging picture. It is expected that, this ability of women will be gradually reflected in other spheres of their life, where they might have to turn out to be major decision maker in the long run.

The educated parents are more considerate and understandable of the facts that, as their female children are going to achieve higher educational degree they are matured enough to have their own ways of thinking about their life. So, they show respect to their children's views and award them by giving scope of exercising decision making power.

In the middle class family economic dependence of children over parents is relatively lesser where as in the upper middle class family parents are relatively better-off, provide for almost every material need of their children. So children from such families get little scope to articulate their opinion.

In the family with father as major decision maker there is hardly any scope for female members to raise their voice and express their opinion.

Overall Condition of the Female Students of University of Dhaka Regarding Decision Making Power

A mixed picture of the female students' access to and exercise of decision making power regarding her own life has been identified in this research. The present status of decision of all three groups of students-(i)unmarried and non-residential, (ii) unmarried and residential,(iii) married and non-residential is not crystal clear. Their freedom to make their own decision fluctuates from one variable to another. Some common pattern of decision making in case of certain variables has been identified among all these female students. At the same time minor or major differences have also occurred in case of other variables.

The majority of both residential and non-residential students followed the same pattern of decision making in case of three crucial variables like **going abroad for higher studies, decision of marriage and field of career**. The students from both groups opted for the option **“by consultation”** for these variables due to the importance of the variables concerned, as decisions regarding such grave issues have a serious and long lasting impact on the respondent herself as well as on the lives of other people related to her. They thought it would be wise to take the right decision in consultation with others than to take a wrong decision on their own.

On the other hand, in case of the variables like **involvement in income generating activities, selection of dress, maintaining friendship with male students and engagement in co-curricular activities**, highest frequency occurred to the **“self”** option for both groups. But the residential students seemed to have more liberty in decision making than non-residential students. In most cases non-residential students are interfered by the family in taking such decisions. Since they live with their family members, their degree of accountability to family members seems to be more than the residential students in such cases as they do not have to go for any explanations regarding these matters.

In case of **selection of educational institution and discipline of study**, majority of non-residential students took the decision by their **own** whereas the residential students **depended on situation**. The reason might be that those who are brought up in Dhaka city are more privileged than those who come from outside Dhaka in terms of better access to information related to admission into tertiary level educational institutions. Moreover, those who come from outside Dhaka remain mostly preoccupied with problems like getting accommodation in the residential halls of the University after getting admitted there. So some of them have had really very little time and scope to ponder over these issues and to take decisions on their own.

But the residential and non-residential students largely differ in terms of taking decisions about the issues of **fixing time of returning to hall or home, attending or enjoying educational\cultural programs**. In case of fixing the time of returning home for non-residential students, only 52 percent respondents take the decision on their own, for 50 percent students parents take the decisions while 25 percent respondents take the decision depending on the situation. On the other hand, majority of the residential students(72%) take the decision of returning to the hall by their own(within the time limit fixed by the hall authority).But usually residential students take parent's consent if they have to go out of Dhaka for a few days for academic and other purposes. Most of them almost all the time keep in touch with their family members through cell phone. Some students do not always inform

their parents instantly about their decision to attend or enjoy academic or cultural programs .They notify their parents about these things after they have attended the programs lest parents or family members should prohibit them.

It is interesting to note that though residential students enjoy more liberty in decision making, they develop it gradually. With the passage of time they become more matured and self-confident and this transformation is also accepted by the parents. However, relatively greater freedom or liberty could not replace the values and norms embedded in them .Still they are largely driven by their family values and tradition while taking decision about their own life .

In case of married students mental structure and traditions of the in-laws family and husband largely affect married women's decision making power. Liberal, open-minded and compromising in-laws and husbands award them with more decision making power while decision making power shrinks in case of those women who have married off to a family which does not cherish and nurture liberal values .

Chapter I

Background

Decision making capacity of a human being is one of those criteria which distinguish her/him from other species. Since it is related to intellectual ability to make the right choice and take responsibilities, recognizing the right of women to exercise decision making power also recognizes women as complete human being. But it is a historical fact that, women face much more challenges in accessing the decision making power just because of their sexual difference. The Beijing+5 Conference organized by the United Nations has also identified decision making power of women as one of the critical areas of concern which affect women's empowerment. The United Nations Development Program has devised a Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) which put emphasis on women's decision making power as pre-condition for human development. But interestingly enough, none of the indicators of empowerment devise so far have recognized the importance of women's decision making power regarding their own life. There is no denying the fact, that the inclusion of more and more women into the decision making structure of both state and market are important. But to supplement this effort from the top, more fruitful exercise of decision making power at the level of family and personal life is also necessary. The process of empowering women through awarding them decision making power has to work both ways—top down and bottom-up. Because decision making is as much a science as an art and hence it requires practice. If a woman does not get proper opportunity of exercising decision making power regarding her life related issues it becomes difficult for her to take important as well as correct decisions in professional, social and national life with enough confidence. This study aims to find out the present status of women's decision making power regarding their own life.

The study has been concentrated to the female students studying in University of Dhaka because it is presumed that higher education automatically leads to more empowerment of a woman. The study will justify this assumption through empirical evidence.

1.1 Literature review

In Bangladesh several researches have been done on women related issues where the position of women in decision making process was a part of the study. But not enough research has been done specifically on women's status in taking decisions about her personal and family life.

For example -

- a) Women empowerment performance of Income Generating Activities: A case study in Dumuria Thana, Bangladesh by The Journal of Geo-Environment
- b) Women's empowerment and fertility regulation behaviour in rural areas of Bangladesh by ICDDR
- c) A participatory Action Research for establishing Self-esteem and Rights of Widows, Deserted and Divorced Women by RIB
- d) Strategies to Meet the Health Needs of Adolescents by Centre for Research on women

From the findings of these researches it is clear that, in our country women do not have enough decision making power and even if they have opportunity they do not show much skill in exercising this power. It might be due to their lack of experience in exercising such power since childhood. The relative deprivation of women from decision making regarding their life which is their 'human right' might have contributed to their absence from the highest level of decision making process. Hence there exists enough scope of conducting research on women's decision making power regarding their own life to know their present status, obstacles and ways of removing them in case of exercising decision making power.

1.2 Utility

It is expected that the findings of this research will help to raise awareness among all the stakeholders about the importance of granting freedom of choice to women regarding their own lives, as a way of making them skilled decision makers in other areas of social and professional life. It is also hoped that the findings would help reviewing the existing paradigm of empowerment discourse and add to the formulation of a more comprehensive set of indicators of empowerment.

The findings of the research may also help the future researchers who are interested to work on this issue by providing them with methodological and conceptual insights and empirical evidence.

This research will also help to strengthen the ability of the GGTP trainees to conduct further research.

1.3 Objectives of the Research

The objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To know about the present status of female students regarding decision making power about their own life.
2. To understand if there is any correlation between their social and economic background and present status in decision making.
3. To find out the causes which deter women from accessing and exercising decision making power.
4. To formulate recommendations with a view to removing these obstacles in the way of decision making power and to ensure the right to freedom of choice.

1.4 Definitions of concepts

Decision making power- Decision making is the process of identifying and choosing alternatives based on the values and preferences of the decision maker.

The willingness and ability of a person to identify as many alternatives as possible regarding a particular issue and then choose the one that best fits with the goals, desires, lifestyle and values of the decision maker can be defined as "Decision Making Power."

Decisions regarding own life- The decisions which determine the life style of a person can be referred as "Decisions regarding own life".

In this study, the decisions of choosing educational institution, subject of study, going abroad for higher studies, field of future career, involvement in income generating activities, spending of own earning, dress-up/get-up, maintaining friendship with boys, fixing time limit of returning home, joining/ enjoying educational/cultural programs, involvement in co-curricular activities and decisions of marriage are considered as indicators of decisions regarding one's own life.

“Access to Decision making process” and “Exercise of Decision making power”-The opportunity of expressing own opinion and choosing the appropriate option regarding any particular issue either individually or through consultation and with the least interference possible can be defined as “Access to Decision making process” and the practice of continuing this course of action and implementing the chosen decisions can be defined as “Exercise of Decision making power”.

Unmarried and Residential students-The female students who are unmarried and reside at different halls of University of Dhaka situated in the university campus are considered here as “Unmarried and Residential” students. It could be mentioned here that, married students are not legally allowed to stay in these halls.

Unmarried and Non-residential students-The female students who are unmarried and dwell at their own homes with their family are considered here as “Unmarried and Non-residential” students.

Married and Non-residential students-The female students who are married and dwell at their own homes with their family are considered here as “Married and Non-residential” students.

Family's educational background- Education can be considered as a variable which broadens human views, modernizes one's perspectives and enlightens his/her thoughts. Thereby it is assumed that, education has a direct relation with an individual's decision making power. Since an individual's decision making power is also influenced by her/his upbringing process and family environment, it is important to accumulate information about the educational background of her/his family members.

In this study, information about the educational qualification (on the basis of highest academic degree obtained) of the respondents' parents (father and mother), elder siblings and influential family members (if any) is collected. Then the relation between family's educational background and respondent's decision making status is determined.

Family's economic status- Economic status can be defined as the overall economic condition of a family based on the total family income. It is assumed that, family's financial solvency has significant connection with the family member's decision making power.

In this study, family's economic status is determined depending on the information provided by the respondents about their income sources and occupations of their family members.

1.5 Research Methodology

Research Area- The Dhaka University was selected as the research area since students from different backgrounds come here to study. So, it is expected that considerable variation in the sample would help to locate the correlation between social and economic background with decision making power.

Population- Female students of Honors final year (4th year) and Masters level of 6 Faculties and 5 Institutes were chosen as the population of the research. The students of Honors final year (4th year) and Masters level were considered as matured enough to respond to such an inquiry on the basis of the experience of groundwork for this research. These students have

already taken some important decisions regarding their education and career and are about to take some more important decisions both at personal and professional levels in the near future. As such these students are considered appropriate population for the study.

Data Collection Methods-Three methods were used to conduct this research. These are-

- **Survey** (with unmarried and non-residential students) –As unmarried female students constitute the larger group of existing population of University of Dhaka and married students are not legally permitted to stay at the residential Halls, so the non-residential unmarried students were chosen for conducting survey.
- **Focus Group Discussion (FGD)** (with unmarried and residential students)-As residential students staying at different Halls of University of Dhaka reside in a common environment and enjoy almost a similar lifestyle irrespective of their family background, the residential unmarried students were chosen for FGD.
- **Case Study** (with married and non-residential students)- Since marriage could be considered as one of the most transforming event in a woman’s life and has a probability of effecting her decision making power immensely, it was determined to use ‘case study’ technique with married women to know in depth information about their status regarding decision making power.

Data Collection Tools- A semi-structured schedule in which both close and open ended questions were included, was used in the survey as well as a different check-list was developed for FGD.

Sample size- Survey with 240 students
 FGD with 25 students
 Case study of 13 students.

Table 1: Faculty/Institute wise distribution of survey respondents

Faculty	Number of Samples
Science	48
Biological Science	25
Pharmacy	09
Business Studies	41
Arts	28
Social Science	51
Institutes	39
Total	240

Measurement scale- During the interview, 12 decision related questions were asked to the respondents and on the basis of their response they are categorized into 3 groups. Following the “Interval Level of Scaling ” the possible answers of each question are given 5 to 20

marks (with an interval of 5) according to the relative importance of each option. The highest sum total of individual respondent could be 260 and the lowest could be 55.

Between this range, according to the performance of the respondents they fall in different groups. The respondents who scored between 55 to 150 are categorized as “dependent”, the respondents who scored between 151 to 215 fall into the category of “moderately independent” and the respondents whose score is between 216 to 260 are categorized as “independent” in taking their decisions regarding their life.

Period of Study – July-August, 2007

1.6 Limitations

Several limitations were faced while conducting the research. These are-

1. In many faculties and institutions, the batches of required session (4th year Honrs and Masters) were not available because of the suspension of classes, ongoing final examinations or the classes of the new batch had not started yet.
2. The target samples from the required session were not also available due to the small number of female students in the existing population particularly in Science Faculty.
3. Among the available samples, some students were reluctant to face the interview. Because-
 - a. Some of the respondents were not comfortable about sharing their personal information like family’s economic status, having romantic relationship etc.
 - b. Some of the respondents seemed quite surprised about the topic of the study as they never thought before regarding this issue.
 - c. Some of the respondents have to hide information from their family members regarding some aspects of their social life like having male friends, going to concert etc in fear of any objection from parents. Such respondents were seen a little bit upset for their in transparency.
4. Due to limitations of time and man-power it was not possible to enlarge the sample size. The research could have been more effective and representative if the research could have conducted with a larger sample size.

Chapter II

Survey Findings

The information obtained from the unmarried and non-residential students through survey are given below under 5 broad categories-

2.1 Study and Education

Table 2: The decision of studying in the present educational institution

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Self	132	55
Parents	31	13
In Consultation	53	22
Depends on Situation	20	8
Others	4	2
Total	240	100

More than half (55%) of the respondents decided to study in the University of Dhaka by themselves whereas 22 % took the decision in consultation with family members. Thirteen percent of the respondents' parents made the decisions that the respondents would study in the University of Dhaka .

- Majority (80%) of the respondents are satisfied about this decision and 14 percent of them are moderately satisfied .

Table 3: The decision of studying in this subject

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Self	111	46
Parents	24	10
In consultation	27	11
Depending on situation	76	32
Others	2	1
Total	240	100

Nearly half (46%) of the respondents themselves chose the subject they are at present studying . Thirty-two percent respondents were compelled to take the subject they are studying right now due to special circumstances such as educational authority has allocated their subject according to their position in the merit list .

- More than two-third (69%) of the respondents are so far satisfied with the subject they are studying whereas 21 percent of them are more or less satisfied.

Table 4: The decision of going abroad for higher studies:

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Self	90	38
Parents	39	16
In consultation	72	30
Depending on situation	35	15
Others	2	1
Never thought before	2	-----
Total	240	100

In case of the decision of going abroad for higher studies, 38 percent of the respondents stated that they would take such a decision completely by themselves. Thirty percent of the respondents stated that they would take the decision in consultation with their guardians.

2.2 Income related activities

- More than half (57%) of the respondents are right now involved in some kind of income generating activities and 43 percent are not involved in such activities.

Table 5: The decision of involving in income generating activities:

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Self	89	86
Parents	1	1
In consultation	12	12
Depending on situation	1	1
Total	103	100

The majority (86%) of the respondents has taken the decision to get involved in income generating activities by themselves whereas 12 percent has taken such a decision in consultation with parents.

Table 6: The decision of spending the money:

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Self	93	90
Parents	8	8
Depending on situation	2	2
Total	103	100

In 90 percent case, the respondents have the freedom to spend their earnings.

Table 7: Satisfaction level of spending their own money

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Satisfied	101	98
Not Satisfied	1	1
More or Less Satisfied	1	1
Total	103	100

Most (98%) of the respondents are satisfied the way or for the purpose they spend their money.

Table 8: Decision of not involving in income generating activities:

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Self	86	63
Parents	19	14
In consultation	3	2
Depending on situation	29	21
Total	137	100

Among the respondents who are not currently involved in any income generating activity, 63 percent of them took the decision by themselves and 21 percent took the decision due to different reasons such as lack of time, pressure of study, physical unfitnes etc.

Table 9: Satisfaction Level

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Satisfied	67	49
Not Satisfied	36	26
More or Less Satisfied	33	24
Not thought yet	1	1
Total	137	100

Almost half (49%) of the respondents opined that they are satisfied with the decision of not getting involved in any income generating activity whereas 26 percent identified themselves as not satisfied.

2.3 Future Career

- Almost all (99%) the respondents want to be service holder in future.
- Almost half (48%) of the respondents said that they would go for a career in the non-government sector whereas 20 percent preferred for government service .Seventeen percent of the respondents would like to take up teaching as their future career.

Table 10: The decision of selecting the field of career:

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Self	124	52
Parents	16	7
In consultation	61	26
Depending on situation	35	15
Total	233	100

More than half (52%) of the respondents would take the decision of selecting the field of career by themselves while 26 percent would take such a decision consultation with family members.

2.4 Social life

Table 11: The decision of selecting dress / get-up:

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Self	186	78
Parents	25	10
In consultation	24	10
Others	5	2
Total	240	100

More than three-fourth (78%) of the respondents themselves select their dress-up, get-up whereas parents take decision about the dress-up, get-up of 10 percent respondents.

- The majority (86%) of the respondents are so far satisfied with such decision whereas 9 percent respondents are more or less satisfied.

Table 12: The decision of Making/ continuing friendship with boys:

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Self	184	77
Parents	24	10
In consultation	15	6
Depends on Situation	14	6
Others	3	1
Total	240	100

More than three-fourth (77%) of the respondents themselves take the decision of making and or continuing friendship with boys.

- The majority (86%) of the respondents are satisfied with the decision whereas almost equal number of respondents (6% and 8% respectively) is either not satisfied or more or less satisfied with it.

Table 13: The decision of fixing time limit for returning to home:

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Self	76	32
Parents	70	30
In consultation	31	13
Depends on Situation	59	25
Total	236	100

Almost equal number (32% and 30% respectively) of respondents claimed that the decision of fixing time limit for returning to home is taken by themselves or by their parents. Twenty-five percent respondents stated that such a decision usually depends upon situation like class schedule, lab work etc.

- More than three-fourth (77%) of the respondents are satisfied with such a decision whereas 15 percent respondents are more or less satisfied with it.

Table 14: The decision of Attending / enjoying educational/cultural programs:

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Self	84	36
Parents	66	28
In consultation	57	24
Depends on Situation	25	11
Others	4	1
Total	236	100

Thirty six percent of the respondents themselves take the decision of attending or enjoying academic or cultural programs. Other options like “parents” and “in consultation” is shared by almost equal number of students (28% and 24% respectively)

- More than two-third (69%) of the respondents are so far satisfied with such a decision. Almost equal numbers of respondents are either not satisfied or moderately satisfied with it.

2.5 Romantic relationship and Marriage

- More than half (59%) of the respondents claimed that they did not have any romantic relationship at the time of conducting this survey while the rest 41 percent said that they had such a relationship.

- The majority (83%) of the respondents take the decisions regarding this relationship jointly with boyfriend and three-fourth (75%) of them is satisfied with such decisions.

Table 15: The decision of marriage:

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Self	53	22
Parents	46	19
In consultation	119	50
Depends on Situation	20	8
Others	2	1
Total	240	100

Half (50%) of the respondents mentioned that the decision of their marriage will be taken in consultation with the family whereas 22 percent respondents thought that they would be able to take such a decision completely by themselves.

2.6 Co-curricular activities

- Three –fourth (75%) of the respondents are involved in co-curricular activities at present whereas the rest 25 percent are not involved in such activities.

Table 16: The decision of involving in Co-curricular activities:

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Self	32	53
Parents	16	27
In consultation	9	15
Depends on Situation	3	5
Total	60	100

More than half (53%) of the respondents took the decision of involving in such activities by themselves whereas parents took the decision for 27 percent respondents.

- Most (93%) of the respondents are satisfied with the decision whereas almost equal (2% and 3% respectively)number of respondents has identified themselves as either not satisfied or moderately satisfied with it.

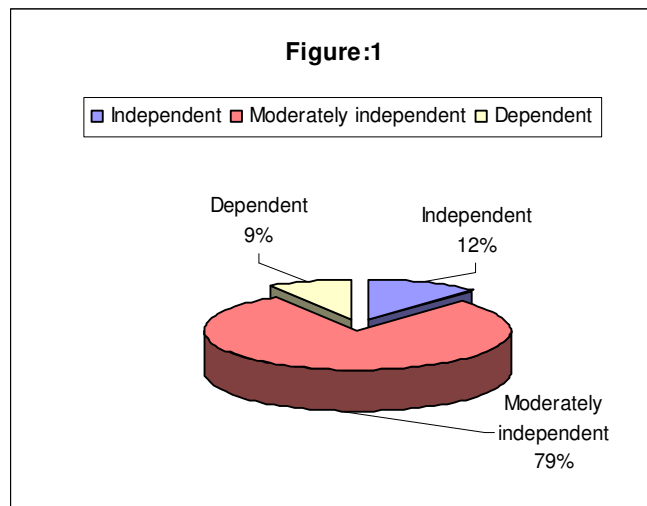
Table 17: The decision of not getting involved in such activities:

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Self	99	56
Parents	23	13
In consultation	4	2
Depends on Situation	52	29
Total	178	100

More than half (56%) of the respondents take the decision of not getting involved in such activities by themselves whereas 29 percent respondents had to follow this path due to pressure of study, lack of time, the tradition of residential hall based cultural activities in the university and some other reasons like that.

- Near about half (44%) of the respondents are satisfied with the decision whereas 31 percent are not satisfied.

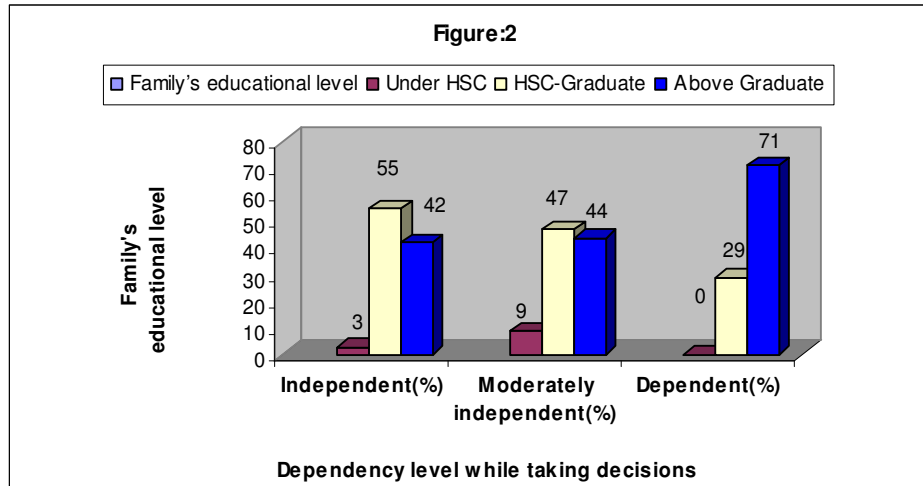
2.7 Dependency level of the respondents while taking decisions



It is apparent from the above figure that, majority of the unmarried and non-residential female students of DU (79%) are moderately independent while taking decisions where as 12 percent of them enjoy full freedom and the rest 9 percent have to depend on others in this regard.

Though majority of the respondents do not have complete freedom in taking their decisions independently, but at least they have access in decision making process. They can disclose their preferences, utilize their intellectual ability to make the right choice and hence get the opportunity to justify their views. So, it can be conceived that, women are not so much ignored in taking decisions regarding their own life, which is really an encouraging picture. It is expected that, this ability of women will be gradually reflected in other spheres of their life, where they might have to turn out to be major decision maker in the long run.(Figure:1)

2.8 Relation between dependency level of respondents while taking decisions and their family's educational qualification



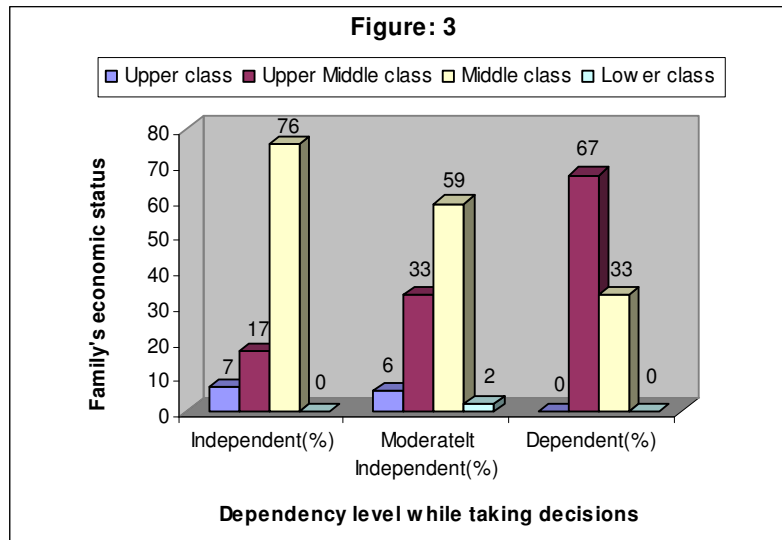
Nearly half of the survey respondents of “Independent” group (55%) and “Moderately independent” group (47%) belong to that kind of families which have a standard educational qualification level (HSC-Graduate).

From this observation it can be assumed that, education has made the parents considerate and understandable of the fact that, as their female children are going to achieve higher educational degree they are matured enough to have their own ways of thinking about their life. So, they show respect to their children’s views and award them by giving scope of exercising decision making power.

It should also be noted here that the children of the parents whose educational qualification is Below HSC belong to the group of “Independent” (3%) and “Moderately independent” (9%) while they are totally absent in “Dependent” group. This implies that, such parents have faith on their child’s decision making capacity.

On the other hand, 71 percent respondents of the “Dependent” group belong to the family whose educational qualifications fall under the category of above graduate. The reason might be that, parents with a relatively better educational background consider themselves as better decision makers as they are already more educated than their children and hence want to impose some decisions on their children.(Figure:2)

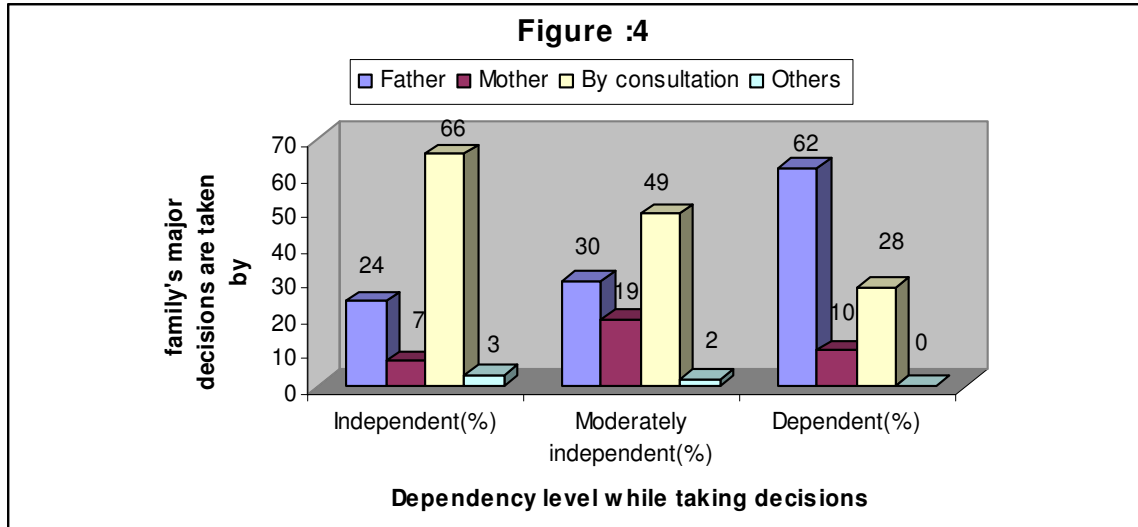
2.9 Relation between dependency level of respondents while taking decisions and their family's economic status



Maximum number of survey respondents of “Independent group”(76%) and “Moderately independent group”(59%) belong to the middle class family .On the other hand, the economic status of most of the families of “dependent group” is upper middle class(67%).

From this observation it can be assumed that, there is a positive correlation between money and power. In the middle class family economic dependence of children over parents is relatively lesser where as in the upper middle class family parents are relatively better-off, provide for almost every material need of their children. So children from such families get little scope to articulate their opinion. Even if they want to do so, the unfavourable balance of power between children and parents acts as a barrier to exercise their decision making power.(Figure:3)

2.10 Relation between dependency level of the respondents while taking decisions and their family's major decision are taken by whom



Highest number of survey respondents from “Independent” group (66%) and “Moderately independent” group (49%) belong to the families where major decisions are taken by consultation with family members. From this observation, it can be assumed that, the female members of such families have at least access to the decision making process and hence it is clear that, if liberal values are nurtured in family ,then it helps women to grow up as confident decision makers.

On the other hand, the major decisions of the family’s of “Dependent” group are mainly taken by their father (68%), which reflects the patriarchal power relations in that family. It can be assumed that, in such families there is hardly any scope for female members to raise their voice and express their opinion.(Figure: 4)

Chapter III

Findings of FGD

Three separate Focus Group Discussions were arranged in 3 different Residential Halls of University of Dhaka-Rokeya Hall, Bangladesh-Kuwait Maitri Hall and Fazilatunnesa Mujib Hall. A total of 25 unmarried students participated in the FGDs and topics related to decision making power of their own life were discussed there. The summarized opinion of the participants are given below-

3.1 Study and Education

- ❑ Majority of the residential students took the decision of studying in the present educational institution and academic discipline because of the then prevailing situations such as not getting admission at preferred institution, position in the merit list etc.

More than three-fourth of the respondents are so far satisfied with these decisions.

- ❑ More than half of the respondents commented that if they get chance of going abroad for higher studies they will take decision in consultation with family members.

3.2 Income related activities

- ❑ At present more than three-fourth of the respondents are not involved in any income generating activity.
- ❑ All the respondents who are currently involved in income generating activities took the decision to do so by themselves. All the respondents spend the money they earn by themselves according to their needs and interests and all of them are satisfied with the decision.
- ❑ Equal number of respondents took the decision of not getting involved in income generating activity either by themselves or due to different reasons such as lack of time, pressure of study, physical unfitnes etc.
- ❑ All the respondents expressed their willingness to become service holder after finishing their study. More than half of the respondents said that the decision of selecting the field of career will be taken by themselves.

3.3 Social life

The majority of the respondents select their dress and get-up completely by themselves and hence most of them are satisfied with the decision.

Most of the respondents themselves take the decision of making or continuing friendship with boys and most of them remain satisfied with their decision.

Near about three-fourth of the respondents choose the time schedule, mode of transport and companion of going their home districts by themselves and majority of them are satisfied with the decision .

The decision of attending or enjoying academic or cultural programs is taken by themselves by nearly three-fourth of the respondents and most of the respondents are satisfied with this decision.

3.4 Romantic relationship and Marriage

- ❑ More than three-fourth of the respondents do not have any romantic relationship at present while the rest have such a relationship.
- ❑ All the respondents who have romantic relationship take various decisions regarding this relationship in consultation with their boyfriends
- ❑ More than two-third of the respondents opined that, the decision of marriage will be taken in consultation with family members.

3.5 Co-curricular activities

More than two-third of the respondents are involved in various co-curricular activities at present.

The majority of the students took the decision of involving in such activities completely by themselves and hence they are satisfied with the decision.

Most of the respondents are of the opinion that, they enjoy comparatively more independent life style living at hall. But at the same time, all of them undisputedly agreed that, they miss the warmth, caring and security of the family life.

Opinions of the respondents about the causes which deter women from accessing and exercising decision making power

The respondents pointed out various causes and factors that deter women from accessing and exercising decision making power independently. According to them the constraints are—

1. Because of the patriarchal perspectives and practice of projecting women to be inferior and subservient, many families do not consider their women members eligible enough to take any decisions and if they take any decisions, those are not granted or taken into notice by the family.
2. The indirect influence and pressure of relatives, extended family members, peer groups as well as neighbours do not let a conducive family environment which can encourage the women to take their decisions independently.
3. Women are considered to be solely responsible to preserve and guard the family honor at all situations in the society. Many of their activities are often discouraged under the pretext that those will bring dishonour to the name of the family. As a result, they become bound to remain within their traditional roles and occupations.
4. The society judges a woman on the basis of her sex rather than as an intelligent individual. The prevailing social structure, attitudes, norms, values, prohibitions and customs are marked as one of the main reasons that prevent women from making decisions independently.
5. Lack of social security has been identified as another major impediment. Families sometimes do not let women to make some decisions under the pretext of prevailing insecure social environment.
6. Religious statutes, regulations, prejudices, superstitions and in some cases misinterpretations and misuse of religious provisions often create impediments in the path of women to have access and exercise their decision making power independently.
7. The education curriculum very much focuses the patriarchal values and views on women's limitations which certainly influence the minds of the people in the society.
8. Because of financial dependency and lack of secure separate accommodation facility women are often compelled to accept many decisions imposed on them.
9. Lack of control over resources, non-acceptance of women's rights over property, lack of proper employment opportunities for women, defining certain jobs suitable for women, absence of women at the decision making level at various professional institutes and absence of women empowerment in the economic sector are also identified as causes that deter women from exercising their decision making power independently.

Opinions of the respondents about how the obstacles in the way of women's decision making power can be removed

Various opinions came up from the answers of the respondents. These are mentioned below-

1. Women should change the inferior perspectives they held about themselves, build up individual personality as well as be aware of the importance of exercising and practicing their decision making power.

2. The parents should treat their all children equally and give the female members access to decision making process, have faith that they are capable to make decisions and should evaluate their opinions.
3. Married women need supportive husbands and in-laws to carry on with a peaceful independent life and exercise their decision making power even after marriage.
4. Both parents and siblings should be cordial and understanding enough to decrease the generation gap within them.
5. The social attitudes, norms, values and views that favours men over women needs to be changed. Women should be considered as individuals rather than being judged by their sex.
6. Misuse of religious authority must be stopped i.e. it should be guaranteed that expert people provide proper explanations and interpretations of religious provisions, documents, values and norms.
7. For the positive transformation of people's mentality, gender-sensitivity should be included in the educational curriculum of every level of academic programs as well as adequate training for teachers should be arranged to deliver this message to the students properly.
8. Women should be given proper support to pursue higher education and more employment opportunities should be created for women, so that they can become financially independent and get confidences to exercise their decision making power.

Chapter IV

Case Studies

Thirteen (13) case studies of married and residential female students were conducted to assess the change of their position in the decision making process in their pre-marriage and post-marriage life. It is seen that out of the 13 case studies, 3 of the respondents can be identified as independent regarding their decision making power before and after marriage, 3 are regarded as 'totally dependent before and after marriage', 1 can be categorized as 'dependent at her parents' home and gained liberty after marriage' and rest 6 can be identified as independent before marriage and dependent after marriage. Four of the interesting cases are presented below:

Case Study 1:

Shukla (not her real name), a student of Economics, decided on her own to study at University of Dhaka. Before her marriage, her parents' decisions always got preference regarding *Shukla's* dress-up, get-up, time of returning home. She was allowed to attend the study tours but not the picnics or concerts. She had been not allowed to attend any kind of extra-curriculum activity. In spite of having her interest, she was not allowed by her parents to work as private tutor. She got married according to her parents' choice. Now in her conjugal life, though her husband consults with her regarding all decisions, in the end it is the decision of her husband which gets priority and is implemented. *Shukla* wishes to pursue higher studies but she knows this dream may never come true. She is also interested to be a service holder but she dreads that she would not be allowed to do so by her husband. *Shukla* also assumes that, the decision of having children will be determined by her husband. Thus her opinions and decisions are always undermined by her family and her husband. Their actions have always hurt her deeply.

From this case, it is clear that in spite of being conscious of right to exercise her own decision making power, *Shukla* has to compromise with prevailing situations as she has failed to transform them in her favour.

Case Study: 2

Annanya (not her real name), student of Accounting, expressed that she used to live a moderately liberal life at her parents' home. Most of the decisions at her parents' place used to be taken through discussion. She had the independence to choose the educational institution and subject according to her preference. Her decisions regarding her clothes, get-up, mobility, time to return home, to choose friends according to her preference were monitored but not controlled or interfered. They even supported her decision to marry the partner she chose. After her marriage, she lost her control over her decision making power. Now she has to abide by the decisions taken by her father-in-law and mother-in-law. Though her husband does not interfere all the time, he also expects that she will listen to his parents to maintain the peace at home. She has taken the decision not to get involved with any income generating activities, though she worked as private tutor in the past, for she knows she would not receive any support from her in-laws. However she has expressed the intention of becoming a service holder in future. But at the same time she informed that her work place would be chosen on the basis of discussion with her in-laws. But she is determined that in case of the reproductive decision, she will make the ultimate decision. *Annanya* lastly stated

that it would make her life happier if the in-laws and her husband showed a little more reliance on her capability to take her own decisions rather than always trying to control her.

From this case it is apparent that, absence of a cooperative family environment in in-laws house can make a woman feel dependent and frustrated regarding making any kind of decisions of her life. From *Annanya's* statements it is visible that her present status makes her miss the essence of liberty that she once enjoyed immensely.

Case Study 3:

Purba (not her real name) happens to be one of the highly meritorious students of the Department of Sociology. Before her marriage, though she was allowed to seek admission at University of Dhaka and choose the subject according to her preference, all other area of her life such as her mobility, dress-up, time to return home, maintaining friendship with male classmates, attending study-tour and concerts etc. were decided by her parents. Her parents encouraged her to attend the co-curricular activities with the intention that it would make her Curriculum Vitae look more attractive as well as present her as a suitable girl to potential grooms. According to her own version, she used to live in a very suffocating environment as she used to feel that her every step was being monitored and judged. She got married quite early and over the telephone. Her husband is an engineer and stationed abroad. After the formal functions when she moved to her in-laws' house, she experienced a much liberal family environment. Neither her husband nor her in-laws ever tried to impose any decisions on her. Her mother-in-law wanted her to wear sari but she now understands that it is very uncomfortable for *Purba's* mobility. She has already visited her husband abroad and after finishing her graduation she will settle down there permanently. She has already got the commitment from her husband to pursue her higher studies there. She is quite confident that she will be able to convince her husband regarding the reproductive decision as she wishes to have children after settling in her career properly. *Purba* has expressed that she feels much independent and empowered after her marriage since she does not have to explain reasons behind her every action. Her husband and in-laws show much reliance on her decisions.

From this case, it is evident that even after marriage if woman gets proper cooperative environment she gains confidence and can practice her decision making power independently, even though she may never experienced this independence at her parents' home previously.

Case Study: 4

Orpa (not her real name), another student of Women and Gender Studies Department, expressed that her father usually takes all the important decisions at her parents' home. Yet she had the liberty to take certain decisions on her own such as which university she would choose to seek admission, which subject she wanted to study, what kind of clothes she would wear, with whom she would hang out etc. She was given the freedom to attend extra-curricular activity of her own choice. She had the right to get involved with income generating activities (giving tuitions etc.) and spend the earnings according to her own preference. She was allowed to decide on her own whether she would join any study tour or concerts. She remarked that since her family never interfered or imposed any decision on her, she willingly kept them informed about her whereabouts. She had consulted with her parents to take certain important decisions such as the decision of her marriage. Even now, being married, *Opra* has the liberty to make most of the decisions regarding her own life on her

own. She feels that marriage brings along many responsibilities and she thinks if she decides to go abroad for higher studies or ever obtain any scholarship, she will make the ultimate decision consulting with her father and husband. Similarly she believes that since she wishes to put equal emphasis or do justice to her profession as well as her family, she will decide her place of work by discussion. Regarding the matters of her household, she decides by consulting with her husband and mother-in-law. She experiences a very cordial environment at her in-law's house. She had even visited several countries with her friends with her own savings without facing any objection from the in-laws or her husband.

From this case, it is seen that *Orpa* has been respected as an intelligent individual capable of exercising her decision making power independently by both her parents and her in-laws. She is very much supported by her husband as well. Thereby, it was very much clear from her attitude that this opportunity has made her a very confident woman.

Chapter V

Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Perception of the respondents regarding necessity of Decision Making Power

At first instance, all of the respondents agreed that it is important for women to have decision making power regarding their own life. But after talking to them in depth, it came out that, not all of them think about the issue homogeneously. There is some confusion among some respondents while some other have different perspectives on the necessity of decision making power.

Some of the respondents have been brought up and socialized in such a way that ,the present inferior status of women regarding decision making power seems very normal and natural to them .Some of them are too afraid to change the existing status quo .They think it might disturb the peace of their life . So they do not want to go into a conflict with anyone regarding decision making power and ready to live the whole life through sacrifice and compromise. Even if some women plucks up the heart to go into a conflict to demand and exercise her own rights, they can easily be convinced emotionally to give up the ambition, they opined.

Some of the respondents truly believe that every woman should possess the decision making power regarding her own life, but reluctant to take the first step to change the existing condition of women .They would appreciate it if someone takes the onus of augmenting women's decision making power, but they themselves are not enthusiastic enough to carry out the change.

In short, it can be said that the positive response of respondents to the question regarding the necessity of decision making power for women does not reveal the true picture .Much lies beneath the apparently enthusiastic answer .Process of socialization, structured mindset etc. perhaps contribute to this situation.

5.2 Recommendation

a. Service recommendations

1. Women are sometimes compelled to compromise with adverse situations in fear of losing their shelters as there are very few alternative secure accommodations for women to live separately outside homes. Therefore the state can take steps to provide adequate secured shelters for women so that if the need arises women can move there instead of compromising with adverse situations.

2. In fear of domestic violence or being victims of domestic violence, women sometimes refrain from making any decisions. Thereby, it is important to enact specific legal provisions to address domestic violence.

3. Government and Non-government organizations can provide more legal information and support (if necessary) to women regarding their right to property, right to divorce, custody of children, physical harassment etc. so that they can become more aware about their rights.

4. The social environment needs to be developed into a secure, friendly and comfortable environment, so that women can maintain their mobility independently.

5. The media can play a constructive role in raising consciousness among both men and women about the necessity of exercising women's decision making power.

b. Study recommendations

1. The research is conducted on small sample of specific age-group (22-24) and of particular occupation (student). This type of research could also be conducted on other women of different age-groups, educational backgrounds, economic status and of various professions to know their status regarding decision making power in different spheres of life.

2. For any woman the opportunity of getting "access to" and continuing "exercise of" decision making power, largely depends on the will and views of her family members particularly on the male members. So, there is scope of conducting research on parents and influential family members specially male members to reveal their perceptions and attitudes about women's decision making power.

Annex 1:

Reference

- **Women in Bangladesh: From Inequality to Empowerment**
Nazmunnesa Mahtab, Professor,
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- **Women in Decision Making Process**
Unnayan Padakhep, 18th Edition
Published by Steps Towards Development

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