



Equal Inheritance Rights for Women in Bangladesh: Legal Reform, Cultural Resistance, and Pathways to Implementation

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Abstract: Inheritance goes beyond legality; it is a foundation of women's economic empowerment, equality, and security in Bangladesh. Although the Constitution promises equality and non-discrimination, women still face barriers in receiving inherited property. Under Muslim personal law, women are given fixed shares, but those shares are not equal to those of men. Under Hindu Dayabhaga law, daughters face even greater exclusion from family property. The Succession Act 1925 provides an equal framework for minority communities, yet in practice women cannot enjoy their rights because of family pressure, social customs, and problems in land administration. As a result, women continue to own only a small share of agricultural land in Bangladesh. This paper examines the legal and practical problems that affect women's inheritance rights in Bangladesh. It uses a qualitative mixed-method approach based on secondary sources. The paper looks at the Constitution of Bangladesh, the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance 1961, the Succession Act 1925, Hindu Dayabhaga principles, and Bangladesh's obligations under CEDAW. It refers to reforms in India and Nepal for comparison. The paper shows that there is a gap between legal rights on paper and women's ability to enjoy rights in real life. Family pressure, lack of legal awareness, corruption, delay in mutation and registration, and weak institutional support all contribute to this problem. The paper argues that stronger legal reform, better implementation, improved land administration, and wider legal awareness are necessary to protect women's inheritance rights in a meaningful way.

Keywords: women's inheritance, Bangladesh, personal laws, constitutional equality, property rights

1. Introduction

Inheritance is not a technical question of private law alone. In Bangladesh, it is tied to who controls productive assets, who can survive marital breakdown, who can bargain within the family, and who can move from formal citizenship to real economic autonomy. Women's access to inherited land and property affects livelihood, housing security, creditworthiness, and social standing. For that reason, inheritance rights are central to both gender justice and development. The Constitution of Bangladesh promises equality before the law and prohibits discrimination on the ground of sex, especially through Articles 27 and 28 (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972). However, the legal landscape that governs succession remains deeply plural, and that plural structure produces uneven outcomes for women depending on religion, family practice, and institutional access.

The inheritance framework in Bangladesh operates through a combination of constitutional law, religious personal law, statutory law, and administrative practice. Muslim families are largely governed by Sunni Hanafi rules, supplemented in important respects by the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance 1961. Hindu inheritance continues to be governed primarily by uncodified Dayabhaga principles, under which women's rights

remain restricted and often conditional. The Succession Act 1925 provides a comparatively more gender-neutral regime for Christians and some other communities, but it does not resolve the broader inequality produced by religion-based succession rules (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1925; Mandal, 2024). The result is not simply diversity. It is a hierarchy of rights in which similarly situated women are treated differently depending on which inheritance regime applies to them.

At the same time, the question is not exhausted by the text of the law. Even where women have clear legal shares, those shares are frequently diluted or lost in practice. Studies on land and inheritance in Bangladesh show that women face pressure not to claim paternal property, are often denied documents, and encounter corruption and delay in registration and mutation (Enokwenw et al., 2024; Khan et al., 2016; Transparency International Bangladesh, 2015). The real problem is therefore both doctrinal and socio-legal: some rules are unequal, while other rights exist on paper but remain practically inaccessible.

This paper responds directly to those concerns. It examines women's inheritance rights in Bangladesh through five interrelated legal instruments and frameworks: the Constitution of Bangladesh, the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance 1961, the Succession Act 1925, the continuing operation of Hindu Dayabhaga rules, and Bangladesh's obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). It asks three connected questions. First, what does the current law actually provide? Second, why do women still fail to obtain effective inheritance rights even where formal entitlement exists? Third, what kind of reform is realistic in the Bangladeshi context?

The paper argues that the denial of women's inheritance rights in Bangladesh is produced by layered inequality. Some rules still privilege male lineage or assign smaller female shares, while even valid claims are undermined by family pressure, documentary exclusion, bureaucratic opacity, and weak enforcement. Meaningful reform therefore requires legal clarification, targeted statutory change, administrative modernization, and social strategies that reduce the cost of women claiming property.

2. Research Objectives

The paper has four related objectives. It seeks to:

1. examine women's inheritance rights under the Constitution of Bangladesh, Muslim personal law, Hindu Dayabhaga law, the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance 1961, and the Succession Act 1925;
2. identify the social, cultural, and institutional barriers that prevent women from enjoying inheritance rights in practice, including family pressure, lack of legal awareness, weaknesses in land administration, and problems relating to mutation and registration;
3. analyse the equality concerns raised by the present inheritance framework, particularly in light of Articles 27 and 28 of the Constitution of Bangladesh and the country's obligations under CEDAW; and
4. draw practical lessons from reforms in India and Nepal in order to suggest realistic legal and policy measures for strengthening women's inheritance rights in Bangladesh.

3. Literature Review

Existing scholarship shows that women's inheritance rights in Bangladesh cannot be understood through a single legal regime. Work on Muslim inheritance law explains that women are formally included in succession, but their shares are often smaller than those of comparable male heirs and are frequently undermined in practice by social pressure and weak enforcement (Huq, 2010; Khan et al., 2016). Section 4 of the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance 1961 is usually treated as an important reform because it protects the line of a predeceased child, although it does not remove wider gender inequality in allocation and enforcement (Huq, 2010).

Research on Hindu inheritance is more critical. Recent analysis of the Dayabhaga tradition shows that Hindu women in Bangladesh continue to face sharper exclusion, especially in relation to ancestral property and control over inherited assets (Mandal, 2024). By contrast, the Succession Act 1925 serves as an internal benchmark because it demonstrates that a more gender-neutral inheritance framework already exists for some communities within the Bangladeshi legal order (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1925).

Socio-legal research further explains why formal rights do not easily become real ownership. Studies point to family pressure to renounce shares, lack of access to documents, corruption, administrative delay, and difficulties in mutation and registration as major barriers to implementation (Enokwenw et al., 2024; Transparency International Bangladesh, 2015; World Bank, 2024).

Overall, the literature remains somewhat fragmented. Doctrinal studies often focus on specific religious rules, while policy studies concentrate on land governance or women's vulnerability without fully connecting those issues to constitutional equality and international obligations. This paper addresses that gap by bringing the legal framework, practical barriers, and comparative reform lessons into a single analysis.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative mixed-method approach based entirely on secondary sources. Its main method is doctrinal legal analysis, which is used to examine the legal rules governing women's inheritance in Bangladesh. Particular attention is given to Articles 27 and 28 of the Constitution of Bangladesh, section 4 of the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance 1961, the Succession Act 1925, and the legal features of the Hindu Dayabhaga system as discussed in legislation, case law, and academic commentary.

The paper also uses a socio-legal and policy-oriented approach to understand why women often fail to enjoy rights that are formally recognized in law. For this purpose, the study draws on secondary materials relating to women's land ownership, family pressure, social renunciation of shares, corruption, administrative delay, and barriers in mutation and registration processes in Bangladesh.

In addition, the paper adopts a limited comparative approach by referring to reforms in India and Nepal. These jurisdictions are used as regional examples for understanding how legal reform and gradual policy change can strengthen women's

property rights. The comparison is used to identify practical reform strategies that may be adapted to the Bangladeshi context.

This study does not rely on fieldwork, interviews, or original quantitative data. Instead, it depends on books, journal articles, legislation, case law, policy documents, and reports published by relevant institutions and organizations. The value of this approach lies in bringing together the legal and practical dimensions of inheritance into a single analytical framework.

5. Legal Framework Governing Women's Inheritance Rights in Bangladesh

5.1 Constitutional Equality and the Problem of Legal Pluralism

Any discussion of women's inheritance rights in Bangladesh must begin with the Constitution. Article 27 guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of the law. Article 28 prohibits discrimination on grounds including sex and also permits special measures for women where necessary (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972). These provisions establish a strong constitutional commitment to equality. At least in principle, they support a legal order in which women should not be denied property rights simply because they are women.

Yet the constitutional promise sits beside a plural succession structure that treats communities differently and often treats women unequally. Inheritance is one of the areas where personal law most directly affects access to wealth and productive assets. When daughters, widows, or mothers receive reduced or conditional rights under one regime while others enjoy broader protections under another, the legal system creates different levels of citizenship in practice. As Alam (2025) argues, women's equal property rights should be understood as part of Bangladesh's substantive equality obligations.

The constitutional problem is therefore twofold. First, some rules themselves remain unequal. Second, the state often fails to protect even those rights that women already possess. A constitutional commitment to equality cannot be satisfied simply by acknowledging that women have "some" share somewhere in the legal order. The state must ensure that the content of the law is non-discriminatory or moving toward non-discrimination, and that the enforcement system does not make legal entitlement illusory.

5.2 Muslim Inheritance Law and the Role of Section 4 of the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance 1961

Under the Muslim inheritance system applied in Bangladesh, women are not excluded from succession. Daughters, wives, mothers, and grandmothers all receive legally recognized shares. However, the system does not treat men and women identically. In ordinary Sunni distribution, a son generally receives twice the share of a daughter of the same degree. A wife receives a defined share that varies depending on whether the deceased leaves children, and a mother also receives a fixed fractional entitlement. For that reason, Muslim inheritance law in Bangladesh cannot fairly be described as denying women any legal rights, but neither can it be described as formally equal (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1961; Khan et al., 2016).

This distinction matters. A careless analysis may wrongly state that the Muslim regime is wholly exclusionary. That is not accurate. The stronger and more defensible claim is that Muslim women often face a double disadvantage: first, some shares are formally smaller than those of comparable male heirs; second, even those legally fixed shares are frequently defeated in practice by social pressure and non-enforcement. Khan et al. (2016) show that women's marginalization in Bangladesh often results not only from doctrinal allocation but from the social practices surrounding property sharing. In that sense, the problem lies both in the structure of the law and in its administration within families and institutions.

One of the most important statutory interventions in this field is section 4 of the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance 1961. That section provides that where a son or daughter of the propositus dies before the succession opens, the children of that predeceased son or daughter shall per stirpes receive the share that the parent would have received if alive (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1961). The section is significant because it modifies classical Sunni doctrine by protecting the line of a predeceased child through representational succession. Huq (2010) explains that section 4 inserted a form of stirpital succession into the legal framework, thereby protecting orphaned grandchildren who might otherwise be excluded by nearer heirs.

The importance of section 4 is both doctrinal and symbolic. Doctrinally, it demonstrates that Muslim personal law in Bangladesh is not entirely immune from statutory reform. Symbolically, it proves that legislative intervention is possible where social injustice becomes visible enough. At the same time, section 4 is limited: it does not change the broader share structure between sons and daughters, nor does it remove all situations in which daughters remain vulnerable under residue rules.

From a women's rights perspective, the Muslim regime therefore presents a mixed picture. It offers clearer formal shares to women than the Hindu Dayabhaga framework, but it still embeds hierarchy in allocation and leaves considerable room for practical dispossession. A defensible reform position is not to collapse all discussion into a simplistic claim that Muslim law is either fully just or wholly oppressive. Rather, the better approach is to protect and enforce existing female shares, while also considering targeted reforms where outcomes remain structurally unfair.

5.3 Hindu Dayabhaga Law and the Problem of Exclusion

If Muslim women in Bangladesh experience reduced yet defined entitlement, Hindu women often face a more severe form of disadvantage: exclusion or sharply limited inheritance within an uncoded framework. Hindu inheritance in Bangladesh remains governed largely by Dayabhaga principles. In contrast to India, where legislative reform has transformed major parts of Hindu succession law, Bangladesh has not enacted an equivalent codifying reform for Hindu women's inheritance rights (Government of India, 1956; Mandal, 2024).

Legal scholarship on Dayabhaga shows that the system historically prioritized the male line and linked succession to ritual and lineage concepts rather than to gender equality. Mandal (2024) explains that the Dayabhaga tradition recognizes stridhana as women's own property, but that does not amount to full equality in ordinary inheritance from the natal line. The practical position of daughters remains much weaker than that of male heirs, and

women's rights are often tied to narrow categories rather than to equal status as children. The consequence is not simply a smaller share, but often a more fragile legal claim.

Research on rural women's inheritance in Bangladesh reinforces this doctrinal picture. The HDRC study found both widespread lack of legal awareness among Hindu women and demands from respondents for reform of inheritance laws in their favour (Human Development Research Centre, n.d.). That is important because it shows that the problem is not merely a matter of theoretical legal history. Women themselves experience the current framework as inadequate and exclusionary.

The absence of codification deepens the problem. Codified statutes at least provide a clear point of interpretation, amendment, and administrative training. An uncoded system, by contrast, can preserve ambiguity and allow patriarchal custom to present itself as immutable doctrine. For Bangladeshi Hindu women, this means that exclusion is sustained both by inherited legal doctrine and by the institutional reluctance to legislate. When compared with India's 2005 reform, the Bangladeshi situation stands out not because reform is impossible, but because political will has been insufficient.

5.4 The Succession Act 1925 as a Benchmark Within the Bangladeshi Legal Order

The Succession Act 1925 is important in this discussion because it shows that a comparatively more gender-neutral inheritance framework already exists within the broader legal system of Bangladesh. The Act brings together the rules relating to both intestate and testamentary succession for the communities to which it applies. In particular, Part V deals with intestate succession. Section 33 explains the widow's share where the deceased leaves a widow together with lineal descendants, kindred, or no kindred, while section 41 provides that where there are no lineal descendants, the remaining property is to be distributed after deducting the widow's share, if any. The following provisions then set out the rules for distribution among kindred. These provisions matter because they show that inheritance can already be regulated in Bangladesh through a statutory framework that is more gender-neutral than some other existing regimes (Table 1).

The importance of the Succession Act lies not in its universal application, but in what it demonstrates. If one part of the legal system can recognise inheritance through a comparatively more gender-neutral framework, then inequality cannot be defended as an unavoidable feature of all succession law in Bangladesh. The Act does not remove the wider problem, because its application remains limited. Even so, it makes one point clear: reform towards greater equality is legally possible within the existing national framework.

Table 1. Comparative Overview of the Main Inheritance Regimes Affecting Women in Bangladesh

Law/Religious Group	Major Female Heir (Daughter)	Key Discriminatory Feature	Legal Mechanism of Inequality
Muslim (Hanafi)	Fixed share (daughter usually receives half of a son's share)	Women are recognized as heirs, but shares remain unequal and are often not realized in practice	Gender-differentiated shares plus customary denial and weak enforcement

Hindu (Dayabhaga)	Limited and conditional claim	Daughters' natal inheritance rights remain weak and exclusionary compared with male heirs	Uncodified male-line succession rules and resistance to codifying equal rights
Secular (Succession Act 1925)	More gender-neutral entitlement	Less discriminatory on paper, but applicable only to limited communities	Restricted scope within a plural legal system

Sources: *Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1961, 1925; Khan et al., 2016; Mandal, 2024; Government of India, 1956)*

Overall, the Bangladeshi legal framework produces three different models of women's inheritance (Table 1). The Muslim system recognizes women as heirs but generally allocates smaller shares and suffers from serious implementation failures. The Hindu Dayabhaga system leaves women in a more exclusionary and uncertain position, especially regarding natal property. The Succession Act 1925 offers a more equal statutory model but only to limited communities. This layered structure is one of the main reasons inheritance reform remains legally urgent.

6. The Gap Between Legal Rights and Women's Lived Reality

6.1 Social Norms, Renunciation, and the Hidden Cost of Claiming Property

A major weakness of earlier discussions of inheritance in Bangladesh is that they treated the legal rule as if it were the whole story. In reality, women often lose property before any courtroom or registry office becomes involved. Family pressure operates at the point where a woman decides whether she will claim her share, ask for land records, challenge a partition, or simply remain silent to preserve relationships with brothers and parents.

The evidence on this point is consistent. The HDRC study on rural women's inheritance shows that claiming inherited land can create hostility within the marital household, strain relationships with brothers, and expose women to mental distress, financial cost, and even violence (Human Development Research Centre, n.d.). The same study notes that some women themselves regarded taking inherited land from father, mother, or husband as ethically problematic, reflecting the power of internalized patriarchal norms. This is a striking finding because it shows that dispossession is not always achieved through formal denial; it may also occur through moral conditioning that makes women feel that claiming property is selfish or disruptive.

Khan et al. (2016) similarly found that the practical exclusion of women from property sharing in Bangladesh cannot be explained by doctrine alone. Women's marginalization is closely tied to social practice, including the expectation that men will manage family assets and that women should preserve harmony rather than insist on economic rights. These practices make inheritance an especially difficult right to assert

because the opponent is rarely a remote public institution; it is usually one's own family network.

A woman may therefore have a legal share and still be unable to enjoy it because the social cost of claiming the share is too high. She may fear losing access to her natal home, crisis support, or emotional ties with brothers. In such a setting, formal legal recognition is not enough; reform must address the reasons women are pushed to renounce rights that the law already recognizes at least in part.

6.2 Land Administration, Mutation, Corruption, and Institutional Obstruction

Even when women decide to claim their rights, land administration often becomes the second barrier. Inheritance rights over land are meaningful only if they can be documented, registered, mutated, protected from fraud, and defended in dispute resolution processes. Yet scholarship and policy literature on Bangladesh repeatedly identify serious institutional weaknesses in this area.

Enokwenw et al. (2024) emphasize that despite formal legislation, women still face barriers related to enforcement, transparency of the land registration process, conflict, and social norms. The study frames these barriers not as isolated administrative inconveniences but as structural obstacles to women's land rights. This is particularly important because inheritance is one of the main routes through which women can access land in Bangladesh. If that route is blocked at the registration and mutation stage, the legal share remains symbolic.

The problem is not only delay but also corruption and asymmetry of power. Transparency International Bangladesh (2015) documents the gendered burden of seeking public services, while Begum's (2023) study on e-mutation shows that digital mutation can reduce time, cost, and physical visits compared with the conventional process. The need for such reform itself illustrates how burdensome the older system has been.

Women's wider economic vulnerability makes these administrative barriers even more damaging. The World Bank (2024) reports weak legal and supportive frameworks for women's economic rights in Bangladesh, confirming that inheritance claims depend on a broader institutional environment.

Land ownership data also show how limited women's control over property remains. Earlier estimates suggested that women controlled only 3–5% of farmland in Bangladesh (Table 2). Later BIHS-related figures cited in the literature indicate that women accounted for about 8.5% of landowners in 2011–2012 and 12.1% of rural women's sole or joint ownership in 2015 (Table 2). The same body of evidence indicates that 54% of women's acquired land came from the husband's family, while only about 3% came through khas land allocation, showing how weak women's independent access to productive land remains [Enokwenw et al., (2024); Human Development Research Centre, (HDRC, n.d.); Sultana et al., (2024)] (Table 2).

Table 2. Selected Indicators of Women’s Land Ownership and Inheritance Pathways in Bangladesh

Indicator	Women’s ownership / access	Reference point
Farmland ownership	Earlier estimate: about 3–5%	Rural Bangladesh
Landowners / sole-joint ownership	8.5% (2011–2012); 12.1% (2015)	BIHS-related figures
Inheritance pathway	54% from husband’s family; about 3% from khas land	Women’s land acquisition

Sources: *Enokwenw et al., (2024); Human Development Research Centre, (HDRC, n.d.).*

6.3 International Obligations and the Unfinished Equality Agenda

Bangladesh’s inheritance regime must also be assessed in light of the state’s international obligations. CEDAW has long provided an important benchmark for evaluating discrimination in family and property matters. In its 2016 concluding observations on Bangladesh, the CEDAW Committee urged the state to withdraw its reservations to Articles 2 and 16(1)(c) and expressed concern about discriminatory family laws (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2016). More recently, Bangladesh’s combined ninth and tenth periodic report stated that the state continues to maintain reservations on Articles 2 and 16(1)(c) of the Convention (Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, 2025).

These international materials matter for two reasons. First, they show that inheritance inequality in Bangladesh is not merely a domestic political debate; it has become a continuing issue of treaty compliance and international accountability. Second, they support the argument that equality in inheritance should be treated as part of Bangladesh’s larger commitment to eliminate discrimination against women in law and practice.

This does not mean that all personal laws should be merged overnight into one secular system. Experience from other countries shows that change can happen step by step. However, the state cannot treat inheritance discrimination as a purely cultural issue beyond equality review. Both constitutional law and international human rights law require the state to explain why unequal outcomes still exist and what is being done to improve them. On this issue, progress has clearly been uneven.

7. Comparative Lessons from India and Nepal

The experiences of India and Nepal are useful not because they can be copied mechanically, but because they show two different pathways toward stronger women’s inheritance rights. India’s Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act 2005 is significant because it altered a major religious inheritance system through legislation. The reform recognized daughters as coparceners by birth in the Mitakshara joint family system, placing them on a more equal

footing with sons in ancestral property (Government of India, 1956). The key lesson for Bangladesh is that legislative reform of Hindu inheritance rules is possible in a South Asian setting where religion and family law are socially sensitive subjects.

Nepal offers a second instructive model. The 2006 gender equality reforms amended discriminatory rules and expanded women's control over movable and immovable property (Government of Nepal, 2006). The 2015 Constitution of Nepal went further by explicitly recognizing equal rights to ancestral property and equal rights within family affairs (Government of Nepal, 2015). This sequence shows how legislative reform can be followed by constitutional entrenchment.

Bangladesh does not need to choose between an abrupt uniform code and total inaction. Comparative law suggests a middle path. Hindu women's inheritance can be addressed through codification and targeted equalization, while Muslim women's inheritance can be strengthened through better enforcement of existing shares and carefully tailored amendments dealing with especially unfair outcomes. Administrative reform can proceed across communities without interfering with religious doctrine because accurate records, transparent mutation, and access to justice are institutional rather than theological questions.

8. Pathways to Implementation and Reform

A credible reform agenda for Bangladesh must respond to the actual sources of women's dispossession. Because the problem is layered, the solution must also be layered.

First, Bangladesh should codify Hindu inheritance rules in a way that clearly recognizes daughters and widows as full legal heirs to family property. The present uncodified Dayabhaga structure preserves too much ambiguity and too much room for discriminatory interpretation. Codification would not automatically solve implementation failures, but it would provide a concrete legal text for courts, lawyers, land offices, and citizens. The Indian example shows that legislative reform in this area is both possible and socially intelligible in South Asia.

Second, the state should strengthen the enforcement of Muslim women's existing shares and review targeted statutory reforms where outcomes remain particularly unjust. Section 4 of the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance 1961 shows that legislative intervention within Muslim family law has precedent. Reform need not begin with wholesale restructuring of all shares. It can begin by ensuring that daughters, wives, and mothers receive the portions already guaranteed to them, while reviewing outcomes where daughters remain disadvantaged through residue rules or family manipulation.

Third, inheritance reform must be connected to land administration reform. A right that cannot be recorded, mutated, and defended is not an effective right. Bangladesh should therefore deepen digitization of land records and mutation services, but with explicit gender-sensitive design. E-mutation systems are promising, yet technology alone is not enough. Women must be able to access those systems without dependence on male intermediaries. Legal aid desks, simplified procedures, grievance mechanisms, and proactive notice systems could reduce the opportunities for document concealment and

informal dispossession. The aim should be to turn administrative transparency into a form of women's rights protection.

Fourth, the state should expand legal aid and legal literacy for inheritance disputes. Many women do not know their rights, required documents, or procedures for mutation and partition. Public awareness campaigns in rural areas, union-level legal support, and collaboration with civil society organizations could reduce the gap between entitlement and awareness. This is important because evidence shows women often renounce rights not only due to coercion but also because asserting them is seen as socially costly or legally confusing.

Fifth, Bangladesh should treat inheritance as part of the larger women's economic empowerment agenda. Property ownership affects credit access, resilience to poverty, bargaining power, and participation in economic life. Inheritance reform should therefore be linked with broader policy planning rather than left to isolated private disputes (World Bank, 2024). Ministries concerned with women's affairs, land administration, local government, and legal aid should coordinate around inheritance as both a justice and development issue.

Sixth, constitutional and international equality norms should guide judicial and legislative interpretation. Courts need not resolve every controversy through sweeping pronouncements, but they should avoid interpretations that hollow out women's rights where statutory or constitutional text can support a more equality-sensitive reading. Similarly, the state should move toward narrowing the gap between domestic law and CEDAW principles even where withdrawal of reservations remains politically contested.

Finally, any serious reform strategy must engage with culture rather than pretending culture does not matter. Women often do not claim inheritance because the family cost appears too high. Reform will therefore be more effective if it includes community-level dialogue, local dispute-resolution sensitivity, and engagement with religious scholars, women's organizations, and local leaders. The aim is not to replace law with custom, but to weaken the social penalties attached to women exercising rights. Without such engagement, even good laws may continue to fail in silence.

9. Conclusion

Women's inheritance rights in Bangladesh sit at the intersection of law, religion, family power, and state capacity. The current framework is unequal in more than one way. Muslim women are recognized as heirs but often receive reduced shares and weak enforcement; Hindu women remain more deeply disadvantaged under an uncodified structure that preserves male-line priority; and the Succession Act 1925 shows that a more gender-neutral model is possible in Bangladesh, though its reach remains limited.

Inheritance inequality in Bangladesh cannot be explained by doctrine alone. It is sustained by discriminatory rules, family pressure, weak legal literacy, corruption, and institutional obstacles in land administration. Reform must therefore be both legal and practical. Bangladesh should move toward clearer and more equal rules, stronger enforcement of women's existing claims, modernized land administration, and broader legal aid and public awareness so that women can own, register, use, and defend inherited property.

Declaration of AI Use: Generative artificial intelligence tools were used during the revision of this manuscript for language editing, structural reorganization, and drafting assistance. All legal analysis, source selection, verification, interpretation, and final responsibility for the content remain with the author.

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