

Human Rights of Bangladesh Women

Kazi Shamsun Alam (Bangladesh)

The People's Republic of Bangladesh, since its inception in 1971, has worked for the improvement of women's human rights. Ironically despite many positive steps taken, the situation has yet to reach the desired standard. Women's human rights deteriorated during the War of Liberation as the occupation forces engaged in rape, sexual abuse and torture of women. Earlier women were often perceived as second-class citizen. Presently, the situation has changed dramatically. However, the main impediments to further change is illiteracy and social endowment. Adequate steps have been taken at government level to improve the situation and the result is evident.

Rape is a social immorality that hurts women of our society very much. A study by a Human Right Organization "ODHIKER" indicated a total of 4,195 women and children fell prey to rape throughout the country from 2000 to 2004. Out of this figure, 467 victims were killed after rape and 45 victims committed suicide after rape. However, at the government level, efforts are being made to put the culprits behind bars and bring them to justice. This is one of the heinous crimes that really needs attention socially. Due to illiteracy and social dogma, many rapes are not reported. In a male dominated social system, a raped women does not have a healthy future This is why many cases remain unreported.

Dowry is one of the social evils. Over a period of 4 years since 2000 almost 740 women were killed and 65 others committed suicide over dowries. 283 women suffered from dowry related violence. This is increasing daily despite government enactment of laws for protection of women from dowry related cases. Mass awareness programmes can bring results.

Acid violence is one the worst crimes committed against women. Victims have often found themselves abandoned. Approximately 300 cases occur yearly. A study reflects that nearly 2000 women suffered acid violence since 1999. Despite enactment of law and quick trial procedure such incidents are increasing alarmingly because existing laws cannot be ensured. Good governance and justice is bearing positive fruit. In addition, mass awareness to put an end to acid violence is a dire necessity.

Almost half of our population is women. They were deprived of their equal share and representation in national and social affairs. Women were also unaware of their basic

rights due to their lack of knowledge and illiteracy. They became victims of social discrimination. Although the status of women is low, at present, there are signs of improvement.

Women's contribution in the economic sector, if evaluated properly, should reflect a definite improvement in participation. Now women are entering into economic activities through micro credit investment and garment sectors. A comparative study will show very encouraging results.

Approximately 23 million women or 38% of the population of 15 years old are economically solvent today. In 1981, the figure was 1.5 million or 5.7%. This is really worth mentioning. The comparison may mislead the reader if the rate of population growth rate, improvement of education ratio and employment opportunity are not taken into account.

The overall situation is improving at a slower rate. For example, women's participation in the defense forces was limited to the medical branch. Only now, women have also entered other branches of Army and Navy and Air force through the officer corps. Women are also working in the civil aviation department as commercial pilots. The rate of their participation in banking, Medicare, administrative jobs, executive and judiciary departments as well as other government positions is also noticeable.

Illiteracy has also been identified as a major cause of human right deprivation. At the same time, the government has made a major breakthrough in the education sector. Government completely subsidize educational expenses for girls up to college level. A society that has come through different ideological system historically cannot be overturned in one day. Many government and non-government organizations are working to establish human rights for the women. If the ongoing jointly process will help, women to suffer decreasingly from human right discrimination. Finally we live in an Asian society that differs from western society ideologically, philosophically and value wise. Therefore, the human rights situation also has to be judged from this perspective.