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Are Bangladeshi Women Enjoying Human Rights Properly?

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Abstract: This paper discusses women's rights and violence of women in Bangladesh. Bangladesh is poor, and developing country of the world and most of the people are illiterate and ignorant. Women are not conscious about their rights, so that the oppressions against women are frequent matters here. The government of Bangladesh and various non-government organizations have been trying to equalize the men and women rights. The discriminations between men and women cannot develop a country. This paper suggests the importance of adopting the uniform rule both for men and women and emphasizes the need for social education and awareness programs through the government and non government institutions.

Keywords: Violence against women, Education and employment of women, Women rights.

Introduction

Violence against women is a common but dangerous situation in most societies of Bangladesh and the type of violence is physical or mental. In South Asia it is a common deadly fate of life for millions of women and girls. Here one in every two women faces violence in her home. Violence is an inescapable reality of women's lives, as the social customs and attitudes that support violence against them are entrenched and institutionalized at all levels such as at home, family, community, society, and the state. Breaking the silence on this violence is not an easy, or even a real option for most women and to do so would threaten their lives (Mehta 2004). South Asian women suffer multiple forms of violence including domestic violence, rapes, gang rapes, dowry deaths, sexual harassment, suicides due to domestic physical and mental tortures or stigma after rape, forced marriage, trafficking, and other psychological and financial oppressions. Women and girls are sometimes underestimated by keeping in purda (special dress to cover the body), deprive from education and do not allow for jobs. So that violence against women is consider as a normal situation by the society (Farouk 2005). Some cases pre-natal female fetus' are killed by abortion when parents confirm by ultrasonography that their coming baby will be female. This is because the parents feel the female as a burden of the family.

About half of the populations of Bangladesh are women but the status of women is much lower than those of men. Women are subjected to discrimination and violence within the household, at the workplace and in the society. Men hold the power and resource within families and control any property and family income. Women are considered as men's property, partner of their sexual activity. The income and labor are being systemically controlled by the men in their family (Farouk 2005).

Amnesty International (AI) has documented various forms of human trafficking around the world as violations of human rights. If the human trafficking prevention and curbing bill approved in the Parliament then the human trafficking will consider as the long list of capital offences. AI acknowledges the states' responsibility to take action against those who lure individuals into situations where they will be trafficked. The state improved work and education opportunities for girls and boys equally, empowering poor and destitute families not to be tricked by the deceptive promises the traffickers will make to

them. Government should bring all the accused persons related to trafficking to justice in fair trails without the recourse to the death penalty ([Amnesty International Public Statement 2011](#)).

Violence against women in Bangladesh is widespread that is a growing human rights concern for the society. Rape is one of the most brutal forms of violence against women in Bangladesh. Sometimes men not only rape women, but also physically torture and murder the victims as well. In the last few years, gang rape has become the prevalent form of rape in Bangladesh. Several men kidnap a woman, take her to an isolated place, and take turns raping her ([Farouk 2005](#)). Incidents of rape are frequently reported in the media and victims rarely go to the police and takes little steps of legal action for the fear of reprisal. Sometimes human right defenders and NGOs want to work for the victims but they remain at risk of attack and intimidation ([Amnesty International 2011](#)).

[UNDP \(2003\)](#) exposes how women in this region remain deeply vulnerable and disadvantaged; indicators for literacy, health, economic activities, work burden, empowerment, and political participation are among the lowest in the world. A recent World Bank regional brief for South Asia reinforces the message that women are in crisis; stating that 56% of South Asian women are illiterate, and one third of all maternal deaths in the world occur here.

Women's Highest and Lowest Position in Various Sectors of the World

At present world Iceland is the highest for political participation, education, employment and health index for equalization of men and women, Yemen is in the worst and Afghanistan is in the most dangerous position for this type of equalization. Mid African country Rwanda is the highest in female majority Parliament Members. Here 45 among 80 seats of Parliament are in the possession of women and in the lowest positions are Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Qatar, Oman, as these countries have no female member in the Parliament. For maternity healthcare Norway is in the highest position and maternity mortality risk is one in 7,600 , on the other hand this rate is worst in Afghanistan. The Japanese women are long lived in the world and average age is 87 years. In Lesotho the average age is the lowest and it is 48 years. In sport among the highest 10 income owners of the world 5 are of the USA and in the Saudi Arabia no women take part in the Olympic game. In Qatar six women take higher degree in the university against one man. The income of male and female are equal both in Norway and Luxembourg, and Saudi Arabian women are in the lowest income in the world. Sri Lankan women lead the country highest for 23 years but Spain and Sweden have no women ruler yet. In Lesotho 95% women are literate and in Ethiopia this rate is the lowest 18% ([The Prothom Alo 2012b](#)).

United Nations Definition on Violence against Women

In 1993, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the declaration on the elimination of violence against women. The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, UN Resolution 48/104 defines violence against women as any act of gender based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether in public or private life. The Beijing Platform for

Action retakes the above definition and stresses that “in all societies, to a greater or lesser degree, women and girls are subjected to physical, sexual and psychological abuse that cuts across lines of income, class and culture” ([Violence Against Women in Bangladesh 2001](#)). The definition of violence against women in the declaration is the internationally accepted definition and states violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not limited to, physical, sexual, and psychological violence perpetrated by family members, the community, or the state. The forms of violence specifically mentioned in the document include battery, dowry related violence, sexual abuse of children, rape, marital rape, female genital mutilation, sexual harassment, trafficking, forced prostitution, and others ([Farouk 2005](#)).

Women’s Right in the Society

The legal system of Bangladesh is based on common law, which was applied during the colonial regime of British-India. One of them is personal law, and it is shaped by religious law or customs. This personal law includes; marriage, divorce, dower, maintenance, guardianship, inheritance and so on. A careful examination of this religious law shows that women are not equal to men. This truth is not only applicable in Muslim personal law, but also equally true with Hindu personal law. The global average sex ratio is 101.7 which means that there are 101.7 boys for 100 girls. In Europe and North America there are 105 women for 100 men. In Bangladesh, for every 100 females there are 102.3 males. For India, Pakistan and China the corresponding figures are 106.8, 106.1 and 107.9, respectively ([Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat 2008](#)). In 1980 females per 100 males were 94.2 but in 2010 this figure becomes 97.8. As a result Bangladesh received an United Nations award for its remarkable achievements in attaining the Millennium Development Goals particularly in reducing child mortality ([The Daily Star 2010](#)). The United Nation’s projection for 2010-2015 shows that Bangladesh will continue to see a faster decline in the female infant mortality rate (35 female deaths per 1,000 live births against 39.4 male deaths per 1,000 live births). Total fertility rates (TFR) in Bangladesh have declined from 6.85 children per woman in 1970-75 to 2.36 in 2005-2010. The TFR is projected to approach a replacement level (2.1) in the period of 2015-2020 ([Islam and Dogra 2011](#)). According to the Constitution of Bangladesh all citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of the law. The state shall not discriminate against any citizen on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. Women have equal rights with men in all spheres of the state and public life. The State takes responsibility to ensure non-discrimination among its citizens and maintain gender equality. Social norms, education, employment and legal rights and gender inequality in Bangladesh are all perpetuated by patriarchy. Most cases women are considered as men’s property for their sexual activity. The whole management system in most of the families is controlled by the men and also controls any property and family income. From their childhood, women are forced to live in a culture, which tolerates and even permits inhuman treatment to them ([Farouk 2005](#)).

In Bangladesh, the majority of the population is Muslim, although several other minority communities exist. The term minority referred to in Bangladesh socio-political context includes religious minorities such as Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and ethnic

and cultural minorities. Under the 1961 Muslim Family Ordinance, female heirs inherit less than male relatives do, and wives have fewer divorce rights than husbands. Women however are prohibited from polyandry. Men are permitted to have up to four wives, but this right rarely is exercised. Under the law, a Muslim husband is required to pay his ex-wife maintenance for only 3 months, but this rarely is enforced. Both Muslim and non-Muslim women face gender discrimination under their personal laws. Under the Muslim law of inheritance a son receives double what a daughter receives. Similarly a Muslim mother's custodial right is severely restricted; a mother loses her custodial right the moment she marries a man unrelated to her child. This reinforces the patriarchal notion that children belong to their father's family (Farouk 2005). Polygamy of up to four wives is permitted for a Muslim man if he has legally take written permission from his current wives. In practically the wife's permission is obtained through coercion, threat and violence. Hindus form the largest group among the minority communities. Culturally and educationally, having highest literacy, it is a most advanced and dominant community not only among the minorities but also among the majorities. A Hindu woman receives no share of the paternal property and a Hindu widow is incapable of contracting a second valid marriage (Farouk 2005). A Hindu widow has no right of her husband's property and sometimes has to depend on her sons' income. Some cases she may assault by her family members.

Bangladesh government accepted to the UN Optional Protocol to the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. The government also has enacted laws specifically prohibiting certain forms of discrimination against women, including the Anti-Dowry Prohibition Act of 1980, the Cruelty to Women Law of 1983, and the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act of 1995, which was replaced by the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act of 2000. However, enforcement of these laws is weak, especially in rural areas.

Married women in Bangladesh are not fully aware of their own sexual and reproductive rights, and have only limited control over their own bodies. A woman's freedom of choice regarding sexual intercourse, birth control, pregnancy, pre-natal care, and abortion are decided by her husband and his family members. A man sometimes intercourse with his wife against her opinion and she is a passive participant to satisfy her husband only. Sometimes he threats his wife of taking second wife if she does not take part of intercourse according to his wish. Often there is a pressure from the husband's family for the wife to male offspring. Hence sometimes a young woman might begin conceiving at a very early age and endure several consecutive pregnancies in the hope of a male offspring and if she fails to give a male child then physical and psychological oppressions begin upon her.

Many women remain neglected during the pregnancy; provide low food and insufficient medical treatment. In fact, about 37% of all deaths of reproductive aged women are due to maternity related issues.

Women have been more politically stable from 1990s. A quota has ensured women's presence in the local government and National Parliament. Women came in politics by the practice of inherited politics, through the social work and student politics but women have to face ominous challenges. The top leaders of the two largest parties of Bangladesh are women. They became leaders during crisis periods but have been successful to unify

factors of their respective parties. The actual number of women members in different political parties cannot be determined at this moment, because the members are not listed with gender basis. There is limited female involvement in party hierarchical positions. Women leaders and party workers engage in canvassing voters for their party candidates. Voting exercises of women in the recent elections are satisfactory.

About 47% of Bangladeshi women experience some physical violence at the hands of their intimate partners. If psychological violence were included, the figure would be much higher. Every week, more than ten women in Bangladesh suffer from an acid attack that leaves them brutally disfigured and often blind and disabled ([Acid Survivors Foundation 2003](#)). A study in Bangladesh shows that 32% of women working outside their homes experience disruption of their work due to incidents of domestic violence ([UNFPA 2003](#)). South Asia has about 40% of the total number of people living in poverty in the world, and about 400 million people affected by hunger. Currently an estimated 50 million women are 'missing' from the population due to gender-discriminatory practices ([Sen 2003](#)). One in six deaths of a female infant in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan is because of negligence and discrimination. Culture-specific forms of violence include domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment, incest, trafficking, honor killings, acid attacks, public mutilation, stove-burnings, and forced temple prostitution ([UNIFEM 2003](#)). In the report of Pakistan Human Rights Commission expresses that 943 women and girls were killed in 2011 for honor. Here women are considered as a second class citizen and there are no laws against family violence ([The Prothom Alo 2012b](#)).

In Bangladesh maternal and neonatal mortality and malnutrition rates remain unacceptably high. Maternal mortality is about 320 per 100,000 live births, and neonatal deaths account for two-thirds of all infant deaths.

From 2006 to 2010 about 4.9 millions of women workers joined in labor sector. In this period the unemployment of women decreases from 7% to 5.8% ([Bangladesh Statistical Bureau 2010](#)). At present about 16.2 millions female officers and workers are working in various sectors of Bangladesh. About 9.1 millions women are involved in domestic works and 0.2 million women workers are working abroad. These women are working in the Middle-East, the rest of Asia and Africa but parts of them are victim of various violence ([The Prothom Alo 2012a](#)). The maternity leave of women in Bangladesh is six months but this facility is not enjoying garment workers and some other non-government organizations and some private sectors workers which are discrimination with women.

Women's Position in Local and National Election

The Constitution of the People's Republic Bangladesh drafted in 1972 guarantees certain rights and privileges to women as fundamental rights. The constitutional guarantees ensure that women of Bangladesh possess full political rights with men. According to the United Nations views women empowerment consists of five components as follows:

- women's sense of self-worth,
- their right to have and to determine choices,
- their right to have access to opportunities and resources,
- their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home, and

- their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.

The National Policy for the Advancement of Women, which was declared by the Prime Minister and the leader of Awami League (AL), Sheikh Hasina, on March 8, 1997. The main goals of the policy are as follows (Mahtab 2003):

- Establish equality between men and women in all spheres.
- Eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and girls.
- Establish women human rights.
- Develop women as human resource.
- Recognize women's contribution in social and economic spheres.
- Eliminate poverty among women.
- Establish equality between men and women in administration, politics, education, games, sports and all other socio-economic spheres.
- Eliminate all forms of oppression against women and girls.
- Ensure empowerment of women in the fields of politics, administration and the economy.
- Develop appropriate technology for women.
- Ensure adequate health and shelter to women.
- Provide housing and shelter to women.
- Create positive images of women in the media.
- Take special measures for women in especially disadvantaged situations.

Increasing empowerment around the world, especially women's empowerment, is one of the hallmarks of the current wave of globalization. In South Asia, Sri Lanka emerged as a pioneer of sorts in terms of the process of women empowerment. Bangladesh has made significant progresses in empowerment in the recent years. After the independent of Bangladesh in 1973 women were first elected in local union parishad (UP) election. 1997 is a political empowerment year for women in Bangladesh, because the government of Bangladesh enacted a law for direct elections to reserve seats for women in local level elections. In 1997 through an Act, the government reserved three seats for women in the union parishad where women members are elected from each of the three respective wards. The women can contest for the general seats apart from the reserved seats. About 12,828 women were elected as members in the 1997 UP election. But 20 women chairpersons and 110 women members were elected for the general seats. The majority of women representatives regularly attended in the parishad meetings and expressed their valuable comments. Most of them are also involve with social activities such as mass education, family planning, immunization, handicrafts, relief activity, and shalish (mediation in the village court). The National Institute of Local Government are training women on various development related issues, legal aid, and organizational structure of local bodies and their roles and functions to enable them play their role effectively (Women Rights in Bangladesh 2000).

Two elected women Prime Ministers have headed the government of Bangladesh for the last 20 years (during the national elections male caretaker governments have headed for about 3 years) and at the same period the head of the opposition parties in parliament

were also women. Hence for the last 20 years the highest policy makers in Bangladesh were women. Participation of women as electoral candidates increased considerably in the 2008 national election. About 155 women from different parties contested for general seats, among them 19 were elected. Before 1996, women were never given full responsibility over any important ministry. In 2008 the Awami League (AL) came into supreme power with a strong mandate to implement its election promises, which included restoring women's rights to inheritance through legal reform in family laws and to place women in key governance positions by enforcing the reservation of seats for women in Parliament, local government, and all levels of government services. The AL takes attempts for the implementation of the proposed National Women's Development Policy, which will establish gender equality at all levels of national life, and help to ensure the economic and political empowerment of women. The long-awaited Domestic Violence Act is enacted by Parliament, and the Local Government Law has reserved seats for women to be directly elected (Britt et al. 2010). In 2008 record numbers of women were allocated important Cabinet portfolios of Home, Foreign Affairs, Agriculture, and Labor. In addition a woman was made deputy leader of the House and another deputy whip of the majority party. In parliamentary standing committees, 57 women were appointed members, but only one woman became a chair of the Standing Committee on Women and Children Affairs (Human Rights in Bangladesh 2009)

Female representation in local and national government has been ensured with the reservation of one-third of seats, but few women have won party endorsement to contest general seats. All political parties have delayed introducing direct elections to the reserved seats in parliament, since these seats are used as patronage resources and in negotiations for forming coalitions (Nazneen et al. 2011).

Trafficking of Women

Human trafficking is considered as the third largest source of profit for organized crime, following arms and drug trafficking. Trafficking is performed for various purposes such as labor, prostitution, organ transplant, drug couriers, arm smuggling etc. (Sarkar 2011). It is very difficult to collect data on trafficking, as the trade is secretive, the women and girls are silenced, the traffickers are dangerous and not many agencies are counting (Hughes 2000). Trafficking of women is a serious problem in developing countries around the globe, and particularly in South Asia. Due to absence of social protection, economic security and legal support, an alarming number of women from the poor families become easy victims of trafficking. As trafficking and sexual exploitation is a crosscutting issue in this subcontinent, it has become a growing concern especially across borders. The problem is more acute for a country like Bangladesh that shares a porous border with India. As there is a heavy demand for women and girls traffickers takes trafficking as a highly profitable business. The organized gangs of traffickers often lure young women and girls with false promises of better jobs or false proposals of love and marriage. Bangladeshi women and girls are more innocent and attractive, so that they become the first target of traffickers. Victims of trafficking are generally trafficked for forced prostitution, for purposes of organ transplants and slave labor. Accurate statistical data about the number of women trafficked from Bangladesh to serve the sex trade in neighboring countries is absent. The trafficked victims end up in brothels where they are

sold for sexual exploitation or serve as street sex workers in India, Pakistan and the Middle East. Although the government has enacted stringent laws and implemented various policies to combat this menace, trafficking continues to be a significant problem in Bangladesh (Farouk 2005). Special target of traffickers are Bangladeshi girls, because the customers think that girls are virgins and are less likely to be infected with HIV. There is blind belief that intercourse with a virgin girl cures a person's STDs (sexually transmitted diseases), though there is no evidence for this belief. Traffickers use Kolkata of India as the trafficking point for other destinations such as India, Pakistan and Middle-east for Bangladeshi women and girls (Sarkar 2011).

The present form and nature of trafficking can be explained by poverty and social disintegration. The spread of wage employment or bonded labor such as domestic labor, women working in the sex trade, in entertainment (camel jockeys), child abuse, and organ trading can be identified as demand factors of trafficking.

Violence in Women's Rights

Violence against women is one of the dangerous situations of human rights abuses in Bangladesh. Women and girls face manifold problems such as several molestations, abductions followed by rape and forced marriages (The State of Human Rights in Bangladesh 2009). In Bangladesh traditionally men have been in a dominant position and women in a submissive one. In Bangladeshi law, dowry has been given an extended meaning "whatever is presented whether before or after marriage under demand, compulsion or pressure as consideration for the marriage can be said to be dowry" (The Women and Children Repression Prevention Act 2000). The emergence of dowry is more due to greed and commercialization of marriage than the impact of traditional culture. Rising unemployment has contributed to the phenomenon; as more and more young men are unable to find employment, their families use marriage and dowry demand as a source of income (The Annual Report on Violence against Women in Bangladesh 2002). The grooms and their families demand large sums of money or property from the would-be bride's family as a precondition to the marriage agreement. In most cases the bride's family pays part of the dowry before the marriage and promises to pay the remainder soon after the marriage. If the bride's family fails to meet the deadline, her husband and in-laws abuse verbally and physically her to compel her father's family to pay. In many cases the abuse becomes severe in nature, such as acid throwing, severely beaten, burnt by kerosene and even murdered (Farouk 2005).

Social expectations of women are still pivot around child rearing and household management. Much of the violence against women is due to dowries which are illegal in the laws of Bangladesh. Human rights group and press reports indicate that incidents of vigilantism against women sometimes led by religious leaders. The major violence of these types against women are humiliating, painful punishments such as the whipping of women accused of moral offenses. Acid throwing to women is another offence which disfigured the faces. In 2000 a total of 3,516 rapes and 3,523 incidents of spousal abuses were officially reported. The law prohibits rape and physical spousal abuse, but it makes no specific provision for spousal rape as a crime. Of the spousal abuse cases, 2,814 were related to disputes over dowry. In 2000 about 2,130 alleged rapists were prosecuted and 63% were convicted. According to Odhikar (2007) from 2001 to 2007 a total of 5,816

women and children were reportedly raped across the country. Among them 636 women were killed after being raped and 69 committed suicides after the incident. At this period about 1,024 women were the victimized of acid violence. During this time a total of 1,884 women fell victim to dowry related violence, of them 1,241 women were killed, 479 were brutally tortured, 61 suffered acid burns and 95 committed suicide (Odhikar 2007). Excessive mortality among women due to discrimination has resulted in a sex ratio in the population of 105 men to every 100 women (Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh 2001). Daily news reports are filled with atrocities including physical and psychological torture, sexual harassment, sexual assault, rape, dowry related violence, trafficking, forced prostitution, coerced suicide and murder.

In 2009, Ain o Salish Kendra (Centre for law and mediation in the village court) recorded from 15 national newspapers of Bangladesh and found that 446 were raped, in which 158 women were victims of gang rape and 62 were murdered after rape. About 281 women were reported to have been subjected to domestic violence, 285 women to torture for dowry, out of which 194 died, about 63 incidents of acid throwing happened on women. The following table gives the comparative data on violence against women from 2003 to 2009 (Human Rights in Bangladesh 2009).

Table 1: comparative data on violence against women from 2003 to 2009.

Category of Violence	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Acid attacks	249	228	130	142	95	80	63
Domestic violence	705	616	689	635	577	608	566
Dowry related violence	374	352	356	334	294	296	285
Rape	948	618	585	515	436	486	446
Gang rape	433	359	250	226	198	127	158
Fatwa	46	35	46	39	35	20	35
Total	2,755	2,268	2,056	1,891	1,635	1,617	1,553

Women are subjected to discrimination and violence within the household, at the workplace and in the society. The overall status of women is not equal as like men but some cases such as voting exercise and some other affirmative interventions have guarantees of gender equality.

In Bangladesh, victimized women usually try to avoid of taking the legal process as they became more stigmatized by the society. They do not want to file cases because of negligence and harassment in police station, courts and society. Often police will not take their complaints, unless they are compelled to do so by pressure from a higher authority. After complaint the existing legal process is elaborate, time consuming. Some cases the victim cannot run the case due to the expenses involved in seeking legal redress such as lawyer's fees, court fees, and other incidental expenses. Hence the poor, illiterate, and disadvantaged rural women dare to take legal action. As a result brutal attacks on women have become commonplace and widespread across the country (Farouk 2005).

The rate of reported violent acts against women has risen consistently and at an alarming rate, especially since the early 1990's. In table-2 the data has been taken from 22 police stations in the capital city (Dhaka) from 2001 to 2004 (Annual Report on Violence against Women in Bangladesh 2002). The results of the data are less than the

actual incidence. Because all the victims do not go to police stations, since in maximum cases police avoids filing the cases related to women violence.

Table 2: Reports from 22 police stations in Dhaka from 2001 to 2004.

Year	Rape	Sexual Haras- sment	Abdu- ction	Dowry	Child Traffi- cking	Women Traffi- cking	Acid Thro- wing	Burn	Ran- som	Total
2001-02	228	74	262	274	31	25	13	16	35	959
02-03	281	87	380	381	36	29	15	20	25	1254
03-04	291	136	425	451	38	67	9	22	47	1486
Total	800	297	1067	1106	105	121	37	58	107	3699

Discrimination in law, practice and violence against women are widespread in Bangladesh. Whether at home, work places or educational institutions; violence or threats of violence are endemic. NGOs and some other social welfare organizations are concerned about discriminations and violence against women and call upon the government of Bangladesh to (Odhikar and FIDH 2011):

- Remove all discriminatory provisions in law related to marriage, dower, maintenance, custody, divorce, inheritance, guardianship, adoption, wages and other areas.
- Adopt adequate legislation against domestic violence and sexual harassment.
- Reinforce efficacy of laws in place that have failed to provide redress to victims of violence and discrimination.
- Reorganize justice system to make it women friendly, including legislating on victims and witness protections.

Purdah rules seek to minimize interactions between persons of the opposite sex (Amin et al. 1998). Domestic violence incidences are fairly common and widespread across the country. Women of all economic levels are vulnerable to maltreatment and abuse by husbands, in-laws, and other family members. Bangladeshi women from an early age are taught to be submissive, tolerant, and self-sacrificing. The social belief that a woman's place is in her husband's home is also deeply rooted in women's self-view and self-worth. These social values make it extremely difficult for women to assert themselves and speak out against domestic violence women are reluctant to complain of domestic violence or file cases against their husbands out of fear of unrelenting social stigmatization (Farouk 2005). In Bangladesh most of the family's women are relegated to domestic matters and men are given charge of all matters outside the house (Kibria 1995). Girls are not expected to use education in their adult lives and their education is thus relatively neglected as compared to that of boys. Poor families also think that investing in a girls' education will not bring them any returns since after marriage they will go permanently to their husband's home. Sometimes girls are married in their teenage years since dowry demands increase with a girl's age and have early pregnancies. This practice continues to be widespread despite the existence of the Child Marriage Restraint Act since 1983. Again parents also fear that older unmarried girls may face sexual harassment or rape (Rashid 2006). When a young unmarried girl becomes pregnant not only does she stand to be condemned by her community (in some cases she becomes the subject of fatwas), her parents and family are also punished with social

isolation and shaming. For the past few years, government of Bangladesh, NGOs and various women welfare organizations have helped to bring positive changes such as a greater demand for girls' education, involvement of women in micro-credit activities and a reduction in fertility (Bates et al. 2003). Hence it is true that the condition of girls and women in Bangladeshi society has improved but wide gender disparities still exist (Khosla 2009).

Wife beating is the most commonly occurring act of domestic violence in Bangladesh. An international report published by the UN in 2000 ranked Bangladesh first in wife beating and found that nearly half of the adult female population surveyed reported physical abuse by their husbands. Husbands physically assault wives for even minor mistakes, such as an unsatisfactory meal, an untidy room, a conversation with another man, or any act of disagreement or disobedience (Farouk 2005). They are considered to be the decision makers in the house and have the right to beat women when they behave unacceptably. Many believe that this right to be grounded in religious doctrine and some had heard that, according to Islamic texts, the parts of their bodies beaten by their husbands would go to heaven but in Muslim law has no such rule (Violence against Women in Bangladesh 2001). From childhood boys are treated differently from their sisters by their parents and other family members. They grow to believe that they are more valuable and more deserving than women, and their opinions and views should have more weight than any woman's. The religious interpretations have also provided men with the justification to chastise wives for disobedience and bring them back to the correct path (so called). So that most of the men believes that wife beating is a virtue and justified action for the family and the society.

Bangladesh has the highest worldwide incidence of acid violence and, acid burns constitute 9% of the total global burn injuries in Bangladesh. A recent study reveals that land disputes account for 27% of acid attacks, followed by 18% for family disputes, 10% for refusal of sex, 8% for refusal of romantic relationship, 5% for dowry conflicts, 4% for marital disputes, 3% for refusal of marriage proposal, 2% for political enmity, and the remaining 23% for unknown reasons (Acid Survivors Foundation 2003). The physical effects of acid are dangerous; it melts skin and muscle, and can dissolve bones, and the loss of eye sight, the scarring and disfigurement is often become permanent. Besides the immense physical pain of acid attacks, the victims also suffer from a lifetime of stigmatization, an inability to study or work, living in shame, hiding the disfigurement with a veil, and retreating to social isolation. Very rare case a man agrees to marry an acid burned woman (Farouk 2005).

Violence Women by Fatwa

According to Islamic law, 'fatwa' is a religious decree based on Islamic principles pronounced by a religious scholar. But in Bangladesh this notion has been totally misconceived and is used by half educated village mullahs (clerics) who actually are not scholars in Islam. The mullahs through the informal village justice system (shalish) punish women for so-called anti-social or immoral activities. In almost all the cases women are brought before the shalish simply for their involvement in extra marital affairs, marrying a man from different religion, giving birth to a child before marriage, complications due to oral divorce pronounced to a woman by her husband and so on.

They always argue that female emancipation is not part of Allah's plan. People's lack of knowledge about the law and religion, poor education and absence of social awareness are the key factors, which allow fatwa to be issues. Punishment awarded by a fatwa is variable but include awarding 'hilla' (intervening marriage) to another man (According to Muslim law once a divorce between husband and wife has become official, the man cannot remarry the same woman unless she goes through an intervening marriage with another man and the second marriage is lawfully terminated after consummation. The object of this law was to prevent Muslim men from arbitrary divorce.), punishing with lashes, social boycott, stoning, divorce, and physical violence (Farouk 2005). In the year 2000, in the High Court Division of Bangladesh a case concerning hilla a forced marriage caused by a fatwa given by a local Imam was declared illegal. There is no place for fatwa in Bangladesh's legal system, because laws are enacted in the Parliament and applied through the courts (Hossain 2003). Lack of information on the legal procedures regarding divorce leads to many women ending up homeless and abandoned by their husbands. Verbal declarations of divorce or "talaq" is not acceptable in the eyes of the law, yet in rural areas many women are considered divorced from their husbands, not only by the couple themselves but also by other members of their community, when the word "talaq" is mentioned thrice by the man (Violence against Women in Bangladesh 2001). An assumption shared by feminist scholars is that the patriarchal postcolonialist state reinforces gender inequality and sanctions injustices against women. In Islam, marriage involves sharing between the two halves of society. Its objectives, besides perpetuating human life, are emotional well-being and spiritual harmony. Its bases are love and mercy. It also indicates legalization of sexual intercourse, and provides a license to produce children. Therefore, in Islam extra-marital sexual relations are prohibited, let alone reproduction (Hossain 2003).

Prophet of Islam, Mohammad (SAS) said, among lawful things, divorce is most disliked by Allah. The general ground for divorce in the Qur'an (The Holy Book of Islam) is perceived as a hopeless failure of one or both parties to discharge their marital duties and to consort with each other in kindness, peace and compassion. The right to divorce is, however, conferred upon men, not on women (Hossain 2003).

Food Serves for Women

In most of the families women are often the last to eat the low quantities of food available for them. Because culturally they have to eat after their husbands, children, and in-laws feast even when they are pregnant. As a result, maternal and neonatal mortality and malnutrition rates remain unacceptably high. Maternal mortality is about 320 per 100,000 live births, and neonatal deaths account for two-thirds of all infant deaths. About 30% of adult Bangladeshi women are chronically malnourished. A woman's education level and ability to control household resources are strongly associated with improvements in nutrition status for the entire family. When women are able to make decisions about the types of food to prepare and feeding preferences among siblings, nutrition levels improve even in households that have similar budgets (Britt et al. 2010).

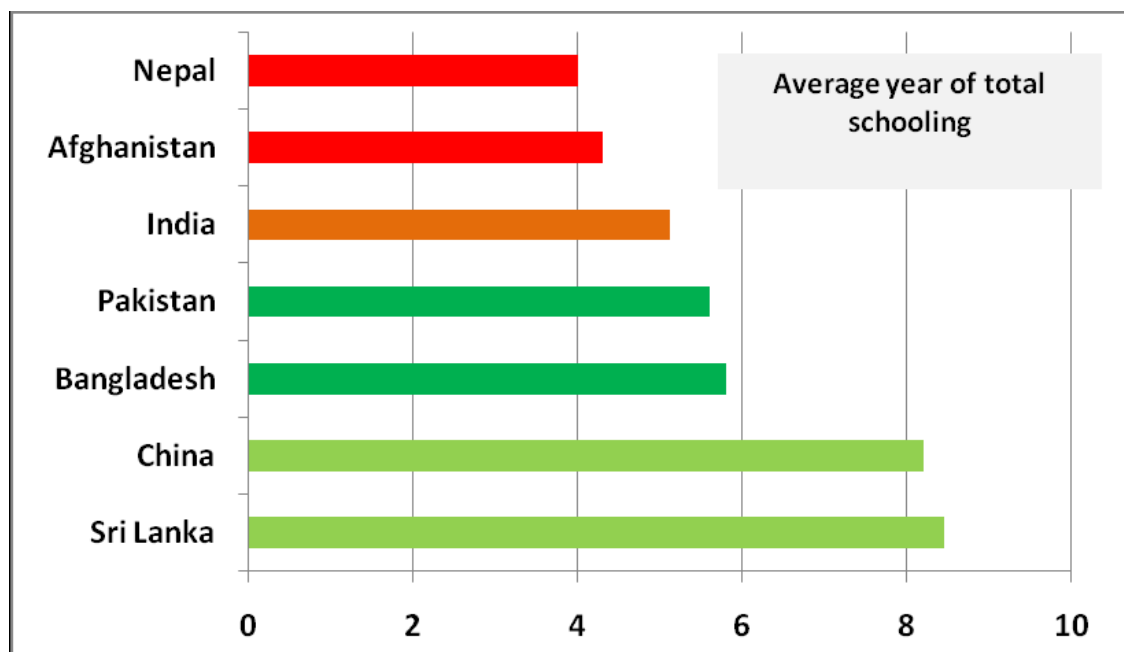
Women Education in Bangladesh

In most part of Bangladesh, women remain in a subordinate position and the government has not acted effectively to establish their basic freedoms. Most cases

women are not conscious about their rights due to high illiteracy rates and unequal education opportunities, strong social stigma and lack of income support. In 2000, literacy rates were about 26% for women and compared with 49% for men. In 2012 about 50% primary and secondary school students are female. Many NGOs operate programs to raise women's awareness of their rights and encourage them. Recently female higher education increases in Bangladesh. Female enrolment in Bangladesh has been increased, due to the introduction of a cash transfer scheme, namely, the female secondary stipend programme (FSS), in 1994. Bangladesh has made marked strides in female enrolment in primary and secondary education; it needs to put enormous effort into improving its female enrolment in tertiary education (Islam and Dogra 2011). The total literacy rate for females is still lower than for their male counterparts due to the former low enrolment in tertiary education. Social consciousness such as to arrange marriage after make the women highly educated has grown in most of the families and some cases parents first try to establish their daughter as an employee before marriage.

Bangladesh has progressed more than most of its South Asian neighbors, but Sri Lanka, in terms of average years of total schooling. When it comes to education attainment of females to males, the country outshone all of its South Asian neighbors and China, particularly in primary and secondary enrolments (figure-1).

Figure 1: Average years of total schooling in Bangladesh and selected countries of Asia. **Source:** Barro and Lee (2010).



Employment Situation of Women

The average Bangladeshi woman earns half of what a man makes in the country, which is higher than in India, Pakistan and Afghanistan but lower than in China, Sri

Lanka and Nepal (Islam and Dogra 2011). Employment opportunities for women than men have increased in the last two decades. In recent years there has been a significant change in the attitude towards women taking up outside employment. With the breakup of the extended family, greater numbers of women are seeking employment. About 80% workers in the export garment industry in Dhaka and Chittagong are women and about 90% health and family planning workers in rural areas are women. In primary school 60% teacher are female. Now women are doing jobs in police department, defenses, universities, banks, health, private sectors, journalism and in every government jobs and NGOs. Women who are employees face the threat of violence from the public because they are outside the home and from their employer, who are usually male, who are skeptical about women holding positions of responsibility. Women officers and workers in every sector work efficiently and some cases women are more efficient than men. Some cases women workers are paid lower wage than her male counterpart who undertakes similar work which is a discrimination of gender.

Attempt to Future Development

Following the declaration of UN Decade of Women (1976-85), the government of Bangladesh and some NGOs have undertaken several programmes for the advancement of women. Simultaneously the women's movement has played an important role in enhancing women's participation in every sphere of life in order to achieve equality. As a result, over the last two decades, women in Bangladesh have gradually become more visible in the labor force, in development programmes, and local institutions such as local government bodies. Grameen Bank, Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), and some other organizations initiated micro-credit loan system, so that a lot of women are involving with earnings and employments. In Bangladesh child marriage is decreased and in future it may be extinct. Deaths due to maternity decrease and infertility rate increases. We hope that in the next decade women violation will decrease.

At present there are 80 universities in Bangladesh of which 53 are private and 27 are public. Recently 8 new private universities are permitted to start by the government of Bangladesh and two other are under consideration. The demand for educational opportunities seems to have increased dramatically. Female higher education both in rural and urban areas increase rapidly and will increase continually due to social consciousness. The violence against women will decrease if the women become highly educated and increasing higher education indicates future development of women of Bangladesh.

Concluding Remarks

More than 100 million girls and women in South Asia face discrimination. Female babies are killed before birth through sex-selective abortions and die prematurely through violence by their family and the society. The pervasive culture of gender-based violence in Bangladesh has eroded women's fundamental rights to life, health, security, bodily integrity, political participation, food, work, and shelter. This situation will not just be changed by state laws and international agreements. If both men and women realize that violence against women is a serious offence, then the violence and discrimination in society will decrease. Government and other NGOs must grow the consciousness of the

Mohajan, H.K. (2012), Are Bangladeshi Women Enjoying Human Rights Properly? *International Journal of Mainstream Social Science*, 2(1): 43–56.

women rights in the every stage of the society. We have tried our best to introduce aspects of violation of women of Bangladesh.

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