

WOMEN'S RIGHTS: BANGLADESH PERSPECTIVE

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A society is measured on the status of women acknowledged and enjoyed in that society.

Women of all continents can look back that they were once marginalized from the mainstream of society and have come out a long way from that position on the basis of equality, justice, peace and development.

The origin of women's subordination, it is argued, lies in political theories, propounded by men. The concern for individual autonomy and freedom for men has later been extended to a concern for women's equality, freedom and autonomy. Female writer such as Mary Wollstonecraft is the venerable classical precursor in advocating women's equality with men and their rights.

Mary Wollstonecraft (mother of Mary Shelley) believed that inequalities between men and women are created and sustained by male-dominated society, which therefore needs to be changed.

In 1792, she published her most important work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, whose content created a storm in society. She argued for the equality of women with men, including female voting rights and pointed out that the ways in which the nature of most women was created by the education chosen for them by men, and perpetuated by the social structures imposed by men.

Women Rights & Peace:

The two concepts-women's rights and peace- have been interlinked because promotion of women's rights promotes peace. In other words, peace prevails in society when women's rights are established and protected as those with men.

If women are allowed to have a say in public life as integral part of human rights, it is argued that international peace shall prevail. Many female writers argue that women are, by nature and nurture, pacific.

Women's natural alienation from war arises from the contradiction between mothering and war. Nonviolence, is a natural extension of maternal practice, and represents the powerful image of the "Moral

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Mother”, symbol of compassionate vision of women as innately pacifist. Some argue that there is a logical connection between maternity and pacifism in the liberal principle of the inalienable right to life and liberty underlying both.

The implicit corollary of innately peaceful women is that men are inherently warmongering. There is also a connection between male aggressiveness and war and patriarchy and militarism.

UN & Women’s Rights:

After the UN was set up in 1945, promotion for human rights for men and women have been come to fore. First the 1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights, followed by the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the most important one for women’s rights is the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Under the Convention, “discrimination against women” shall mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality with men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.

This definition is very comprehensive and covers all women’s rights as those for men. States-parties are obliged to adopt legislative and administrative measures for rights of women on an equal basis with men.

The UN Commission of Status of Women held Women’s Rights Conference in 1995 in Beijing and in New York in 2000. The two conferences have focused promotion of women’s rights and mechanisms for promotion and protection in this field.

Factors against women’s rights:

Some say this is because poverty among women in developing countries impedes the promotion of human rights for them. Elimination of poverty is the mother of human rights and until and unless poverty is eliminated, poor women will not be able to secure their rights.

Another reason is the lack of education among women. Unless women are educated, they will not know their rights. According

education for women and girls will automatically generate an environment in which women cannot be denied their basic rights.

In traditional economies, women's role was not recognized in the field of economic development. Traditional economists did not construe women as belonging in the economic sphere as exceptions. Moreover a typical bread earner is pre-eminently masculine.

Esther Boserup's work titled, *Women's role in Economic Development* (1989) is undoubtedly seminal in underlying the difficulties of women. Although she argues that recruitment of women into various sectors of work has accelerated economic development, it has impacted on women differently in different societies. Technology and cash crops often benefited men while increasing women's burden.

Although nationally various approaches towards women's rights are promoted, modernization, according to some writers, has tended to consolidate patriarchy and expand its control, because women have inadequate access to resources and receive low wages.

Another important issue is who decides when to have children. It is men who control it. As far as rural women are concerned, hard work without relief from reproductive tasks increases women's burden and health.

Although women have played an important role in national liberation struggle, they did not benefit collectively from their active participation. In the developing countries, women have achieved legal equality, such as the right to vote, education and property but the basic problem of women's subordination remains.

Where nationalism is combined with Islamic fundamentalism, women are literally made invisible in public life and male dominance is increased over women's life and conduct.

The main difficulty for empowerment of women is the hostile attitude of the conservative society to women in developing countries. They want women to continue their traditional duties of house-work and raising children.

Women's empowerment:

Women must be empowered in public life. Women are grossly discriminated against men in male-dominated society. They are discriminated in every sphere of public and private life by men.