

The Status of Women in Bangladesh: Is the Situation Really Encouraging?

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Abstract: The status of women is an important factor affecting the overall development of a country. The total development of Bangladesh will undoubtedly be hampered if the status of women, constituting about fifty percent of the country's population, remains as low as it is today. In Bangladesh the women feel deprived in every sphere of their lives. Right from their birth, women are neglected in food sharing, education, work, independent thinking, right to property, choice and matters of decision making. They face discriminations in both their "public" and "private" lives. Despite of the equality of man-women ratio in Bangladesh, the importance and potentialities of women have been disregarded in socio-economic development till today. Patriarchy still controls all institutions of the society, the parliament, military establishments, Judiciary, education and benevolent organizations etc. Gender-gaps still exist in every sphere of women's lives and women are deprived of their fundamental rights. Women's development is a global concern in this new millennium. In most of the developing countries and obviously, in Bangladesh also, today, women issues are in the forefront and the government of Bangladesh has taken many initiatives as well as the constitution of Bangladesh guarantees the equal right's of men and women, but what is the real situation of women in our country? In this article an attempt has been taken to focus light on the status of women in Bangladesh, whether the situation of women, in order to achieve the development goal, are really encouraging or not.

Key words: Status, women, Bangladesh

INTRODUCTION

In Bangladesh, as elsewhere in the region, gender inequality is deeply embedded in the overall structure. Social controls at all levels deprive their subservience to patriarchal control. In Bangladesh, traditionally the role of women has been that of daughter, wife and mother. Their activities in the socio-cultural milieu of Bangladesh are primarily domestic in nature confined to the four walls of home. Women are vulnerable in every sector in Bangladesh. They have also lack access to justice on human rights, because of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, social, and economic class distributions. In a word, women are discriminated against from home to parliament in Bangladesh.

According to the Gender Development Index of UNDP in 2002, Bangladesh ranked 110 with an estimated earned income of PPP US \$ 1150 for females and PPP US \$ 2035 for males (PPP or Purchasing Power Parity means, \$ 1 has the same purchasing power in the domestic economy as \$ 1 has in the United States). This means, women are the poorest of the poor. The traditional society of Bangladesh is permeated with patriarchal values and norms of female subordination, subservience, subjugation and segregation. These consequences result in discrimination of women at birth

leading to deprivation of and access to all opportunities and benefits in family and societal life, thus putting women in the most disadvantageous position.

Objective of the Study: The objective of this study is to focus light on the real status of women in Bangladesh. More specifically to identify the situation of women in Bangladesh in different sections such as education, health and nutrition, decision making, politics and administration, economic activities etc. It also deals with the violence against women in our country.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study is basically based on the review of primary and secondary literature including books, journals, annual reports, newspapers etc. Relevant information is also collected from internet browsing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Demographic profile of the women in Bangladesh: Bangladesh is one of the high-density countries of the world. According to the UN Gender Development Index, Bangladesh is ranked 121st out of a total of 146 countries worldwide. Out of the total population, 48.9

per cent is women, of whom nearly 86 per cent live in rural areas. And only about 16 per cent women are literate compared to a 30 percent rate of literate men^[11]. Demographic changes related to fertility and migration influences the Bangladesh economy and society to a great extent. For years, Bangladesh was characterized by a youthful population structure with a heavy concentration of children (below 15 years) and an imbalance in the sex ratio. Over time, however, the fertility rate has declined remarkably and this significantly affected the population composition. In 1995-1996, about 53 per cent of the population belonged to the active age group and 41 per cent were children^[5].

The female population of reproductive age was 29.8 million in 1996. This number is likely to reach 37 million in 2010. There is little evident improvement in the overall sex ratio, which shows a preponderance of men over women. Over a period of more than two decades, the sex ratio decreased from 108 to 105. However it improved remarkably in urban areas, suggesting a greater volume of women's independent migration to cities and also a higher prevalence of family migration. In 1995-1996, sex ratio for rural and urban areas was estimated at 104 and 106, respectively. The fertility rate has dramatically fallen from 6.34 per women in 1997 to 3.8 in 1996. Fertility is higher in rural (2.76) than in urban areas (2.48). In rural areas the fertility rate is higher for women aged between 20 to 35 years. For urban women, women's increased participation in the labor force starting at adolescence contributes significantly to controlling fertility^[3].

The average age of marriage for girls in Bangladesh is between 13-16 years and almost all the girls are married before they are 25 years of age^[12]. As married life commonly starts at the age of 15 for most, a woman experiences 10-11 pregnancies in her lifetime, out of which the number of average surviving children is 3.2^[11]. With regard to mortality, the population belonging to 0-1 and 50 years and above is more vulnerable than any other age group. For the 0-1 age group, the mortality rate of the male population used to be higher than that of the female

population, but now the death rate of girl children is higher than boy children. Women are also gravely exposed to dangers of childbirth. The maternal mortality rate of 444 per 100,000 live births is one of the highest in the world^[5]. A pervasive gender differential in entitlement of food, nutrition, and care leads to a higher death rate of girl children than boy children^[3].

Education: Education is a social phenomenon that strongly influences on women's control of their own future but low level of female education have been frequently cited in Bangladesh. Lack of education is one of the main factors, which deters women from equal participation in socio-economic activities with her male counterparts and helps to perpetuate the inequality between sexes. The common belief among many villagers that educated girls are rude, less affectionate and disobedient also acts as a contributory factor against female education^[11].

In 1990, Bangladesh signed the declaration on "Education for All". But the country is still far behind the desired literacy level. The overall literacy rate is 58 per cent, for males it is 67 per cent and for females 49.5 per cent. The ratio of male-female teachers in primary schools in 1990 was 79:21, this increased to 72:28 by 1996, registering an increase in favor of females^[6]. But the girl student drop out rate at both primary and secondary levels is comparatively higher than that of boy-students. Consequently, the completion rate for girls is lower in both primary and secondary levels. The situation is worse for women in higher and technical education, this is due to the fact that education for girls is still considered economically less useful as investment^[10]. Poor parents consider any expenses for educating a girl unproductive as she leaves their family after marriage. A survey conducted in 1986 showed most men in rural Bangladesh considered educated women responsible for unhappy conjugal lives. Consequently, boys, not girls, get preference when it comes to the question of educational investment^[8]. That is why very few women continue their education up to the overall rate of return from education and women's labor market entitlements.

Table 1: Educational status of women

Indicator	National		Rural		Urban	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Adult literacy rate 15+, 1998	42.5	59.4	36.2	56.1	60.0	75.4
Net enrollment, Primary School, 1997	80.8	82.9	82.8	96.8	83.8	82.1
Net enrollment, secondary school 1995	19.0	23.0	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Dropout rate at secondary level 1996	48.4	37.8	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

Source: Sample Vital Registration, BBS; Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, BBS; Statistical Year Book, 1997, BBS; UNESCO Paris, BANBEIS 1998

Table 2: No of primary and secondary schools and students by sex 1984-1985

Type of institutes	Number of institutes	No of students		No of teachers	
		Boys	Girls	Male	Female
Primary	43.863	5725000	3218000	159594	24199
Secondary	9.853	1853000	755000	84995	10280

Source: Compiled on the basis of Statistical Year Book 1984-85 and Planning Commission data.

Table 3: Mortality rates

Year	Child death rate		Mortality rate		Infant mortality rate		Child death rate (1-4)	
	F	M	R	U	F	M	F	M
1982	12.1	12.3	-	-	-	-	23.9	20.5
1990	-	-	5.0	4.3	-	-	-	-
1992	11.0	11.1	-	-	-	-	13.9	13.0
1994	-	-	11.1	3.9	76	77	-	-

Source: BBS 1995, Statistical Pocket Book, PP 124-125, BBS 1994; Women and Men in Bangladesh, 1970-1990, P-33.

Table 2 shows the number of primary and secondary schools in the country in 1984-85 and sex wise breakup of students and teachers.

Female's low educational levels affect the service program not only in terms of vacancies, but also in terms of the women who are recruited, since they are likely to represent a highly selected group. Different reasons are found in Bangladesh for not sending their daughters to school. One of the tendencies of the schools in Bangladesh is to reinforce prevailing attitudes than to transcend them. Some subjects (for example home Economics) are seen as appropriate or useful for girls and other for boys (e.g. Agricultural Science).

Health and Nutrition: For women, in Bangladesh, generally life consists of high mortality, malnutrition and ill health. Women's general health care is greatly ignored and they face special health hazards due to severe anemic condition, poor health, inadequate nutrition, multiple pregnancies, abortion etc. Although a housewife has to take care of the health of all members of the family, there is hardly anyone to take care of hers. The daily per capital calorie intake of women (1599k. cal) is lower than that of a man (1927k. cal). The life expectancy of females (60.5) is lower than that of males (60.7 years)^[8]. Women's low social status and poverty are in turn lead to their poor health, high fertility and lack of access to essential health care. The ultimate outcome of these latter three factors is a high maternal mortality rate.

The average weight of a Bangladeshi woman is about 40.9 kg, which is less than the mean weight of women in most third world countries. The low weight is a reflection of food deprivation. Poor environmental sanitation and lower food intake of female give them lower resistance capacity, thereby rendering them more vulnerable to diarrhea and communicable diseases, which cause the highest

mortality and morbidity in this country. Though it is said that women are biologically more resistant to adverse health situation than men, women in Bangladesh have a lower life expectancy at birth (53.4) than men (54.2)^[11]. Now the death rate of girl children is higher than boy children. Women are also gravely exposed to the dangers of childbirth. The maternal mortality rate of 444 per 100,000 live births is one of the highest in world^[5]. A pervasive gender differential in entitlement of food nutrition and care leads to a higher death rate of girl children than boy children^[3]. In effective use of indigenous abortion related methods yearly cause about 10,000 women's death in the country.

Empirical data from a nutrition study in *Matlab* area shows that family allocation of food and health care discriminates against female children and causes higher female mortality in childhood. Table 3 reflects the same fact:

Table 3 shows that maternal mortality rate in Bangladesh is still high though compared to previous years it has sharply come down. Infant mortality rate per 100 live births among male children is higher than females. But child death rate (1-4) among female is higher^[7]. According to UNICEF, about 23000 women die in pregnancy and childbirth every year, while 600000 others suffer from various neo-natal complications in Bangladesh. Malnutrition, environmental insanitation and shortage of medical services and above all a negative attitude towards female health have been the main causes of poor health of Bangladeshi women. The National Health Service has been too inadequate for the purpose and is traditionally curative in a nature and it is basically urban based^[11]. The above factors such as ill health, maternal mortality, women's unnatural deaths have all made women more vulnerable than man.

Women in decision making, politics and

administration: Participating in politics or election is an important instrument to facilitate democracy in the society. But women are still fighting for their just and equitable participation in political processes.

In Bangladesh women's participation in the political and national movement has been very negligible^[7]. Statistics show that women lag behind men substantially in indicators of economic participation and political participation. Political participation of women is low because of illiteracy and little involvement in public life and politics. The female members of the Union Parishad, the lowest tier of the Local Government, though elected in direct election, literally they have fewer powers, lots of women voters at villages and women in the hill tracts are deprived of their voting rights also. Patriarchy still controls all institutions of the society, the parliament, military establishments, judiciary, education and benevolent organizations etc^[13].

In Bangladesh, nominating a few women candidates "has been merely a ritual to (some) political parties"^[14] whether they win or lose. Table 4 gives us the idea that through compared to previous years the number of women candidate as competitor in the general elections has increased yet their number is not at all significant^[7].

On the other side, women's participation in electoral race is very frustrating. Although the participation of female voters have increased greatly so as exercising voting is concerned but such increase was less in fighting election as a candidate, which can be seen in Table 5.

Out of 300 seats only 37 women candidates contested for 48 seats including Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina, among them only 6 candidates won in the National Assembly in the 8th parliament. In the parliament, the total number of elected representatives is 300. Since 1972, the number of women contestants in general election is negligible^[13].

Table 4: Women's political electoral participation: 1979-1996

Year	Number of candidates			Number of contesting parties	Number of parties with women candidate
	Total	Male	Female		
1979	2125	2108	17 (0.8%)	17	9(31%)
1986	1429	1409	20 (1.4%)	20	5 (18%)
1988	978	971	7 (0.7%)	7	3 (30%)
1991	2774	2727	47 (1.7%)	47	16 (21%)
1996	2569	2532	37 (1.44%)	37	16 (13.45%)

Source: BBS, 1994; Men and Women in Bangladesh, 1970-1990; Bhorer Kagoj, Bengali daily, Dhaka, 5 June, 1996; Janakantha, Bengali daily Dhaka, 28 May, 1996.

Table 5: Participation in election

Year	No of seats	No of women candidates
1991	46	39
1996	48	36
2001	47	37

Source: Unnayan Podokkhep, 2001

Table 6: Women and national election

Year	Women candidates per hundred	Reserved seats for women	Percentage of women in nation assembly	Successful women candidates by direct election	Successful in by election as women candidates	Total successful women candidates
1973	.3	15	4.8	X	X	X
1979	.9	30	9.7	X	2	2
1986	.3	30	10.6	5	2	7
1988	.7	30	10.6	4	X	4
1991	1.5	30	10.6	4	2	6
1996	1.3	30	11.21	5	2	7
2001	2.0	X	2	6	X	6

Source: Unnayan Podokkhep, 2001

Table 7: Class-wise male and female participation in civil service, 1996

No. of employees /class	Ministry/Div./Secretariat			Department/Directorate			Autonomous/Corporation			Total		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Class-I	1,843	227	2,070	33,940	3,852	37,792	40,981	2,523	43,504	76,764	6,602	83,366
		-10.97			-10.19			-5.8			-7.91	
Class-II	56	12	68	13,270	1,100	14,370	21,676	1,935	23,611	35,002	3,047	38,049
		-17.65			-7.65			-8.2			-8.01	
Class-II	3,674	425	4,099	410,556	65,514	476,070	110,414	6,187	116,601	524,644	72,126	596,770
		-10.37			-13.76			-5.31			-12.08	
Class-IV	2,228	228	2,456	111,079	10,285	121,364	85,410	2,778	88,188	198,717	13,291	212,008
		-9.28			-8.47			-3.15			-6.26	
Total	7,801	892	8,693	568,845	80,751	649,596	258,481	13,423	271,904	835,127	95,066	930,193
		-10.26			-12.43			-4.94			-10.22	

Source: GOB, 1996, Statistics of Civil Officers and Staff of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Statistics and Research Cell, Ministry of Establishment

Table 8: Male-female distribution in the duty posts in administration of government (1987)

Category of posts	No. of male	No. of female
Secretary and additional secretary.	55	Nil.
Joint secretary	88	1
Deputy secretary	268	1
Section officer (Assistant secretary)	562	15

Source: Calculated on the basis of information obtained from the Establishment Ministry, Government of Bangladesh

Table 6 shows the situation of women in politics from the beginning of Bangladesh.

As member of the house hold women have only the right of work and not to decide, like wise in the national level women's absence in decision making bodies is noticeable^[4].

On the other side, women's participation in administration is also not so satisfactory. It is found that in most cases women get more opportunities for low-grade jobs. A survey conducted in 1987 shows that out of 55 posts of secretary and additional secretary not a single was held by women. There was only one woman out of 88 joint secretaries and one woman out of 268 deputy secretaries. Out of 562 posts of assistant secretaries only 14 were held by women. Up to 1990 none of the key posts in the 4 Divisions of the country, 64 Districts and 460 Thanas were held by women. The scenario did change a little in subsequent years; and in the year 2000, there were two women secretaries, three Diplomats and five joint secretaries. By 2001 one high court judge and four district commissioners were women. Among the ministers in Sheikh Hasina's cabinet three were women. Moreover, only 18.1 percent (10 years to onwards) of the total labour force is constituted by women^[8].

Like political and civil administration women are also non-existent at the top management level in the private sectors.

Legal status: In Bangladesh women have inadequate access to the law due to illiteracy, lack of legal literacy, information and resources, insensitivity and gender bias. They also lack awareness of women's human rights in general. The law-enforcement officers and the judiciary do not really know how to make law more gender sensitive. Women may also lack access to justice or human rights because of race, ethnicity, culture, and religion.

In Bangladesh the most important events in a woman's life, e.g. marriage, divorce, custody of children inheritance etc. for example, are governed by the personal laws, which in case of Muslims is the "Sharia based on the Quran and Hadith (Sayings of Prophet Mohammad)". But civil laws are also exercised in some areas relating to these issues and it is hard to establish the logic regarding the jurisdiction of each. This question is more pertinent to Muslim women because, two most important things of women's life are affected critically by the exercise of discriminatory personal laws: firstly, the sanction of

co-wives and secondly, unequal inheritance right in father's property. Occasionally, proposals for revising these in the right of modern civil laws have been raised but they subsided for different reasons^[11].

Section 27 of the constitutions of the People's Republic of Bangladesh reads, "All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law". On the other hand section 28(1) reads, "the state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. "But in our statute book there are many discriminative laws intermeshed directly and indirectly in our laws. We have not much information regarding the number of women rendered largely disadvantaged on account of it. Justice Nasir Aslam Zahid of Pakistan cited, it give me a new experience when from gender point of view I scrutinized those laws that I had studied as a lawyer for the last few decades and administered justice. The discrimination, which is clear, is easy to identify, but it is very hard to identify what we approve as rights in our subconscious mind-the foundation of inequality intermeshed within our social manners and customs. As for example, some labour acts to keep women as workers and get some disapproving women's rights for abortion, and snatching their fundamental rights"^[15].

In Bangladesh, we can see the same thing. Provisions of some preferential treatment regarding women's employment in the labour force is also there for example, no deduction could be made from women's wage for breach of contract and there is a prohibition of employing women for night works. All these no doubt, show great concern of the law regarding women's vulnerable position in the society but they also limit their opportunities and scope to be treated as equals in spheres of life.

Economic activities: A woman in Bangladesh enjoys lesser importance. "She is little more than a free servant and a child bearing machine." The "good" women stayed

at home and looked after her husband and her children. Whereas the working woman was portrayed as morally lax and the cause of disintegration of the family, of social values and of society in general. Women's participation in economic activities remains unvalued at the national level because of patriarchal social structure, tradition and norms. In Bangladesh, women's participation in economic activities shows great variations by gender, nature of activity and place of residence. For example, more than three quarters of employed women of 15 years and above are found to be unpaid family labours as opposed to less than a tenth who are self employed and a few (6 per cent) contract workers^[3]. Women's household work remains unrecognized, uncounted and invisible. National Labour Force Survey also reflects the bias. Non-recognition of household work shows almost half the population as unemployed and inactive^[1].

Economically, women have always been involved in production although their share in consumption as well as control over capital and cash has always been nominal and neglected. The agriculture sector is overwhelmed by unpaid family workers who are disproportionately represented by women. Self-employed or own account workers are predominantly found in the trade, hotel and restaurant, transport, storage, and communications sectors where men's involvement is sizeable (nearly a quarter) and women's is negligible. Every four out of five workers in the construction sector are day or contract laborers, although this sector is represented by only 3 percent of the employed men and less than 1 percent of women. For women in the rural areas, the number working in the construction sector is likely to be higher. However, a sizeable chunk (nearly one fifth) of unpaid family helpers is found both in the agriculture and manufacturing sectors and they are disproportionately represented by women. Hence, even in the informal sector, women are not only concentrated in a few sectors, but also their labor is largely consumed without any remuneration. By way of

Table 9: Employed persons 15 years and above by employment status, hours worked, sex, and residence (per cent)

Status	Bangladesh			Urban			Rural		
	Male	Female	Ratio	Male	Female	Ratio	Male	Female	Ratio
Total	48	26	54.2	51	34	66.7	47	24	51.1
Self-employer	48	31	64.5	52	29	55.8	47	31	66.0
Employer	48	6	33.3	58	14	24.1	35	17	48.6
Employee	53	49	92.5	53	51	96.2	53	46	86.8
Unpaid family helper	39	22	56.4	39	22	56.4	39	22	56.4
Day laborer	50	37	74.0	49	39	79.6	50	37	74.0
Average daily wage of day laborers (TK)	46	26	56.5	60	36	60.0	44	25	56.8
Average monthly Income of self-employed (TK)	2,240	827	36.1	2,899	847	29.2	2,073	821	39.6

Source: BBS, 1996.

Table 10: Participation rate of women in economic activities: Evidence from some recent micro studies (in per cent of women of 10 years and above)

Source	Year	Rate	Remarks
Socio-Economic Impact of roads in Rural Areas (Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad, Dhaka). study Upazilas	1984	8.9	Average for three

A Socio-Economic Evaluation of Chandpur II Irrigation Project, p. 2-48 (Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad, Dhaka).	1982	14.3	Average for four project villages.

		18.3	Average for two control villages.

Rural Industries Study Project Final Report, p.31 (Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, Dhaka).	1981	10.0	Average for all study areas (10 Thanas).

Source: Situation of Women in Bangladesh, Ministry of Social Welfare and Women's Affairs, 1985.

Table 11: Women victimized by 'Fatwa' (yearly)

Year	Number of women
1993 to 1995	43
1996	12
1997	27
1998	30
1999	28
2000	22
2001	39

Source: Daily Jugantor, Manob Jamin, Bhorer Kagoj, Prothom Alo, Ittefaq, Shangbad.

contrast, although men are also overwhelmingly found in the informal sector, they are mostly involved as self-employed or own account workers, suggesting their greater access to resources and economic opportunities^[3]. According to a UNICEF report the average age of female marriage is 14 years, on the average, the men work at home 12 minutes a day while a woman is engaged in daily domestic work of 5 hours. The report also notes that women have a minimum say in terms of childbearing and her pastimes in hours of leisure.

Economic exploitation of girls includes many of the same issues as it does for women inherited rights, social security, unequal wages and job opportunities and they also exploited by unvalued, of ten unpaid and harmful labour.

Labour in Bangladesh is cheap, female labour is cheaper. The number of women workers is greater in the garments industries. A unit having capacity to produce 200 pieces of garments require 185 to 225 workers. Labour costs in the garments industry is less compared to other large and heavy industries. A garments factory can run with 50 per cent unskilled labour. So a large number of rural and urban destitute women can get jobs in these factories. Wages for the positions of supervisor, machine operator, iron man (now women), packing man helper are very low. Among the helpers women do the unskilled work. There are males in most of the senior positions including manager, cutting master, cutting assistant. In addition to cheaper wages, one of the major

causes behind the acceptance whatever is doled out to them. They are expected to work from more than eight hours and often they are not entitled for overtime payments and bonus^[1].

Violence against women: Violence against children, adolescents and women include rape and sexual abuse, trafficking and prostitution, domestic violence, dowry-related deaths and psychological abuse. Gender based violence is universal and cuts across all boundaries of age, class, location, ethnicity and religion. It takes many forms, occurring mostly at home at the hands of male relatives or with their approval. Children who witness violence are seriously affected, often developing many of the same behavioral and psychological problems as children who themselves are abused. Different kinds of violence done against the adolescent girls and women in Bangladesh constitute a serious threat of their physical and mental health, personal development and sometimes even their survival.

Girls on their way to school and women to office and factory fall easy victims to teasing and harassment. They have similar experiences in the public transport stands, railway stations or at other common places. Besides, they undergo sexual harassment even into their work-stations. Women feel insecure even at the disposal of the police. Everywhere women are denied of justice. Recently, violence against women has reached another dimension with the rise in the number of trials through the *fatwa* (religious judgment) in the rural areas.

Table 12: Reported violence against women and girls.

Nature of violence	1998	Jan-March, 2001	April, 2001	May, 2001
Rape	406	135	66	60
Acid Throwing	45	22	32	16
Dowry Related	48	49	24	13
Suicide	72	159	Exact cases not found	69

Source: Various Daily Newspapers / Unnayan Podokkhep, 2001.

Table 13: Women's violence

Period January 1, 20001 to February 28, 2002.	
Victims of acid burn	297
Torture in relating to dowry	43
Killing in relating to dowry	139
Suicide in relating to dowry	6
Rape victims	720
Victims of rape: children	171
Tortured/killed for various reasons	150

Source: Unnayan Podokkhep, 2002.

Table 14: The growth rate of women's violence (yearly)

Nature of violence	Incidence by year.				Growth rate/year 1996-1999
	1996	1997	1998	1999	
Rape	262	753	1425	1238	67.8
Acid throwing	27	130	138	153	78.3
Dowry related violence	77	177	129	253	48.7
Domestic Violence	55	234	273	330	81.7

Source: Compiled by Ain-O-Shalish Kendra from 8 daily newspapers from 1996-1999.

Village elders usually form a "Shalish" or tribunal to settle some local disputes. Punishments are meted out (in accordance with religious laws as interpreted locally) in contravention to the existing penal code. Some women were flogged publicly and a few among them have committed suicide^[3].

Several reports proved that, the violence against girls and women have increased rapidly day after day in our country. Reported violence against "raped" girls aged 10-19 in 1998 is 406. Additional information on the reported rape cases of January-March 2001 survey, reveals that 72 of them were victims of gang rape, among them 63 were adolescent and 4 were children. 23 of the "raped" girls were later killed. 200-400 young women and children are smuggled out of Bangladesh every month, mostly to Pakistan, while another report reveals that approximately 200,000 women and children have been trafficked to the Middle East in the last 20 years. Information collected from 10 newspapers reveals that during 1998, there were 49 trafficking incidents involving girls aged 13-18, 79 involving girls age 7-12 and further 245 involving girls of unspecified age. Acid throwing is an extreme form of violence. The consequence of acid attacks is traumatic physically, psychologically and emotionally. One of the most

serious consequences faced by acid survivors is the social isolation, which results from the nature of their injuries. As per report, the reported cases are in 1996:80 in 1997:117, in 1998:130. In 1999:168 and from January-May 2001: 70^[2].

Some NGOs have also conducted surveys. Nari-pokkhya, a women's organization offers Table 13 and Table 14.

Violence against women remains largely unreported mainly due to prevailing norms and values regarding women's honors, the insecurity of victims and due to lengthy legal procedures that discourage people from seeking legal support. Moreover, the legal process is complicated and the police are often influenced by political pressure and by bribes offered by "mastanns" (muscle men or thugs) and violators, with the result that they either do not take adequate action or remain inactive. During the period of legal litigation women neither get legal protection of their choice nor financial support to save them and her family member from starvation and onslaught of violence from her ex-husband of mastanns.

The rising trend of violence on women is connected with the casual attitude with which the law-informing authorities deal with these cases. Reports often reveal

Table 15: The situation of women repression cases

Year	Total cases	Discharged	Released	Punishment	Transferred to other courts	Under judicial process
1995	18	09	01	01	08	03
1996	810	398	92	56	29	235
1997	2280	592	581	65	37	1005
1998	2160	338	614	16	34	1158
1999	2753	185	561	04	25	1978
2000	2953	48	250	01	07	2647
Total	10978	1570	2099	143	136	7026

Source: Women and child repression prevention act, 2000, an overview, Naripokkha.

that the police are reluctant to file the case under proper article and sometimes the police in a way play a residing role on the fatwa or irrational arbitration done by the so-called *village leaders*. The number of cases filed for violence is very poor, and average about 50 per cent^[9].

Conclusion: From the above discussion it becomes clear from various data and information of different sectors that women in Bangladesh are victims of inequality, abuse, suppression and exploitation, Social customs and traditions, illiteracy and employment opportunities have hampered the total integration of women in the mainstream of development activities in Bangladesh. It is true that Bangladesh society is becoming increasingly intolerant, prone to violence and in discipline. Political unrest has become such a recurring affair as a regular feature of our society, which defies all kinds of prohibitive measures. The basically conservative nature of our society has made our task much more difficult. The basically conservative nature of our society has made our task much more difficult. So emancipation of women has become very important agenda in Bangladesh as elsewhere in the world. Though we have no reasons to be complacent, still we can enthusiastically greet the onward move towards the upliftment of the status of women. A sign of that move can be seen in the proclamation of the order that compulsively of the mothers' name along with the fathers' in the papers and documents in relating to the children. This is certainly recognition of the position of women. The High Court, in one of its recent verdict, has declared all 'fatwas' as illegal. This verdict will always be regarded as a milestone in the process of emancipation of women. Such noble act still offers us the stimulation to look head (Unnayan Podokkep: 2001). To improve the backward and in awareness situation, government of Bangladesh takes many other initiatives. Various laws have been enacted and amended to protect women's rights. It had enacted several legislative measures, which have proven to be successful in reducing the incidences of violence. Such laws include the Dowry Prohibition Act, Cruelty to Women (Deterrent punishment) Ordinance, Child Marriage Restraint (Amendment) Ordinance, and the very recent

Family Court Ordinance. Moreover in the constitution of Bangladesh especially in the sessions of fundamental rights, it has been noted that no discrimination should prevail against women irrespective of religion, race, caste, sex and place of birth. Women are supposed to enjoy equal opportunity in public employment, right to protection of law, protection of right to life and personal liberty, prohibition of forced labour and right to property. But it is very difficult for the government alone to aware the backward women in a short period of time. So the government helps and supports various non-government organizations to works for these vulnerable women. NGOs are working with the government to establish the rights and overall development of women. NGOs enable their clients and beneficiaries to graduate into higher standards of living. In addition to their poverty alleviation programs, they set many motivational programs for the women at grassroots level. These programs have made women aware of their rights and the women have their platform to raise their voices. Though the constitution of Bangladesh grants equal rights to women and men in all spheres of public life and even various laws have been enacted and amended to protect women's rights but women are not conscious of their rights and that is the main barrier to serve the purpose of government. For these reasons, women hold a marginal position in the sharing of decision making at all levels. Although government is taking initiatives to ensure the political rights, increase awareness, participation and empowerment but government have to be more sincere, active and give proper attention to increase the real awareness of the vulnerable and disadvantaged women by fully implementing the initiatives. Especially cooperation between government and NGOs can expedite the process of women development. Opportunities are growing for the NGOs through out developing world to work with government in helping the poor women to improve the quality of their lives. The institutional capacity of the government is weak and there is a gap in service delivery system especially at local level. On the other hand, some NGOs have higher-level management capabilities to organize and manage development programs at the grassroots level.

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