

Empowerment of Women in Bangladesh: From Different Perspective

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Abstract

Half of the population of Bangladesh is women. That means a major part of the active citizens of Bangladesh are women. Now the participation of women is clearly evident in every sphere of the society. The status of women in Bangladesh is defined by the struggle to massive improvement over the years. Since the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, the women of Bangladesh have made enormous improvements. Though, women in Bangladesh are subject by a patrilineal and male-controlled relationship structure that put into effect the social and economic dependency of women on men and advocates relatively inferior position of women. Women were treated as an asset in her husband's household; that time existed here not far back. She used to put up a lot of domestic and agricultural works for her family in the entire path of her lifetime besides playing her reproductive role. Although, The last four decades of

Bangladesh, the country has witnessed high political empowerment for women, better education, better job opportunities, development of health and nutrition and adoption of new laws that protect the rights of the women. The Prime Minister of Bangladesh, the Speaker of Parliament, and the Leader of the Opposition are women indicate women empowerment. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) include gender equality to achieve the goals. But still there exists inequality in different sectors of Bangladesh and participation of women is very low associated to their male counterpart. By reviewing the visibly available documents, the paper analyses the multiple discourses on women's empowerment and find out the major stumbling blocks in the way of empowerment and suggest possible recommendations to bring equality and empowerment as well.

Key words: women; empowerment; equality; stumbling blocks

1. Introduction

Women represent approximately fifty percent all around the world population. Their contribution in different sector of

development is vast. But, women's position is still not same as their counterpart male in recent world. The problems and issues

regarding women don't take care of properly. Women have poor status in every sphere of life, including social, familial, economic and political aspects as a result of gender discrimination and social prejudices. Most of the third world countries are facing these issues. All sorts of gender discrimination and lower status of women are heavily seen in Bangladesh (Naz,2006). Women are doing miracle and developing day by day. The country has witnessed development women in politics, education, job opportunities, health and nutrition. But, this sort of progress is not enough for the country's development. Here, through this research a modest attempt has been made in this paper to analyze the prevailing women's empowerment situation in Bangladesh the major stumbling blocks in the way of empowerment and suggest possible recommendations to bring equality and develop the status of women.

2. Conceptual Framework

The last four decades of Bangladesh is the country who has taken several attempts for women empowerment. The term women empowerment has become an important matter of question in current development discourses. Before getting on a discussion, it is essential to define the concepts, gender, women, empowerment and women empowerment.

2.1 Gender

On one hand, the differences between male and female are determined biologically, on the other hand by society. There are differences between sex and gender. Sex is the biological differences between male and

female. Gender describes the personal and psychological individualities accompanying with being man and women called masculinity and femininity. Women's marginal status has been seen as natural and a fact of their biology (Kabir, 2013). It is very much prevalent that, Gender inequality is the outcome of social processes than biological issues. A social and religious conservative keeps women backward in the development activities.

2.2 Women

Women are never treated as general representatives of humanity or general people. They are specifically feminine gender and normally sexual categories. In family life, women are recognized as nurturers. Women are presented as someone's mother, daughter, sister or wife at the community level. They are seen as dependent and subordinate to her male counterpart (Mahtab, 2012). It is necessary to share equal rights and opportunities for the development of the country. Because, when half of the population do unproductive works, then countries' development must be impossible.

2.3 Empowerment

The term empowerment denotes as a process and the outcome of this process is called empowerment. To be more specific, the visible result of empowerment is rearrangement of power within individuals, nations, classes, groups, races, castes and ethnic groups. Empowerment is the change in the structure of subordination through a faster change in law pattern, property rights issues, control of women's manual labor and

bodies, and the traditions which support male domination continuously (Khan & Ara, 2006). Thus it can be made out that empowerment means a method of establishing control over resources, also means of acquiring the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process actively and its implementation also.

2.4 Women Empowerment

Women Empowerment can be expressed as control over intellectual and material resources that ensures liberation from any kind of subordinate positions.

For women empowerment five levels of equality are essential. Like:-

- Fulfilling the basic needs of women.
- Equality of access to resources like land, credit and opportunities of education.
- Identifying that their difficulties curtail from essential structural and institutional discrimination.
- Working together collectively and taking decisions along with man. It will increase the representation and empowerment also.
- Women are able to control over their lives, their family members' lives also. There should be a balance of power between man and women (Mahtab, 2007).

3. Objectives of the Study

1) To present the status of women from a different perspective.

2) To find out the major stumbling blocks in the way of women empowerment in Bangladesh.

3) To suggest some measures to reduce the stumbling blocks towards the way of women empowerment.

4. Methodology

This paper is basically depends on secondary sources like to publish books, research works, reports, journals and newspapers and through the review of information from this, the paper prepared skillfully. Some information is collected through internet browsing also.

5. Status of Women in Bangladesh: From Different Perspective

As Bangladesh crossed its 42 years of independence, here we got a significant gain in the post-independence era in women's wellbeing and improvements. Various economic and social development indicators show that there has made significant progress in increasing women's access to different sectors like education and health care, participation in economic and political activities and development of social status also. But still there exists an unequal status in these sectors of Bangladesh compared to their male counterpart. Gender inequality has appeared as the major stumbling blocks in the way of achieving the development targets, as we know that gender mainstreaming is one of the major targets of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This paper explores the status of

women in Bangladesh from a different perspective.

5.1 Women and Health

The difference between male and female infant mortality rate is higher than that of their male counterparts female mortality, were too much. The infant mortality rate of 2.19 per thousand live births male average annual decline rate of 16 per thousand live births in 2007 has been reduced, which in 1993-94, it was 46.7 per thousand live births. On the other hand, for women, it was 3.02 per year per thousand live births in 2007 to an average decline rate has been reduced to 20 per thousand live births, which in 1993-94 was 62.3 per thousand live births. In addition, the progress for both men and women going ahead follows the same speed of previous years. The percentage of children with low weight for male and female inequality prevails. The percentage of underweight children, female children per year in 2007 to 1.45 percent average annual reduction rate was reduced from 42.1 percent to 58.8 percent in 1996-1997. At the same time, male children, this percentage are reduced to 1.34 per cent average annual rate of 39.3 percent has been reduced to 54.6 percent. In addition, the percentage of underweight children reduced rates for both male and female children occurred at a slower rate than in previous years (Ferdaush& Rahman, 2011). So, it can be said that, Bangladesh has achieved some progress in the health sector and its population has been successful in raising the average life expectancy. However, women's health situation is still poor.

5.2 Women and Education

Women are less educated than men, largely due to the ancient traditions and the general mentality. Educated women as well as men seldom remain outside the education system.

The many positive actions to improve female literacy were introduced. However, there remains a considerable gap in enrollment. Significantly higher proportions of female dropouts as well as the education system are still a major concern. The Male literacy rate is 1.16 per cent average annual growth rate of children in 2010 increased by 61.12 per cent, which is at the national level, 49.5 per cent in 2000. The rate of literacy in the continuation of the male children, whereas, the female literacy rate among children 34.23 percent lower than the target of 100 percent of the national education policy, which by 2014 could lead to an increase in the level indicates that the level of 65.77 per cent annual average growth rate of 1.47 per cent in 2010 increased by 54.8 percent, which was 40.1 percent in 2000. Under the business as usual scenario, the female literacy rate of 39.32 per cent lower than the target of 100 percent of the national education policy will be 60.68 per cent at the national level, which could be in 2014 (Dutta ,2013).

5.3 Women and Economic Activities

Like many other sectors, the country is lagging behind by men in terms of women's economic status. Women's lower access to employment in the sector makes it difficult to establish gender equality as well. Despite overall progress in narrowing the gender gap, the position of women in Bangladesh,

like many other developing countries remain unbalanced men. Bangladesh, women are still largely traditional views of women's roles in society and the labor market in some sections of the economy are considered as minor players in the secondary participant. Therefore, the contribution of women in different sectors leads to a higher economic growth. The situation has changed over the last few years. Women are trying to come out of their homes. As a result, employment in the sector is increasing day by day for their participation.

Over the years, the occupational status of women has changed. Every year, the rate of participation of the male population is agricultural job in 2010 to 30 percent in 2001 to 1.16 per cent from 33.50 per cent decline that is apparent. In addition, female participation in other sectors has increased over the years. Growth rates of transport and communication sector (10.75 per cent), business sector (5.68 per cent) and household work (3.26 per cent), followed by the industrial sector (11.23 per cent) was higher. On the other hand, for women, followed by transport and communications sector, the agricultural sector (30.26 per cent), while the percentage of women is an enormous increase in 2010 (2.10 percent) during 2001 reduced household work (not 13.33 percent), industrial sector (11.85 per cent) and at the same time the business sector (6.67 per cent) each. Reduced growth in women's participation in household work and other professional women in agriculture, industry, transport and communications, and business as well as other work to devote themselves to their traditional jobs, the families are more likely to come out of the

work indicates that the income of their families, along with their generate income (Rahman, 2013).

5.4 Women and Employment

Women's employment in any countries plays a significant role in economic progress. To achieve sustainable development, employment of women in economic activities is urgently needed. Labor force participation of women can change the dynamics of the labor market. Bangladesh, women's economic contribution is not substantial, but they are largely accepted. Climb up to the growth and development of the country's economy, the labor market participation of women is urgently needed.

Change the dynamics of the labor market, the labor force participation of women is expected. The total number of women in the total labor force, labor force, less than half of the men, even though women's labor force growth rate, however, higher than men. 1999-2000 the number of men in the labor force has increased from 32.2 million, whereas in the case of women, the number of labor force, an annual rate of 5.06 per cent in 2010 to 17.2 million in 1999-2000 has increased from 8.6 million to 39.5 million in 2010 to an annual rate of 2.27 per cent. The labor force participation of women, women's education, due to increased growth of the garment industry, the awareness, the media and the government and the progress of various NGO's role in the increased rates (Ali,2013).

5.5 Women and Politics

Over the past two decades, however, women's participation in politics has been a significant change in terms. Women's participation in national elections is gradually increased by 3.86 per cent in 2008, in which the total candidates in the national elections in 1973, only 0.3 per cent per cent of candidates were women, with the exception of 1988, has increased over time, women as well as participating in local government elections. Women of the Union Parishad and the Upazila Parishad elections attended and won many of them. As vice chairman of the recent district elections to ensure that women's overwhelming participation of female candidates have highlighted reservation (Rahman, 2013).

But generally, we see, women's participation in politics in the country due to various reasons such as the lack of political parties is very limited appropriate organizational arrangements. Low participation of women in decision-making bodies of political parties is another reason for the muscle men and the violence, including the use of their political culture.

6. Major Stumbling Blocks in the Way of Women Empowerment

Some initiatives have taken by the government to address the issue of women's empowerment. However, issues related to gender inequality and improve the status of women's empowerment is not satisfactory due to various reasons.

6.1 Child Marriages

Early marriage of girls is a very common event in Bangladesh. Early marriage of

women and girls in education, health and employment is one of the vital barriers. Historically, early marriages for their health as well as education and employment opportunities for the young women have limited access to a vulnerable situation.

6.2 Social Institutions

Traditionally, women are often discouraged from part of public life and are mainly recognized for their reproductive role. The gender gap is created, the social forces that still prevail in most parts of Bangladesh is based on the ancient patriarchal traditions and values. Traditional perceptions about the role of women are still continuing as Homemakers.

6.3 Family Responsibilities

Due to the cultural heritage of the responsibility lies with the women in a family. Sometimes they give priority to the family of one of the family and career, to have to choose. She has to look after his office and the house, because it is a working woman, a double burden. A full-time working woman from domestic responsibilities is not forgiven. This office is an obstacle to maintaining a high standard of performance, which takes away a big part of their productive energy. Women are expected to play at home and office, due to the multiple roles, it is difficult to perform efficiently (Jahan, 2007).

6.4 Poor Working Environment

Our society is a male dominated society. Society's values, norms, religious beliefs do not allow women to be in decision making positions. Men are not willing to admit

women as bosses and colleagues. Dual sets of values towards the roles of females have the male colleagues. At home, they have their female members effectively perform their roles, and they leave early or arrive late because of family responsibilities or childcare problems. But most of them, they want to leave early or arrive late because of family responsibilities or childcare problems if you do not want to consider the plight of their female colleagues (Jehan, 2011).

6.5 Lack of Clear Policy Initiatives

Houses, educational institutions, roads, institutions and the like, to ensure the safety of women there is no effective policy. Increase in violence against women is now a grave concern. In this situation, parents are likely to keep their girls in their home. Therefore, the education, health, employment, or cannot participate in other sectors. Therefore, discrimination and poor women empowerment issue are still unresolved.

6.6 Comatose Mind Set

The common perception of our society is that the son will look after his parents, not the daughters. Boys have ability to work more than the girls. It is very common case that, girls are subject to discrimination from their births. Preferences of son in the traditional Bangladeshi society generate gender discrimination. The employers in Bangladesh still tend to employ men first rather than women in case of employment. That's why women cannot get enough opportunities in the job market.

6.7 Poor Health Care Facilities

Bangladesh has a commitment to primary health care, but health provision, particularly in rural areas, woefully inadequate remains. Health provision is urban biased, but a general bias against the poor in both rural and urban areas. Preventive medicine in primary health care workers, there is a lack of relevant skills rather than curative approaches. Employment in rural health facilities in this part of the problem, at least on the local budget constraints, is widespread. Moreover, poverty is an important barrier to positive health outcomes for both men and women. Income inequality and economic participation of women, low-loss challenges remain as a major concern. Poverty, for example, malnutrition is a higher burden on the health of women and girls is the yield (Nasrin & Rahman).

6.8 Poor Education Structure

Discrimination is a part of the social structure. Social, cultural norms, religious affairs, lack of parental education and lower expectations of girls and women to education, discrimination in education to create. A man belonging to the lower classes of society in anyway associated with the upper class is not allowed (Islam, 2013). Low literacy is a matter of the nation address has no strong motivation policy. Geographical isolation is a powerful obstacle to the achievement of women's education. Rural, urban space plays an important role in this regard. As Bangladesh is one of the populous countries in the world, large size of its population demands more educational institutions against its growing citizen. A huge lack of educational

institutions for the growing population is a strong barrier.

6.9 Barrier in Politics

With patriarchal traditions, lack of access to resources, norms and attitudes, poverty, discrimination in the workplace, lack of access to political party lists as main causes of political under presentation of women, other political factors also responsible for women's underpresentation in politics. The second important factors are the nature of party structure, the political institutions themselves that are opposing the enrollment of women in political leadership (Mahtab, 2007).

7. Recommendations

Since 1960, women's empowerment, gender equality, and concern about the systematic discrimination against women have gained momentum internationally. That, leads to a number of self-standing international treaties and conventions and the insertion of non-discriminatory sections in numerous broad-purpose economic settlements, which have nurtured governmental stroke on the way to greater gender equality all around the world. It is considered the most noticeable international treaties among the all international treaties is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979. UN Women's Empowerment Principles in the workplace, the marketplace and how to empower women in the community is a set of principles for guidance.

They are the United Nations entity for gender equality and women's empowerment (UN Women) and the UN Global Compact in collaboration. Women's empowerment programs and projects of the Women's Affairs, Jatiya Mohila Sangstha, NGOs and women's organizations through the Department of Women and Children Affairs Ministry (MOWCA) has been intensified by (Chowdhury, 2014).

Development of educational enrollment, life expectancy, labor force participation, gender gap has closed, though serious gaps still persist, such as differences in voice in households and in society, inadequate entrance to Economic prospects. To ensure a meaningful and an essential step to empower them, the following policy prescriptions may be taken into consideration:

- Health service providers have to be thoughtful to the necessities of women through the course of their entire lives, including older women, adolescent girls, women with disabilities, and most-at-risk clutches of women.
- Medical personnel should be trained enough to curative approaches to primary health care.
- Policies should be targeted towards the rural and poor women. The government should address the problem of discrimination on the basis of priority. In addition, policy implementation requires both

theoretical knowledge and practical judgment.

- Higher education institutions of the decentralized rural women can easily get higher education, in order to create new institutions in rural areas, will be of vital concern. Policies, especially for larger enrollment for women, the poor should be targeted towards children.
- Female security in educational institutions is highly essential.
- Employment prospects must be produced and equal rights needed be guaranteed to all.
- A sound working environment should be given main concern in all sectors.
- More productive and profitable sectors of the women involved, along with the proper training and education of female workers is needed.
- Increase awareness in the productive roles and movement of women along with their role in development.
- To ensure women's participation with men in political leadership, strong steps needed to be taken. There should be a quota policy for women in party leadership.

- Promote gender equality and sustainable development and is essential for the sound development of the population and development strategies for the empowerment.
- Women with a big promotion campaign regular symposia, etc. as well as through the media should be launched by holding seminars to create empowering social attitudes towards the positive.
- Government to take a radical program or policy on women's empowerment, as well as creative and effective enough to ensure that its implementation should be.

8. Conclusion

Women's empowerment is a core development objective in its own right. Economic, political and social empowerment of women as actors to change policy choices and institutions can be more representative of a range of voices. Education for the empowerment of women to get a job as well as to create a healthy lifestyle, regain a home for themselves and their children with the necessary skills and confidence in women. Empower women to participate fully in the economic life across all sectors, the development and sustainability of the economy achieve the internationally agreed goals and women, for men and their communities to improve the quality of life is essential. Amendment principles that focus on the gender gap is

essential - Economic development is not enough to shrink the gender gap.

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