

## **Empowerment of Women : Problems and Issues in the context of Bangladesh.**

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### **Bangladesh : An Overview**

The emergence of the sovereign People's Republic of Bangladesh in December 1971 was the successful culmination of a long and arduous struggle for self-expression by the Bengali nation in the years between the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 and the initiation of a systematic policy of genocide by colonial Pakistan in 1971. In more ways than one, Bangladesh was the fulfilment of a national dream, indeed a restoration of the cultural legacy that was sought to be swept away in the face of a spurious movement for politics based on motives that could not and would not redound to the benefit of the masses.

In 1971, therefore, the choice that the country faced was simple: it could go on being part of a political dispensation that ignored Bengali aspirations despite the all too clear triumph of the people at the general elections of 1970 or it could chart a course that would hasten its progress to an independent clime. The nation, under the inspiring and dynamic leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, chose that latter course. It was only natural, given the fact that in the years since the Pakistan ruling circles first

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entertained the nation of the state language of Pakistan being Urdu (to the detriment of the Bengalis who formed no less than fifty six per cent of the country's population) a constant and consistent struggle had come to symbolize the spirit of the Bengali as the years came on. Following the dramatic and groundbreaking movement for Bangla to be elevated to the status of a national language, Bengalis began to define in clear perspective their national priorities.

Through the fifties and the decade-long dictatorship of Ayub Khan, the Bengali struggle was sustained through a careful enumeration of history and the cultural legacy the people were heir to. In 1966, the vision became clearer, through an articulation of the Six-Point programme for autonomy outlined by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The essence of the message was simple, which was that if the Bengalis were to carve a place of their own in the political set-up, the entire set-up needed to be transformed.

It was a change that the rulers were not willing to consider. What followed was unmitigated repression, the focal point of which came to be the infamous Agartala Conspiracy Case through which the ruling circles sought to make a dent in the Bangalee spirit, especially that of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. But revolutions always have the unusual quality of thwarting the various degrees of meanness brought into the task of diverting the attentions of people towards things of baser quality. The Bengalis emerged triumphant when the dictatorship tottered and then collapsed. But all was not achieved yet: and when the new dispensation, a sequel to the one that had fallen, tried subverting the democratic process by a calculated plan and operation of genocide between March and December of 1971, Popular resistance took shape in the form of organized armed struggle. The incarcerated national

leader, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, served as the pivot of the struggle for the emancipation of the country. And in consonance with his directives, the provisional government formed in Mujinagar on 17 April 1971 carried the struggle forward. It was a struggle that could not but culminate in victory. Despite the genocide extermination of as many as three million people and the outrage committed on no fewer than two hundred thousand women, the people of the land stood witness to freedom on the afternoon of December 16, 1971.

The surrender of a hundred thousand strong Pakistani occupation force was the beginning of a new dawn for a country that has not swerved from its consciousness of history. The sad part of the story of independent Bangladesh is that it was forced, through intrigue and organized conspiracy, to revert to darkness within three and a half years of liberation. The assassination of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, along with the members of his family, on August 15, 1975, was a most terrible act that would keep the Bengali its grip for a long period of twenty one years. The killing in prison, in that same year, of the four national leaders- Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed, M. Mansoor Ali and A. H. M. Kamruzzaman only strengthened the feeling that the country had once again fallen prey to well-planned conspiracy. After that, the moot question was one of how soon and how effectively the country could return to its historical moorings. The struggle for a return to democracy and the secular principles that had guided the nation towards the achievement of victory in 1971 was soon in force, through it would take a long time for the country to reclaim the old glory. Between the conspiracy of 1975 and the reemergence of secular democracy in 1996 lay a long trail of dictatorship and all the negativism such



dictatorships leave in their wake. Therefore, once it became clear that the forces which had shaped and conducted the struggle for freedom in 1971 were finally again triumphant in the elections of June 1996, the imperatives became patent. The need was to restore government to a state of dignity, to give the country back to the people whose sacrifices alone had gone into the achievement of freedom and the restoration of democracy after the years of unaccountable governance. The principle of government by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, was in place.

Bangladesh today is a reflection, in essence, of the rich cultural and political tradition that once defined its ethos. Its villages shape its thoughts, and ideas come in the nuances of its poetry, in the romance of its music. The spirituality of the land, as symbolized by the tales of Hazrat Shah Jalal and others, has consistently worked to deepen its mystic quality. In the works of such writers as Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam and Michael Madhusudan Dutta are embodied the qualities that shape the personality of the Bengali. Nature works wonders across this land; and nature also wreaks havoc. When it works in that manner, first as an inspiration to the growth of the soul and then as a challenge to the power of individual and collective endurance, it brings forth the resilience of the spirit that has for ages shaped Bangladesh and its people.

It is a land of laughter and deep, well-wet convictions that come through in the patterns made by the criss-crossing of the rivers across the landscape. And the rivers and many. They speak a single language. The language is one of power emanating from core beliefs, beliefs that have given Bangladesh its persona.

Bangladesh has been aptly described as a new state in an ancient land. Much has been written about past glory of

Bangladesh, notably in old records like the evidence of Pliny and Periplus of the Erythrean Sea (first century AD). it was drawn in Ptolemy's map. These indicate that from the earliest times Bangladesh was known to the West, particularly for its muslin, the finest fabric the world has ever produced. Travellers and scholars who were attracted by the charms and face of Bangladesh since time immemorial had showered effusive epithets on its bounties and wealth, affluence and prosperity, craftsmanship and cultural advancement. They include the Chinese travellers-Fa-hen (fourth century AD), Hue-an-tsung(seventh century), Ma-hoen and Fe-shin (fifteenth century), Ibne Batuta fourteenth century)) from Africa, Nicola Kanti (fifteenth century) and Ceasar the Frederick (sixteenth century) from Venice, Verthema, an Italian in the sixteenth century, Barbosa and Sebastin Manric (sixteenth century) from Portugal, Tavernier and Bernier from France (seventeenth century) and Queen Elizabeth-the First's ambassador Ralf Fish.

To Ibne Batuta, Bangladesh was "full of bounties and wealthiest and cheapest land of the world". So great were the attractions of Bangladesh that to quote Burner "it has hundred gates open for entrance but not one for departure". Ladies of Imperial Rome were literally crazy for Bangladesh's Muslin and luxury items, which according to Pliny, resulted in serious drain of gold of the Empire. Because of its location, Bangladesh served as a flourishing entry port and intermediary in trade and commerce between South Asia and the Far East. The region also played a seminal role in disseminating its beliefs and its arts and architecture in the wider world of Asia. Ancient Bangladesh took great pride as a coveted seat of learning and education and scholars from far away countries regularly flocked to its numerous universities and monasteries.

Etymologically, the word Bangladesh is derived from the cognate Vangā which was first mentioned in Aitarey Aranyaka, a Hindu scripture composed between 500 BC and 500 AD. Literally it means a wetland. Muslim merchants of Arab origin used to refer to it as Bangalah from which its present nomenclature is believed to have gradually evolved.

Geological evidence indicates that much of Bangladesh was formed 1 to 6.5 million years ago during the tertiary era. Human habitation in this region, therefore, is likely to be very old with the evidence of Paleolithic civilization dating back to about 1,00,000 years.

Bangladesh has an area of 1,48,393sq. km and occupies the apex of the arch formed by the Bay of Bengal into which all the rivers flowing through the country drain. Bangladesh has one of the most complex river systems in the world numbering about 230 with their tributaries having a total length of about 24,140 km. The climate of Bangladesh is characterized by high temperature and high humidity, heavy rainfall and marked seasonal variation. Daily temperature ranges from 10\*c to 12\*c in the cool months and in the other months it varies between 28\*c and 40\*c. Soil of Bangladesh may be divided into three main categories, namely hill soils (Chittagong and Sylhet regions), terrace soils (Barind and Madhupur tracts) and alluvial and flood plain soils.

Bangladesh contains greater biodiversity than that of many countries taken together. Indeed few countries in the world can match its rich and varied flora and fauna which are not only a unique biological phenomenon but are also a great natural resource of the country.

The people of Bangladesh are historically descendants of various races and nationalities. An Austro-Asian race first



inhabited this region followed by Dravidians and Aryans. There was also an influx of the Mongolians from Tibet and Myanmar. The Arab Muslims started coming here in the early ninth century AD.

Persians, Armenians, Turks, Afghans and lastly the Mughals came in quick succession.

As per the census of 1991 Bangladesh has a population of 111.5 million with an average density of 755 people per sq. km. It is the second largest Muslim country. Traditionally a land of communal harmony, followers of other religions enjoy full freedom of worship. The economy is spurt in industrialization with the utilization of the country's available natural resources and manpower. Trade and commerce are increasing and widening. Bangladesh is a repository of rich cultural heritage and tradition.

Long colonial exploitation has largely denuded Bangladesh of its past affluence and wealth. Independence has, however, opened new vistas of prospects and opportunities. In the final analysis, Bangladesh is a land made splendid by natural grace—a veritable mosaic in green, verdant and boisterous, with its dedicated and creative people adding colour and vibrancy to it. (The Bangladesh Diary 1997)

### **Introduction and background and concept of Empowerment**

Bangladesh is a land of some of the poorest people in the world. Half of them are women. For decades, these women were exploited in the name of tradition, culture and religion. Now the time has really come for women to build their own future. Traditionally Bangladeshi women, most of them living in the villages, are conservative. They normally remain inside home, perform the domestic works, care for the

children and elders at home. Most of the rural women help their husbands in agriculture. That is the general practice in Bangladesh. Sometimes they earn money by making small-scale cottage industry products at home. But they do not possess this money. Their husbands generally have the money to spend it at their sweet will.

The status of women in society is determined by many factors. One of the indicators is the level of education in the country. This also helps a country to improve effectively the human resources for national development. But it is a matter of great concern that educational attainment of women of Bangladesh is among the lowest in the world. However, people are not aware of women's role in the society and also in the economy of the extreme poverty of the country. In Bangladesh only one in three school age girls is in school, only 2% of women of age 20-34 are in the Universities, and only three out of a thousand women are in professional jobs (World Bank, 1990.p.59).

Since the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, the women of Bangladesh have been trying to get its own share in the different positions, social, economic and political activities. This endeavor on the part of women and demand of the day helped establish an independent Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs.

The concept of empowerment of women is not a new one. Though the concept is gaining memorandums, the empowerment of women did really exist in ancient India and early years of Islam. The religious scriptures allowed ample opportunity to the women to be considered as true partners of men in development activities. But due to misinterpretation and ulterior motives the women were confined in houses. Now a worldwide realization has emerged recently that without the



active participation of women in all the development activities the ultimate goal will not be achieved.

Empowerment is a process which enables individuals or groups to change balances of power in social, economic and political relations in society. It refers to many different activities including but not confined to awareness of the societal forces which oppress people and to actions which change power relationships. Empowerment redistributes power from the powerful to the powerless. In the Bangladeshi context, empowerment should give the vast majority of women the freedom of choice for self fulfilment and self development as well as equal access to domestic and community resources, opportunities and powers. (UNDP, 1994)

**Present status of Women in Bangladesh in social, economic and political context.**

Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. Half of them are women. These womenfolk have been following their roles in the forms of mothers, wives, sisters and daughters. They were never seen as partners of development. The status of women in the field of education is given below in the following tables:

**Table-1. Gender Disparity in Education**

Category	Male	Female
Literacy rate (15+yeras per cent)	45.5	24.2
Per cent enrolled in shcool		
Primary	77.7	61.4
Secondary	32.0	15.0
Post-secondary	12.2	2.3
Per cent dropped out		
Primary	58.3	54.9
Secondary	57.6	65.8
Percentage of teachrs		
Primary	80.0	20.0
Secondary	88.7	11.3
Post-secondary	87.4	12.6
Monthly expenditure on education		
Total Amount (Tara)	25.3	11.4
Per cent	69.0	31.0

Source : BBB ( 1993), Women and Men in Bangladesh.Facts and Figures, and UNICEF (1992), Situation Analysis of Children and Women in Bangladesh, 1992.

**Table-2. Number of students and teachers by university, 1993-94.**

Name of University	Male Students	Female	Total
Dhaka	15,876	6,988	22,864
Rajshahi	10,559	3,246	13,805
Chittagong	6,155	1,908	8,063
Jahangirnagar	3,002	917	3,919
Engineering	4,439	607	5,046
Agricultural	3,191	281	3,472
Islami	2,865	309	3,174
Shahjalal	874	105	979
Khulna	437	74	511
Open	42,401	13,125	55,526
Total	89,799	27,560	1,17,359

**Teachers**

Dhaka	900	289	1,189
Rajshahi	556	61	617
Chittagong	405	44	449
Jahangirnagar	240	47	287
Engineering	389	25	414
Agricultural	381	15	396
Islami	88	4	92
Shahjalal	61	12	73
Khulna	41	2	43
Open	34	8	42
Total	3,095	507	3,602

Source : (1) University Grants Commission.



**Table-3. Number of teacher's training colleges and institutions and number of students therein.**

Teachers Training College (Secondary School Studetns)					Teacher Training Institute (Primary School Studetns)			
	College	Male	Female	Total	Insti tutions	Male	Female	Total
1985-86	10	2,550	950	3,500	51	6,453	1,850	8,303
1986-87	10	2,615	1,009	3,624	53	4,675	3,725	8,400
1987-88	10	2,584	1,040	3,624	53	-	-	6,893
1988-89	10	2,379	1,328	3,707	53	3,286	4,439	7,725
1989-90	10	2,444	1,342	3,786	53	3,144	2,417	5,561
1990-91	10	2,444	1,342	3,786	54	NA	NA	5,010
1991-92	10	2,983	1,469	4,452	54	2,662	2,348	5,010
1992-93	10	2,983	1,469	4,452	54	2,662	2,348	5,010
1993-94 (P)	10	3,271	1,458	4,729	54	1,595	1,700	3,295

Source : 1. BANBEIS  
2. Bangladesh Economic Survey, Ministry of Finance.

**Table-4. Nmuber of teachers and students in different institutes under the University of Dhaka 1992-93**

Institute	Number of Teachers			Number of Students		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Institute of Social Welfare and Research	10	8	18	404	221	625
Institute of Statistical Research and Trainning	11	4	15	259	21	280
Institute of Modern Languages	22	4	36	469	29	498
Institute of Business Administration	32	4	36	469	29	498
Institute of Education and Research	22	16	38	384	164	548
Institute of Nutrition Science and Food	26	10	36	28	24	52
Institute of Fine Arst	31	7	38	387	235	622
Dip-in-L.Sc. and M. phil, Ph. D	10	2	12	220	157	377
Total	164	64	228	3,326	1,195	4,431

Source : Registrar, University of Dhaka.

Table-5. Number of Teachers, Students of Government Colleges in Bangladesh

No. of Schools				No. of Teachers				No. of Students (000)				
Year	Boys	Girls	Total	% Vari tion	Male	Femal e	Total	% vari tion	Boys	Girl s	Total	% vari tion
1985	43248	340	43588	1.4	159852	23786	183638	0.4	6002	4080	10082	4.4
1986	43417	295	43712	0.2	159317	25351	184668	0.4	6201	4575	10776	6.8
1987	43665	327	43992	0.6	158186	30183	188369	2.0	6378	4885	11263	4.5
1988	43831	371	44202	0.5	156484	32707	189191	0.4	6729	5026	11755	4.4
1989	45049	290	45339	2.5	157513	35303	192826	1.9	6597	5177	11774	0.2
1990	45480	303	45783	0.9	160183	39873	200056	3.7	6912	5433	12345	4.9
1991	47561	585	48146	4.9	161429	41418	202847	1.4	7111	5924	13035	5.3
1992	49483	481	49964	3.6	163641	44631	208271	2.6	7472	6245	13717	5.6
1993	47214	3684	50898	1.8	166230	48549	214779	3.3	7581	6621	14202	3.4

Source : (i) Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS). (1971 to 1977).

(ii) Primary Education Officer, M/O. Education



**Women in Development and politics.**

Over the last two decades, a world-wide sensitivity to the problems of women has developed. The feminists of both the North and the South, in spite of differences among themselves, have been very vocal about the genuine rights and shares in development for their sisters everywhere in the world.

Regarding the operational strategies, Bangladesh is in a better position than Tanzania. The last five year plan (1990-95) proposed eleven major strategies to achieve the objective of bringing women in the mainstream of development. However, it is to be noted that the women's movement has identified three key bars to achieving gender equality, namely gender inequality in unpaid reproductive labour, in entitlement to factors of production and in decision-making.

In the last two decades, women's organizations have proliferated and people have been made more aware of gender inequality through research and public debate. Mahila Parishad, Ain Shalish Kendra, Women for women, Nari Paksha, Ubinig, Nijeria Kori, Saptagram-all these women's groups and organizations have been trying to establish close links between women researchers and activists in order to enhance the women's voice and agenda. But the limitation of the process is that the non-government women's groups are still largely urban based advocacy groups with few rural links. Bangladesh is a unique case in terms of women's leadership in politics-both the Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition are women. There are three women in the present cabinet of ministers. But has the women's lot significantly changed in the country with women's increased role in politics? Perhaps we have to wait for a positive answer in this respect.

Indeed women have come a long way in having their due shares in the decision-making process. There are 30 seats reserved as the female quota in the national parliament. Three female members in each union parishad-the lowest tier of local government-were directly elected in the last union parishad elections held in December, 1997 defying the fatwa of the fundamentalists. These fundamentalists try to misinterpret Islam to their petty and mean advantage and hardly anyone dares contradict them especially in the rural areas. But the fundamentalists have failed to browbeat women into silence this time. The enthusiasm shown by the female voters in the recently held union parishad elections has encouraged the government to allot reserved seats in the corporations/ municipalities for women and there will be direct elections for these seats. These two events will surely induce the women's groups to come forward with reforms in electoral rules to accommodate more women elected bodies. However, the women's quota in the national parliament is criticized by feminists as it deters the nurturing of a political constituency for women.

**Table-6 : No of Female Ministers at Different Times**

Regime	Total No. of Ministers	Lady Minister/ State Minister/ Deputy	%
Awami League Government (1972-75)	59	02	04%
Government of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (1977-1982)	101	06	06%
Bangladesh Jatiya Party (1982-1990)	133	04	03%
Government of Bangladesh National Party (1991-1996)	39	03	05%
Awami League Govt.(1996)	24	04	16%

Source : Cabinet Division 1997

The table-6 shows a clear rising picture of empowerment of female politicians during the current political regime.

### **Women in Administration**

There was no female officer in administrative cadre before 1983. There were a few female officers in Audit and Accounts, Education cadres. Some of them worked as doctors, teachers and gradually, the women are coming to all the 28 cadres of Bangladesh civil service. The following table shows the status of women in public administration :

**Table-7 : Women in Higher Public Administration**

Post	Male	Female	Total	%
Secretary	50	01	51	2%
Addl. Secretary	79	02	81	2.5%
Joint Secretary	247	07	254	2.8%
Deputy Secretary	474	14	488	2.9%

Source : Organization and Management Wing, Ministry of Establishment, 1996.

### **Review of the existing policies and programmes of both Government and NGO**

#### **Gender Question :**

In recent years, questions centering around gender equality have become important and demand to be answered expeditiously. Women comprise 48 per cent of the population of the country. Of this, 86 per cent live in rural areas. The average age of women at marriages is less than 18 years; on average a woman produces four children in her life time. Social norm against remarriage of widows coupled with an average age



gap of 10 years between men and women in wedlock result in 90 per cent of widowed population being females. Likewise, women comprise 94 per cent of the divorced population of which 54 per cent are below 24 years of age. As of now, participation of females in labour force amounts to over 20 per cent of all households of the country are functionally female headed. Constitutionally, women in Bangladesh have equal rights with men in all spheres of the state and of public life; they cannot be discriminated against or subjected to any disability or restriction with regard to access to any place of public entertainment or resort or admission to any educational institution on ground of being women.; they are entitled to special provisions in their favour to be made by the state (article 28); they cannot be discriminated against in respect of any employment or office of the state (article-29). In addition to these fundamental rights, prevention of prostitution (article-18) and ensuring participation of women in national life (article-10) are constitutionally accepted as two fundamental principles of state policy. Further, guaranteeing of fundamental human rights and freedom and respect for the dignity and worth of the human person is adopted as a principle fundamental to the governance of the country (article-11).

**Situation Considerations :** Despite these constitutional rights and entitlements, women across both classes and religions, have quite a scope to improve upon their status and condition in terms of equality with men. If progress in this respect is not made or slowed down, conflict breeding out of gender inequality as already observed, will increase in intensity with fuelling from the borderless information media and fast changing economic circumstances. Specific to the conduits for making progress are the following considerations:

- a. Women's lives are organized, (particularly in rural areas) within a framework of biological, labour and social reproduction of a society in which management of female sexuality is central to the dominant male interest; in this frame high value is attributed to female sexuality; this makes females acutely insecure, requiring a cultural norm of isolation and protection to avoid possible female violation; in this cultural norm, a violated female irrespective of causes or manner of violation, is treated as a female fallen from virtue and left to earn her livelihood in any way she can in this process, resort to the oldest profession or prostitution by her is acceptable without its being much stigmatic on male customers and patrons.
- b. Under changing economic conditions, the aforesaid cultural norm breaks down, a continuous deviancy from the acquired cultural norm about womanhood starts to win over degradation of women as human persons; to accentuate such a break-down, dynamics of those who break the norm, those who tolerate the breaking and those who uphold the norm need to be assessed and understood; as is perceived such a breaking-down has its class dimension; for the poor material or economic circumstances may make men encourage women to break the norm and come out of chains of isolation and protection.
- c. As women come out of isolation, veils and chains into a working and pulsating lives, they are likely to confront the 'double day' and consequently even 'double exploitation' through the interplay of gender and class relations; the prevailing gender relations do not usually release them from the primary responsibility for homestead chores even when and after they enter the formal work place or the job market. Thus an extension of female

participation in male dominated workworld needs to be accompanied by changes in traditional codes of household duties enjoining amongst others, cooking of meals and rearing children on females alone.

- d. Evidently, there is male bias in the set of family laws in force: women across both classes and religions have to struggle over their (i) inheritance rights in natal family; (ii) rights to choose husbands; (iii) sexuality and pregnancies in marriage; (iv) rights to the dowry which usually accompanies her at marriage; (v) property right in the event of husbands' death; (vi) right over property and to subsistence in the event of divorce or desertion; (vii) custody right over children, their subsistence and education; and (viii) procedure of separation and divorce. The laws relating to nationality in marriage, equality of pay, maternity leave, protection against sexual harassment at work places, etc., are either absent or unendorsed.
- e. Equality apart, research across countries in recent years shows that female education has marked negative relation with fertility and infant mortality and strong positive relation with life expectancy; likewise schooling is found to have important influence on choice of number and quality of children; these are effects that influence long term growth of a society. Specific to Bangladesh, equality of women with men is likely to have positive effects on poverty alleviation. The female headed households constituting over 20 per cent of all rural households are about the poorest reflecting widowhood, divorce and abandonment, all virtually uncared for by the society.

**Policy Measures :** These five considerations point out as many mutually reinforce policy measures fraught with elements of social and economic conflicts:



- a. Breaking the cultural norm centred round high valuation and consequent protection of female sexuality; this is likely to create and even intensify conflict with the fundamentalists and uneducated male chauvinists; widespread liberal arts education, female literacy and collective effort by conscious and educated women to break the traditional gender code are likely to limit such conflict down to its ultimate winning over by the forces favoring gender equality;
- b. Providing women access to power through access to material resources : to this end some definite ways are : (i) credit support following the principles developed by the Grameen Bank and some NGOs working in the field; (ii) adopting a system or norm for joint registration of properties by married couples during marriage; (iii) reform towards equitable inheritance law; (iv) affirmative female employment policy; and (v) election of women members of the parliament and local government bodies (against seats reserved for women) by universal adult franchise of the relevant constituencies;
- c. Changing the traditional gender code of division of duties of males and females; this can be done through education, orientation and conscientisation; NGOs working in the field have already shown ways following which an initial and widespread break-through can be made; public debates, open dialogues and affirmative actions by women organizations are likely to have positive effects; opening up all modes of employment in the government and parastatals to women is likely to provide the needed pilotage in this regard;
- d. Making appropriate reforms in laws relating to family, inheritance, parental responsibility, work place equality

and nationality in marriage; these have to be taken up by the parliament in conformity with the constitutional provisions and mandates; and

- e. Extending education and health facilities with an effective and affirmative bias towards women: to this end, the recently adopted subventions and supports to female education in secondary schools and physically extended health care and family planning facilities are steps in the right direction; these steps need to be strengthened through curricular reform and improvement of the health and related service delivery system.

### **Recommendations and Suggestions :**

So far we have discussed and brought out meaningful insights into the position of women in our society. But the item has really come when words should be translated into positive deeds. Karl Marx's oft-quoted remark would bear repetition in this contest : 'Philosophers have so far interpreted the world in various ways. The point, however, is to change it'. We can improve the condition of women only when we can coordinate the sincere efforts made by all the actors- government, civil society and NGOs and the donors and when the forces of change can establish their hegemony. It would perhaps help to clarify our vision if we can deal more elaborately with the forces of change shaping up within the civil society. Finally, it is also worth remembering that without the close cooperation and participation of women in the process of social production and their consequent empowerment, we can not have national development in the true sense of the term.

For effective Empowerment of Women the following measures should be taken by the different agencies including the Government.

**Actions in advocacy :**

- a. Political commitment for the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment in all spheres of life by the year 2010. This should be reflected in the constitutions and manifestos of major political parties and by a Government statement of intent.
- b. Advocacy for sharing housework between male and female members of the family and to change the attitudes of husbands, parents, in-law and community.

**Actions for Government :**

- a. assessment of capacity, impact and cost-effectiveness of MWS and WID focal points in Line Ministries.
- b. electoral reforms to ensure women's direct election to the national parliament and at all levels of local government.
- c. legal reforms to give wives rights over joint property during marriage.
- d. specific programmes to give land title to single landless women.
- e. implementation of the ILO conventions on labour laws for the protection of female industrial workers.

**Actions for other organizations :**

- a. inclusion of gender issues in the party manifestos.
- b. providing different role models of women in redesigned curricula and through counselling, specially for adolescent girls.

(UNDP, 1994.)

**Conclusion :**

We require both our hands to pray to our Creator. So the active cooperation between the men and women is a must for real development for a developing country like Bangladesh.



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