

Combating Violence against Women in South Asia: An Overview of Bangladesh

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Abstract

The term violence against women is not new to us. But today this problem is very seriously committed through all over the world especially in south Asia likes, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Shrilanka, Mayanmar, Nepal and Afghanistan. In this paper I have tried to explore the nature, forms, causes, impact and the remedies are available of violence against women in South Asia especially in Bangladesh. Lastly I have recommends how to combat women violence in Bangladesh as well as South Asia in the light of International organization of violence against women by considering the socio-economic and cultural environment of Bangladesh. The paper is based on secondary sources of information like books, journals, research reports and newspapers. Relevant literature has also been collected through Internet browsing.

Key Words: Combat, Violence and Women.

Introduction

Women and gender issues have increasingly become very important in Asia in precognition of the fact that improvement of the condition of the people of the country must necessarily include development strategies related to women, who make up almost half of the population. With the appreciation of this fact, a variety of programmes specifically related to women and gender issues have been undertaken by government and non-government institutions. It has also been proved globally that women should not be targeted to confine to some specific activities only. They can play equally a significant role side by side with man in different activities or professions contributing to nation building and welfare activities for human advancement. Most of the South Asian countries like Bangladesh; the women are still in the grip of socio-economic, cultural, politico-religious stigma and could not play an assertive role in the activities beginning from family to state. Rather their effective participation in the all phases of life has been abstracted by socioeconomic and cultural factors. The women are still treated as weaker segment of population of the society and they have been made subject various social, domestic repressive measures. Very often we hear and press reveals how the women folk in urban and rural areas are being persecuted or injured physically and mentally both. In

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Bangladesh women are victimized by the different violence. Most common acts of violence are torture, acid throwing, dowry, kidnapping, forced prostitution, suicide, rape, sexual harassment and trafficking.

Conceptual Analysis

Violence is a product of social, cultural, religious and traditional values, which perpetuate patriarchal attitudes at different Level of society and restrict female empowerment. Violence against women (VAW) refers to any private or public act that is likely to cause them physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering (Islam, 2004; 119). VAW affects all spheres of a woman's life-her autonomy, her productivity, and her capacity to care for herself and her children and subsequently also her overall health status and quality of life. However, it is only recently that VAW has become of focus of discussion in South Asia. WHO's World Report on Violence and Health defines violence as the international use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal development or deprivation. Each year over 1.6 million people worldwide lose their lives to violence. Violence is among the leading causes of death for people aged 15-44 years world wide, accounting for 14% of death among males and 7% of deaths among females, for every, person who dies as a result of violence, many more are injured and suffer from a range of physical, sexual, reproductive and mental health problems. Moreover, violence places a massive burden and national economies costing countries billions of US dollars each year in health care, law enforcement and lost productivity (Who, 2002).

The declaration on the Elimination of violence Against women, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993 defines violence against women as "Any act of gender based violence that result in or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.

Article-2 of the declaration states violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to, the following:

- i) Physical sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry related

violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation;

ii) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution;

iii) Physical sexual and psychological perpetrated or condoned by the state, wherever it occurs.

Although broad in its scope, this statement defines violence as act that cause or have the potential to cause harm, and emphasizes that these acts are rooted in gender inequality. This focus on women does not deny the fact that men experience violence.

The international communities have recognized that VAW is a violation of women's human rights, their bodily integrity, and their sexual and reproductive rights. It is also acknowledged that promotion of women rights is a means to ensure sustainable development. The convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) 1978 is the most comprehensive international agreement imposing legally binding duties eliminate discrimination against women and ensure equality between women and men. It offers a means of holding Governments accountable for structural and systematic discrimination against women. In its approach, the convention covers three dimensions relevant to the situation of women (Rahman, Undated).

i) It brings together in single treaty body civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights;

ii) Unlike other treaties it imposes obligations on state parties to eliminate discrimination in private as well as public life;

Finally, it addresses reproductive rights and the role of cultural factors in perpetuating discrimination against women.

It is worth mentioning that Kofi Annan Un General Secretary rightly observes that "Violence's against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation. It knows no boundaries of geography culture or wealth. As long as it continues, we can not claim to be making veal progress equality, development and peace," (Rahman, Undated) However, assertive behavior against women may take the following forms (Rashid, 2003; 315):

- i) Physical violence which includes all aggressive behavior inflicted on the body of victim by an aggressor such as pushing, pinching grabbing and pulling by the hair, chucking, burning, stabbing throwing acid or boiling water, shooting and so on.
- ii) Sexual violence includes physical attacks on victims erogenous organs, e.g. breast and genitals of forced sexual activity accompanied by physical violence on described earlier.
- iii) Psychological violence is committed by using psychological weapons such as verbal threats of violence against the victim or a person dear to her, forcing the victim to degrade herself: excessive controlling, curtailing and/or disruption of routine activities such as sleeping or eating habits social relationship, access to money, verbal insult and so on.
- iv) Various violence is committed through damage or destruction of property or assault on pets or even children.

Major Trends and Forms

All these various forms of violence, mentioned above may take place in private and public arena, committed by family members or strangers. Major types of violence committed against women are as under:

Family Violence: Violence committed by family members within the family home is the most serious and repugnant of all types of violence. In south Asian countries where reliable, Large scale studies on gender violence are available, more than 20% women are reported to have been abused by man with whom they live. Not only they abused by their husbands. Their mother-in-law, father, also physically or mentally tortures them in law, and sister in law or brother in law for dowry. This is a common phenomenon in Joint poor family. The women's labor is not properly recognized not given their due share and always they are kept neglected or ignored on different pretexts. Their masters-male or female on a very trifling matter or flimsy ground also inhumanly tortures the maidservants. The tortured becomes often sever that they are succumbed to death. Wife battering is not only an event in Bangladesh it is also corn man in many African and Western World. In USA one in four and Canada one in ten women face domestic violence (Rahman, undated) violence in the family include the following (Daily Star: 2004):

Battering by intimate partners, fathers or brothers; Sexual abuse of female children and young women in the household by family members; Dowry-related violence; Marital rape. Female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women. It also covers abuse of domestic workers including –Involuntary confinement; Physical brutality; Slavery-like conditions; Sexual assault.

Rape and Sexual Abuse: Rape is an unlawful sexual intercourse with a female person without her consent by force or threat of force. It is the most serious and frequently occurred form of violence against women. In our country everyday a huge number of women and girl are being raped. According to a report made by Ayne O Salish Kendro, from January to December, 2002, 1412 women have been victimized of whom 149 have been killed after rape (Rashid, 2003). In 2001, according to BNWLA source, it is understood that as many as 605 women rights organization Naripokkho documented 545 rape incidents the same year (Ialam-2004). Beside many such cases are happening behind the public screen and notice of the people. Even many known cases are not reported in the press or case filed in police station because of social stigma attached to it. The unfortunate part of the story is that the raped women is socially condemned, ostracized and boycotted, ignored and widely believed to be responsible for their own rape. A raped woman also is considered as abandoned women no place in the society, hence the raped women or relatives of that woman keep the incidents secrets. There are various form of rape in Bangladesh such as: rape in work place, rape in domestic environment, rape in police custody, child rape, gang rape, data rape institutional rape, spousal rape and rape by intimate male relations.

Prostitution and Trafficking in Women: The problem of prostitution and trafficking in women seems to have increased tremendously in the last two decades. Trafficking in women and children, most often for commercial sexual exploitation is estimated to rise up to 8 million us dollar each year, according to the international organization for migration (IOM). The huge profit reaped by the perpetrators, increasingly linked to organized crimes has turned this trade into a rapidly growing menace. Poor women and the girls are among the target groups of traffickers, because other magnetization of poverty and limited economic resources. In Bangladesh a gang of traffickers induces the poor and wretched women and children for love marriage and also pretension of love and marriage

and illegally traffic them to Pakistan, India and Middle East countries to become domestic servants and often used sexually.

It is extremely difficult to assess the actual number of prostitute currently in operation in our country. According to a report published by coalition against trafficking in women (CATW) AROUND 2,00,000 women have been smuggled in ten years up to Sept. 1995. According to some estimation, the number of prostitutes in Dhaka and Narayangonj may be around 50,000. Some of them are brothels some operates as street prostitutes and some are hold call girls.

Acid Throwing: Acid throwing is another form of violence against women, which are increasing at alarming women, which are increasing at an alarming rate. The young and teenaged girls fell victim of acid burn because of refusal of marriage and rejection of love proposal given by young man. Acid burns also taken as measures of personal revenge, family quarrel and quarrel in couple and also feuds between two families, kinship.

Although laws have been made against such cruelty, the offenders are practicing very often in the society. According to the report of Ayne O Salish Kendro, 262 incident of acid throwing have been recorded between Jan-Dee. 2002 of whom any 63 have been litigated (Rashid, 2003).

Abduction: Women are helpless and suffer from a deep sense of insecurity with the increase of deterioration of law and order situation the scale of abduction has astronomically risen particularly in industrial cities where the female workers are abundant in garments factories, the abduction case has sharply increased. Not only it is confined to garments workers only, the teen aged girls are also reported being abducted from the school premises. After abduction the criminals demand a big ransom for their release. In case they fail to get ransom the abducted girls are made worst victims of sex harassment, and in extreme cases they are brutally killed.

In a study made by ACD Rajshahi, from 1999 to 2003, 30 women, girls or children were abducted. One has to take this point in mind that Rajshahi is relatively a peaceful city as compared to other cities and district town of Bangladesh (Rahman, undated).

Dowry Violence: Demanding giving and accepting dowry is illegal in Bangladesh. The practice, however, still prevails in many sections of the society. A major reason is the rising unemployment among young males, especially in rural Bangladesh, often the bride's parents cannot contribute the whole amount of dowry at once. The issue of dowry

is probably the most common sources of domestic violence in rural Bangladesh, where the husband along with his parents and relative, remind the wife that the remaining payment is still due. Incidents of murder or attempted murder for dowry-related reasons are regular items in the country's daily papers.

The following case study documented by Odhikar clearly shows how far such illegal demands of money can go.

Case study: R. an 18-years old woman, married W four years ago. W drives a rickshaw van and is a habitual gambler. He sold the little property he had to pay his gambling debts. After he began stealing to pay off the debts, his father threw him out of the house. He took his wife to live on the homestead of his brother-in law and sister. W to bring dowry from her father's house constantly presented R. This nagging took the shape of beatings and other forms of physical and mental violence. Soon this violence became a common part of her daily life. Her sister-in-law and her husband even joined in the verbal and sometimes physical abuse. At one point, her father a poor farmer, managed to scrape together ten thousand for his son-in-law, leading to more demands.

In October 2000, after a severe beating from her husband, R took her six-month-old daughter to her father's house. The next morning her father sent her back home after giving her some rice and fifty taka. But W, upon seeing her, heated her again. He pushed her out of the house and told her to go back to her father's house. Her father forcibly kept their young daughter with him. R had no choice but to return to her father's house. The next day, W's younger brother came to her village and local elders restrained her from seeing her daughter. Her father's husband went instead and found that the child had been buried.

Within the same month, R's father filed a case against W. Immediately on hearing the news, W with the politically influential chairperson (elected sub-district Representative) along with the same village head who prevented R from seeing her child, began to pressure R's family to retract the case. A shalish was arranged and W was made to give R one thousand four hundred taka as compensation and her family was told to withdraw the case. R told Odhikar investigators that her family did not have the economic support to carry on a case and thus decided to withdraw the case filed. Nor does she want to return to her husband's home. She is afraid that she will meet the same fate as her six-month-old daughter, who is believed to have been murdered (Rahman, 2004),

Mental or Psychological Torture: Women are also victims of silent mental torture. Apart from physical torture they are made subject to mental torture both at home and outside. Even at their work place they are often ignored, ridiculed, deprived of financial benefits. Socially derided and arrogant young boys also often tease the school and college going girls. The acid victims become mentally depressed and pass their days under fearful mental agony.

Torture during Pregnancy: Bearing a child is a very difficult task and causes a lot of physical strain. For the growth and development of the baby and for a normal and easy birth a woman requires sufficient food, leisure which are often denied or not taken into notice in most cases of joint poor families. She is deprived of regular medical checkup and not getting proper medicine for keeping the baby healthy and alive. Denial of all these facilities are nothing but a stress for the women to survive to deliver the baby.

Forced to Prostitution: This is an old practice and an evil, a social disease too. On many pretexts and temptations the girls are abducted and forced to live a life of sex workers and those who control them or manage them. They are also great exploiters. They enjoy a greater share of money earned by the sex worker and on the other hand the latter are reduced to a life of bare necessities.

Murder: Murder is the most cruel form of women violence. The murder of women by their husbands and in laws is related to escalation of dowry demands and with more general harassment and severe beating of women. Women are murdered secretly as well as openly by the gunshot by the hired terrorists. Sometimes on a very trifling cause or neglected issue or of sudden rise of anger beyond control, kill wife and children. In an ACD Report it is found that in the year 2001, 590 women were murdered on different causes.

A report was published in the Daily Prothom Alo on 10 January, 2004 on women violence cases filed to the police station from 1998-2003 is as follows:

Table-1

Women violence					
Period	Rape	Acid throwing	Hurt	Others	Total
1998	2959	146	200	4082	7387
1999	3504	148	237	4819	8710
2000	3140	155	297	6943	10535
2001	3189	153	351	9265	12958
2002	4106	303	525	13521	18455
2003	4442	222	660	14918	20242

Source: The Daily Prothom Alo, 10, January-2004.

Actually the above information are available and applicable for Bangladesh. Now I have also mentioned here Pakistan India and Nepal.

Violence against Women in Pakistan:

ISLAMABAD, 2 Feb 2005 (IRIN) - Two independent reports on domestic violence against women in Pakistan have found that the country is suffering increasing levels of abuse in spite of legislation to provide women with protection.

'The State of Human Rights in 2004', the annual report of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) was released on Tuesday in Islamabad, covering the period from January to October 2004. It said that although there is increased awareness of the issue and discussion at both official and non-official levels, little had been achieved.

"Existing laws were poorly implemented. The practices that led to the crimes against women continued across the country under the cover of 'tradition', however, no efforts were made by the government to ensure an improvement in ground realities. Rather, attempts were made to defend the murder of women and violence against them by some legislatures," said the HRCP.

A second report compiled by the Lawyers for Human Rights and Legal Aid organisation (LHRLA) recorded some 4,302 cases of violence against women which had been reported in the print media and more than 1,000 cases of sexual abuse, during 2004.

The HRCP found the incidence of physical, sexual or verbal violence against women in the home to be amongst the highest in the world. According to their figures, up to 80 percent of women in the country suffer from such abuse.

The extent of domestic strife was illustrated, said the HRCP, by the fact that in the first half of 2004, around 5,464 cases involving violent husbands were pending in the civil courts of the Punjabi capital, Lahore alone. Many other cases of domestic discord never even reached the courts, it said.

Cases of acid attacks on women have grown alarmingly over the past three years, notably in the southern Punjab, according to the HRCP. Over 15 attacks were reported in the Bahawalpur district alone between January and June 2004. "Looking at the figures coming from various sources, it appears that violence against women is clearly increasing. But to curtail this violence, the laws need to be strengthened. A whole system needs to be put in place to help the victims," said Anis Haroon, the Resident Director of the women's rights and advocacy group, the Aurat Foundation.

"We can talk about it, discuss at different forums, highlight it and then get some relief for a few victims after making some noise before the higher authorities, but that's not all. There should be a proper system in place to compensate the victims and curtail the violence as well," Haroon told IRIN, speaking from the southern port city of Karachi. The HRCP report said both the official figures and unofficial estimates indicated an increase in the incidence of rape. According to the HRCP figures, about 670 rapes were reported in the first ten months of 2004. Three hundred and fifty of those were gang rapes.

However, the HRCP added that some press reports suggested the true national figure for both reported and unreported rapes indicated the number of victims to be over 10,000 a year. The HRCP report further observed that despite a ban on 'jirga' trials, under which an assembly of local tribal elders passes verdict, the decisions taken by the 'jirgas' continued to jeopardise the safety of women. The increase in verdicts violating the rights and dignity of women issued by 'extra-judicial court-like' forums has to be brought to an end, demanded the HRCP. It also called for the withdrawal of a proposed new ordinance in

Sindh which would legitimise such 'jirgas'. The report added that flaws in a recently introduced law on 'honour killing' must be removed. It called for judges, lawyers and police officials, as well as other sections of society, to be urgently educated on the terrible consequences for women of many customs, including 'honour killings', so that the courts and administration are deterred from extending protection to such illegal practices. "Besides introducing strong legislation, the entire system of the police and judiciary needs to be reformed. And for that a strong political will is needed, which is lacking at the moment. Unless the people at the helm of the affairs are not punished for violating the laws, nothing will change," Haroon maintained (IRIN; 2004).

Violence against women in India and Nepal:

1. As the Asian Legal Resource Centre has previously stated before the Commission, approximately 260 million people in South Asia are designated as Dalits. At the very bottom of the social structure, Dalits suffer constant discrimination and violence on the basis of descent. The Asian Legal Resource Centre has this year submitted a separate written statement to the Commission on the condition of Dalits in Nepal.
2. That Dalit women suffer an additional layer of discrimination and violence on the basis of gender both by people of higher castes and within their own communities has also been made amply clear before the Commission (E/CN.4/2003/NGO/97). The extreme vulnerability of Dalit women stems from the precariousness of their economic, social, and political position. Despite the fact that both the constitutions of India and Nepal prohibit the practice of untouchability, these provisions are not enforced. In India, even though the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Prevention of Atrocities Act bars violence against the Dalits, it is not effectively implemented. Nor does it in fact outlaw caste-based discrimination, which the government of India has refused to recognise as a form of discrimination on the basis of descent. Under any circumstances, whereas the police are the authority equipped to investigate crimes, in many cases it is either the police who are the perpetrators of caste-based human rights violations, or high caste persons with the influence necessary to have the police hush up the crime.
3. A case in point is that of Muna Devi Damai, a 40-year-old Dalit woman from Dhangadi, Far Western Region, Nepal. On 8 April 2003, Muna was force-fed human faeces by her neighbours, Bir Bahadur Thapa and his wife, Parbati Thapa, both of the upper caste. In the morning the couple called her to their house. When she entered the compound, Bir Bahadur Thapa grabbed her by hair and threw her on the ground. Then Parbati Thapa sat on her chest and both of them started to beat her. Muna Devi cried and tried to defend herself, but to no avail. While Parbati Thapa was continuously beating Muna Devi, Bir Bahadur Thapa brought human faeces, which they had prepared into paste mixed with chili powder. They forced the paste into Muna Devi's mouth. She could not save herself and fainted. Her children rushed out when they heard their mother's cry, but they could do nothing but to cry out loud. They were too small to defend their mother. They carried their mother home and cleaned her, but she remained unconscious. The other neighbors came to Muna Devi's house and expressed their sympathies, but refused to provide any other help. Muna Devi tried to launch a complaint at the local police station but was turned down by the police since she is Dalit. Later the couple paid her to drop her attempts at legal action.
4. Caste-based discrimination is referred to as discrimination on the basis of descent and work because each caste is restricted to one kind of work, with the most demeaning, menial, degrading and 'polluting' work done by Dalits. Typically, this work involves

the disposal of human excreta, or the bodies of dead animals and corpses. Invariably, it is the Dalit women who are forced by the men to do these jobs. The feudal nature of the caste system also prevents Dalits from leaving their prescribed work. Many are paid nothing at all. Others are given no money, but only a portion of grain or some other payment in kind. This practice leaves them in complete dependency on the upper castes who control and own the businesses and land.

5. Apart from being forced into the most demeaning 'ritual' jobs, Dalit women are also extremely vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Among the Dalit communities, one landless group, the Badi, has for years survived by prostituting its women. More recently, young Dalit women from Nepal are being brought to India in increasing numbers, where they are forced to work as prostitutes. Sometimes they are sent further afield. Many believe that they will obtain jobs as domestic helpers or similar, and willingly follow recruitment agents in the hope of earning money with which to support their families. The police in both Nepal and India support the trade, opening up routes for the women and girls to be sent through, and protecting the brothels. The victims end up as sex slaves, and many die miserable deaths due to sexually transmitted diseases. Those who protest are threatened and, if necessary, murdered, while the police ensure that such crimes are never uncovered.
6. When a Dalit woman is subjected to violence the chances of her getting her grievances redressed are remote. The victim may not even lodge a complaint. The reasons are usually that the victim
 - a. Is facing threats from the perpetrators, usually upper caste persons or others with social influence.
 - b. Fears that the police will commit more violence against her.
 - c. Does not know her rights.
 - d. May have been discouraged by the unsuccessful attempts of other victims to have their complaints recorded by the police.
7. The judiciary in India and Nepal does not help the situation in any way. Even where cases are taken up, the victims face great ordeals in court due to the ignorance of judges, corrupt prosecution systems, absence of legislation to provide compensation, and inordinate delays in court proceedings. Other agencies such as the respective National Human Rights Commissions, and the National Women's Commission in Nepal, provide little relief and are institutions established by the respective states out of political convenience rather than any serious commitment to the values they purportedly represent.
8. In light of the above, the Asian Legal Resource Centre submits to the Commission that
 - a. Caste-based discrimination against Dalit women in India and Nepal is a matter requiring the introduction and effective implementation of laws that will hold the perpetrators of abuses responsible for their actions, and ensure adequate compensation for the victims.
 - b. Immediate action must be taken to investigate the allegations of Muna Devi Damai against Bir Bahadur Thapa and Parbati Thapa, and also her allegation that police refused to take up the case when she lodged a complaint. Suggestions that the victim in this case may have been compensated by way of a settlement with the perpetrators are irrelevant to the question of their alleged criminal action. While the question of adequate compensation for the victim arises, it is a separate matter from criminal prosecution, and should never be seen or used as a substitute for prosecution or as a

supplementary measure where the punishment handed to an offender is widely perceived to be inadequate. In addition to compensation, the emotional and personal needs of the victims also must be considered, particularly in the case of sexual violence.

- c. The problem of cross-border trafficking of women and girls from Nepal into forced prostitution in India must be treated with far greater seriousness, in particular taking into account the role of the police forces in the two countries in encouraging and perpetuating the trade (ALRC, 2004).

Factors Contributing to Increased Violence against Women

In recent years the incidents of women violence have increased significantly in South Asia. There are different socio-economic, political, cultural and religious component's which have contributed to the increased vulnerability of women to male violence are as under:

Male Dominated Society: As a male dominated society men in all sphere of their life dominate the women of Indian subcontinent. In her life cycle a women depends on father, brother, husband and lastly their sons. Besides, they are dominated and oppressed in every sector by the male members. Owing to such dependency, the male members think that they always direct women and all services should be centered to the interest of the male. Besides, the society's basic reluctance to drastically change patriarchal policies and practices, which perpetuate male dominance over women (Islam, 2004; 127). As a result, from time immemorial the male members consider women as an object of enjoyment.

Socio-Economic Factors: The disruption in the traditional rural economic pattern brought about by changing socio-economic processes has adverse effects on women. Both economically and socially vulnerable in the society. Traditional socio-cultural practices, low rate of education, lack of employment opportunity, and low nutritional and health status etc. are some of the factors responsible for holding low social and economic status, unemployment have increased the stress and tension in male-female relation in poor households and given rise to desertion, divorce and violence.

Cultural Ideological Factors: Irrespective of national affluence or level of development, women are vulnerable to exploitation, oppression and all other types of explicit violence from men in all societies where cultural norms, tradition and legal system sanction women's subordination to men. In Bangladesh, an important mechanism of male dominance is the propagation of gender ideology through sanctions of religious texts and their gender-selective interpretation by the community leaders. Moreover, increasing

exposure to violence through popular reading, theaters, film and TV shows, satellite culture etc. directly or indirectly encourage men to commit offences like rape.

Ineffective Legal System: Theoretically Bangladeshi state regards man and women as equal. However, the states concern to preserve the existing patriarchal social order is clear from the ways laws operate in respect to violence against women. The Bangladeshi legal system has done little to diminish women's vulnerability to violence. Another problem lies in the existing legal system is that the victim has to seek permission from the magistrate for medical test. During accomplishing these formalities, the rape evidences are many a time destroyed. As a result, the offenders do not get punishment. In such circumstances, the rapist is more active to evict the victim and her family and eagerly wait to commit another violence. Even religious sanctions and traditional values safeguard the interest of the patriarchy through family norms, community practices; state policies and laws.

Criminalization of Public Arena: Today the politics and administration in Bangladesh has been criminalized severely. Such Criminalization and corresponding deterioration of the law and order situation has not spared women. In the last two decades, the musleman and student cadres of various political parties have committed various acts of violence against women and escaped punishment. So, such a tendency towards acceptance of violence in the society is mainly responsible for increased violence against women.

Social Attitude of Women: Women in general in South Asia think that husband has the right to impose punishment or torture on wife. Such misconceptions indirectly recognize the right of the male offenders. As a result, the rape incidents are not reducing rather it is on increase day by day.

Devaluation of Moral Character: Socio-economical conditions like poverty, unemployment etc. and political unrest tend to force young people to be involved in terrorism, drug addiction, hijacking, illegitimate sex and other antisocial activities. Thus dislocated form moral courage they like to cheer up more by occurring rape violence as thrill and adventure (Islam, 2004).

Poverty Pervasiveness: Most people of the country are often victimized of due to object poverty. People in large number are live in rural areas. Near about 40% of them are live bellows the poverty line. They live from hand to mouth. Owing to their poverty condition the rural people something tend to incest female members to workout side the home even

in urban areas. In that case, miscreants allure them of job and take the opportunity of their helplessness and commit rape.

Other Influential Factors: Besides these, other influential components are responsible for the rape occurrence in the country, lack of education and awareness in case of women, gender disparity, practice of power, land dispute, illicit love affair, denial of love and marriage, opposing second marriage, expansion of political supremacy in the specific area and others, are directly or indirectly associated with criminal activities including women violence.

Impact and Consequences of Women Violence

There are multifarious impacts of women violence both on society and the victims. Different studies have explained consequences of rape in various ways. Akanda and Shamim (1985) have classified the consequences of rape into three categories: Murder, severe injuries and mental illness. Rape impacts on victim's health such as pelvic inflammatory disease, chronic pelvic pain, asthma, irritable bowel syndrome, partial or permanent disability, delayed physical effects like arthritis, hypertension and heart disease, unwanted pregnancy, pregnancy complications, or premature labor, miscarriage, maternal mortality from excessive bleeding of infection, HIV infections and death etc. are vital (BPFA, 2002; Islam, 2004: 129). These physical conditions tend to transform them as a dependent person both in the family and society. In this way women violence have many other impact like as:

Psychological: In the back drop of psychological and emotional maladjustment the victim can be habituated in smoking, unprotected sex with multiple partners, prostitution and alcohol or drug abuse, humiliation, guilt, shame, embarrassment, self-blame, anger and helplessness and so on. Sometime these situation push the victim to commit suicide.

Social: Women violence has a great social impact. The victim is considered as a neglected person of the society as a social stigma. They loss the dignity of society and encourage to another violence and social deviant activities. As a result break down their family and lead an insecure life. If the victim is unmarried, everybody treated her as a stigma and burden of society. Nobody will be welcomed her to marriage. As a result many of them choose to prostitution or suicide.

Economical: Women violence also hinders programs for alleviating poverty in addition to increasing the legal and health costs. Further more, it losses the labor time, hinders

income generating activities of women in the society (Islam, 2004; 130). A study report of World Bank State that rape and domestic violence 15-44 aged women are affected by tuberculosis, pregnancy infection, cancer, heart disease and so on which increases the health services costs (Rahman, 2002; 50).

Political: The political environment of a country is influenced by the women violence. The incidence of rape reduces the women empowerment, hamper5s the social security and creates obstacles to establish democracy and good governance (Islam, 2004: 130).

A Universal Abuse: It is easy to think that human rights abuses happen to other people, in places of conflict or repression. The truth is that violence against women is an abuse that is not confined to any political or economic system. It is prevalent in every society in the World. It cuts across boundaries of wealth, race and culture. It affects the young and the old. Wherever you live, women are suffering violence.

Side Spread Harm: The repercussions of violence against women reverberate throughout the family and community. Children in particular are damaged when exposed to it. Actual or threatened violence creates an atmosphere of fear that limits the lives of women everywhere. When force and fear restrict women's lives, society is impoverished economically, politically and culturally.

Discrimination: The underlying causes of violence against women lies in gender discrimination-the denial of women's equality with men in all areas of life. Women are also targeted because of their race, class, culture, sexual identity or HIV status, or because they are from poor or marginalized communities.

Remedies Against Women Violence:

Some initiatives have been taken both in national and international level for combating women violence. Among the national initiatives, Suppression of Violence Against Women and Children Act, 2000, Muslim Family Law Ordinance, 1961, rectified in 1995, Family Court Ordinance, 1985, reformed in 1989 can be mentioned. Nonetheless, another initiative likes legal aid committee and the government has introduced women investigation centers. On the other hand, among the international initiatives, CEDAW 1981, UN convention on child Rights 1989, ILO convention 1960, World Human Right Conference in Vienna 1993, Fourth World Women Conference in Beijing 1995, Katmandu Declaration 1997 etc. are the remarkable initiatives (Islam, 2004; 131).

Now we will have to look at what measures are available both on the state and non- state sectors for removing or reducing violence. One noted scholar on women studies Jahan points out that violence against women is accepted, tolerated and in, 'certain prescribed forms and given contexts' and in that sense it is legitimated. She further holds that 'gender violence is deeply related to inequality' and this is all so embedded in Bangladeshi social structure, all Bangladeshi institutions permit, even increase demonstration of unequal power relation between both the sexes. Other's also supported this view.

Bangladesh have taken a firm stand on ending all sort of discrimination against women. Bangladesh are a member state that has signed the CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women) The government endorsed the Beijing Platform for Action without any reservation. The main tool for implementing the platform is the National Action plan (NAP) which sets the following broad goals.

To make women's development an integral part of the national development program;
 To establish women as equal partners in development with equal roles in policy and decision-making in the family, community and nation at large;
 To remove legal, economic, political or cultural barriers that prevent the exercise of equal rights by undertaking policy reforms and strong affirmative actions;
 To raise/create public awareness about women's differential needs, interests and priorities and increase commitment to bring about improvements in women's position and condition.

In relation to women's employment, the Plan stresses the need to improve women's working conditions. This includes increasing the scope of maternity leave, more creches and day care centres, adequate numbers of separate toilet facilities, better transport facilities especially for night work and accommodation facilities for out of station work placements, The NAP also proposes the development of professionally elaborated gender sensitive codes of conduct/ ethics/ self regulatory mechanisms for the medical and media professionals, with the goal of promoting greater respect for women and their rights monitoring action and taking internal disciplinary actions against violations of the agreed codes of conduct.

It also deserves mentions that government of Bangladesh in March 1997 the declared the national policy for development we man which clearly states:

1. Achieve equality between men and women in all spheres of decision making structure.
2. Establish necessary strategy, institutional Power and resources for faster development of women in all spheres of life.
3. To ensure equal rights of women on land, capital and technology as well as on all economic resources.
4. To reduce the gap between women and men regarding availability of necessary information, skills and knowledge to benefit from economic opportunities.
5. Visualization and recognition of economic activities of women.
6. Ensuring equal participation of women and men in professional occupations.
7. With regard to monitoring of the implementation of the various policies, programs and laws, the National Council for Women's Development and the Inter-ministerial Coordination and Evaluation Committee provide institutional mechanisms through which individuals and various women's organizations can participate.
8. Another Development of Serving the repressed Women from one service center is the setting of new institution known as one stops crisis center.

One Stop Crisis Center:

In many cases the oppressed women become helpless and homeless. None is found to come forward to rescue them. They are to move from place to place with a hope to ease their sufferings but with of no avail. Keeping this particular point in mind the Ministry of Women Affairs and Children has introduced One Stop Crisis Center in Dhaka and Rajshahi Medical Colleges with a view to serving the oppressed women by providing health, legal and police aid. This center is composed of officers belonging to health, social work and police department. The government has a plan to extend the center in other divisions in near future.

Position of Women in Bangladesh Constitution:

The constitution of Bangladesh contains the provision of gender equality, prohibition of gender basis of discrimination and expansion and extension of opportunity of women in all spheres of civic life. In the preamble of the constitution it is clearly stated that a society in which the rule of law, fundamental human rights and freedom, equality and justice, political, economic and social will be secured for all citizens. It is also stated in the constitution that the local government institutions be composed of representatives of

peasants, workers and women (article 9); steps will be taken to ensure participation of women in all spheres of national life (article 10); right to guaranteed employment at a reasonable wage having regard to the quantity and quality of life [article 15(b)]; rights to social security in case of undeserved want arising from unemployment, illness or disablement, suffered by widows or orphans or in old age or in such other cases [15 (d)]; state shall adopt effective measures to remove social and economic inequality between man and man and to ensure equitable distribution of wealth among citizens [19(a)]; ... all citizens shall be paid for his work on the basis of principle “from each according to his abilities to each according to his work” [20(1)]. These rights are included in “Fundamental Principles of State Policy” which will guide the legislators while making laws. Further, in the “Fundamental Rights” of the constitution the article 27 provides that all citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection and article 29 clause (1) provides equality of opportunity for all citizens in respect of employment or office in the service of the Republic, the clause (2) of the same article states no discrimination will be done on grounds of religion race, caste, sex or place of birth for any employment in the Republic. It is true that constitution is committed to protect and ensure the rights of women in many respects but it is not always reflected in the individual life. There still persists discrimination in individual life.

Legal Measures for Combating Violence:

There are two laws relating to violence against women in Bangladesh: The Cruelty to Women (Deterrent Punishment) Ordinance (1983) and The Dowry Prohibition Act (1980). There are also articles in the Penal Code relating to rape. The Cruelty to Women Ordinance outlaws the kidnapping and abduction of women and acid throwing attacks on women, and mandates the death penalty or life imprisonment for causing the death of a rape victim. The same provisions apply to a husband and his family under the Dowry Prohibition Act, for the murder or attempted murder of a woman for dowry.

Article 376 of the Penal Code mandates two years imprisonment, a fine, or both, for the rape of a woman by her husband. Article 342, however, requires that a woman undergoes a medical examination immediately after rape, which in practice, minimizes the possibility of a conviction being made. In any legal case, including cases of violence against women, if the complainant is absent, the case can be dismissed. In practice this discriminates against women who may be intimidated by their husbands or in-laws into

staying away from court. In practice, convictions for rape and other violent crimes against women are rarely made, because women are unaware of their legal rights, and legal institutions are male-dominated and often inaccessible or unsympathetic to Women. It is also difficult to prove the case, because of legal loopholes.

The Repression of Women and Children (special provision) Act, 1995 provides severe punishment for certain crimes against women and children. A special Tribunal under section 16 can only try the offences under this act. Sections 4-14 define various offences against children and proscribe punishment. The act in different sections provide, that raping and kidnapping of a child is a punishable offence and most of the offences under this act is punishable either imprisonment for life or with death penalty. Besides women and children Repression Act 2000, Acid Control Act 2002 and Acid Crime Prevention Act 2002 provide severe punishment ranging from imprisonment with fine to death penalty.

Initiatives taken by the International Community:

Since the Beijing Conference five years ago, important steps have been taken at the international level towards eliminating violence against women:

1. An Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted by the UN General Assembly on 6 October 1999, gives women the right to seek redress for violations of their human rights, including gender-based violence.
2. Model Strategies and Practical Measures on the Elimination of Violence against Women in the Field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice were adopted by the General Assembly in 1997.
3. The Statute of the International Criminal Court, adopted in June 1998, specifically addresses gender-based crimes, as do the Criminal Tribunals for the Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda's.
4. A draft protocol to a new treaty – the proposed United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime – focuses on trafficking in human beings, especially women and children.

Legal steps to criminalize violence against women

In recent years some countries have taken significant steps towards improving laws relating to violence against women. For example:

1. In July 1991, Mexico revised its rape law in several important ways. A provision was eliminated that allowed a man who rapes a minor to avoid prosecution if he agrees to marry her. Now judges are required to hand down a decision regarding access to an abortion within five working days.
2. On 9 June 1994, the Organization of American States adopted the Inter-American Convention to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Violence against Women (also called Convention of Belém do Pará), a new international instrument that recognizes all gender-based violence as an abuse of human rights. This Convention provides an individual right of petition and a right for non-governmental organizations to lodge complaints with the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights.
3. In Australia, a National Committee on Violence against Women was established to coordinate the development of policy, legislation and law enforcement at the national level as well as community education on violence against women.
4. In 1991, the Government of Canada announced a new four-year Family Violence Initiative intended to mobilize community action, strengthen Canada's legal framework, establish services on Indian reserves and in Inuit communities, develop resources to help victims and stop offenders, and provide housing for abused women and children.
5. In Turkey, a Ministry of State for Women was established whose main goals are, among others, to promote women's rights and strengthen their role in economic, social, political and cultural life. Legal measures are being adopted towards the elimination of violence against women. The establishment of special courts to deal with violence is envisaged. Psychological treatment for abused women is also planned, along with the establishment of women's shelters around the country. Specially trained female police officers could provide assistance to victims of violence.
6. In Burkina Faso, a strong advertising campaign by the Government as well as television and radio programmes on the unhealthy practice of genital mutilation were launched to educate and raise public awareness about the dangerous consequences of such an "operation". A National Anti-Excision Committee was established in 1990 by the present head of State. Today, the practice of genital mutilation has been eliminated in some villages of Burkina Faso. In others, there has been an incredible drop in the number of girls excised: only 10 per cent of the girls are excised compared to 100 per cent 10 years ago.
7. Some countries have introduced police units specially trained for dealing with spousal assault. In Brazil, specific police stations have been designated to deal with women's issues, including domestic violence. These police stations are staffed entirely by women.

Role of Women's Organizations in Bangladesh:

The major strategies employed by women's organizations in Bangladesh, to combat violence against women, have been: publicizing and organizing around particular cases; legal awareness work; and conscientization of both women and men on issues of gender

violence. Nari Pokkho, a small autonomous women's group, and Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, have both always been vocal on issues of gender-based violence. Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, provides legal assistance to women, has organized demonstrations around dowry cases, and has set up some battered women's shelters. The Government of Bangladesh's Women's Affairs Directorate has also established some hostels for battered and threatened women, and offer counseling service. However, Jahan (1983) questions the relevance of battered women's shelters in the Bangladeshi context, when for most women, both psychologically and materially, leaving the 'security' of their marital home is impossible. She calls rather for greater community mobilization around gender violence, whilst recognizing that this may be difficult to achieve.

Bangladesh Jatiyo Mahila Ainjibi Samity- the National Association of Women Lawyers- has organized legal awareness classes aiming to reach 50 million women.

Response by Mass Media:

The press as a whole is playing very laudable role in reporting the cases of women torture of various scale and dimension. Through editorials, columns, features and reporting of cases of Women repression the press is drawing public attention which on the other hand mobilizing or awakening public opinion or awareness on various nature of women repression. The electronic media both public and private channel are found equally pro-active in building public opinion and raising hatred and anger against violence.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Over the last two decades, violence against women has become one of the most visible and articulated social issues in Bangladesh. Today all the section of the society are concerned about the issue and movements: agitation's and legal reforms are being made against women oppression. But the rate of improvement is not noticeable. It is resultant of a lot of reasons as negative socialization of our women, historical system of patriarchy, economic dependence of the women, acceptance of violence in the society and so on. Even the women themselves also are not able to realize the situation. They sometimes accept violence against them as usual. On the other hand, security agencies have become the breeding ground of violence. Police custody is considered to be more insecure place for a victim. In spite of much agitation and protests and actions by government and non-government organizations with international area: the evil persists and is aggravating. The

obvious question is what is the need of hour to face up to the challenge? A few suggestions are made here:

1. **National Policy:** There should be a national policy on all forms of violence against women. Such a policy should be framed on the basis of general consensus among major political parties and professional and occupational groups.
2. **Governments should recognize that women's human rights are universal and indivisible:**The Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth United Nations (UN) World Conference on Women reflects the commitment made by governments in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action of the 1993 UN World Conference on Human Rights that "the human rights of women and of the girl-child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights".
3. **Ratify and implement international instruments for the protection of human rights:**Governments should ratify international legal instruments which provide for the protection of the human rights of women and girl-children, such as:
 1. the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and its two Optional Protocols;
 2. the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
 3. the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;
 4. the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;
 5. the Convention on the Rights of the Child;
 6. the Convention and Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.

Governments should also ratify regional standards which protect the human rights of women and girl-children. Governments who have already ratified these instruments should examine any limiting reservations, with a view to withdrawing them. This is particularly important in the case of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, where the commitment of many governments is seriously undermined by the extent of their reservations. Governments should take due account of non-treaty instruments such as the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women.

Governments should ensure that reports to treaty monitoring bodies include detailed information on the situation of women and girl-children.

4. **Eradicate discrimination, which denies women human rights:**

Governments should recognize that discrimination against women, including lesbians and girl-children, is a key contributory factor to human rights abuse such as torture, including rape and other forms of custodial violence. Governments should initiate a plan of action against such discrimination. Governments should ensure that women are treated equally in law; a woman's evidence should have the same weight as a man's in all judicial proceedings and women should not receive harsher penalties than a man would for the same offence. Where it is alleged that discrimination in the administration of justice contributes to human rights violations against women an independent commission should be appointed to investigate and make recommendations to rectify the situation.

4. **National Anti-Violence Movement:** Violence against women is a social evil and social action is probably the most effective shield against it. Social mobilization must therefore be attained to curb violence. For this, vigorous publicity should be given through all types of media, pictures, release, demonstrations etc. Besides anti-violence committees should be formed in unions and thanas.
5. **Legal Reforms:** The patriarchal legal system needs to be salvaged from the traditional foundations of discriminatory norms about women. A new system should be built on the solid foundation of equality, reciprocity and interdependence of men and women. The proposed law commission on a priority basis may handle the review of the legal system.
6. **Support Services:** The number of shelters for affected women and facilities for legal aid, counseling and vocational training are inadequate. So, need for shelter is urgent. Besides, it is essential to develop adequate facilities within the health system to identify cases of violence. Besides, affected women should be absorbed in the income generating projects of NGOs for providing skill training and rehabilitation.
7. **Political Commitment:** Women's organizations can lobby with political parties to include women issues in the respective manifestos. They may reorient the attitudes and outlook of women politicians.
8. **Extension of Literacy Programmes:** To make the women aware of their rights and responsibilities, they should be provided with proper education. They should be made able to fight superstition and oppression. After all, integrated programmes to

accelerate the position of women in the society is a must to combat violence against women.

9. **Social Awareness:** Social awareness can help a lot to eliminate rape incidents. It is possible to build awareness among the people through social education, media and civil society. Various mass media (TV, radio, newspaper, seminar, rally, discussion, drama etc.) can display multifarious aspects of rape for creating awareness. On the other hand, civil society and social worker can play vital role to form the public opinion against women violence.
10. **Tradition Would be Changed:** There must be a break through of old male dominated traditional society particularly in the rural community through spreading education and publishing and distributing of banners and posters bearing the rights of women and the punishment to be inflicted upon the women repressors.

Lastly: In Bangladesh it is difficult to change anything by the government initiatives alone. So it is badly needed to add NGO initiatives with the government activities to bring any change in the society. A collaborative effort of GOs and NGOs can reduce women violence. This type of collaboration would save money and time, protect duplication of work and provide maximum services for the victims. In this connection, the collaborative attitudes and relationships between GOs and NGOs should be increased to eradicate rape violence (Islam, 2004). Apart from this, the government and Non-government organizations are working especially to protect the women may be preference to take the lead.

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