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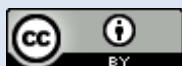
Research Article

Women Rights Violation and the Role of Islam in Bangladesh

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Abstract. Women rights violation is a common phenomenon in the world be it developed, developing and under developed country. If we closely observe the life of our prophet and Islamic culture we will find that there is no place of violence against women in Islam. Although Bangladesh is predominantly a Muslim country there are wide spread violence and abuse of women human rights in Bangladesh. None of the violence and women rights abuse are sanctioned by Islam. Non-Islamic culture has been infiltrated into Islam and this culture provokes women's rights violation. Strict adherence to prophetic teachings and observance of Islamic culture can stop women rights violation and uphold women rights in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Islam, Women Rights, Violence, Bangladesh.

INTRODUCTION

Violence against women is recognized as a serious human rights violation and a pervasive public health problem that concerns all sectors of societyⁱ. Violence against women, especially beating wives by husbands, has been common in all culture perhaps in all timesⁱⁱ. It is not a phenomenon peculiar to Bangladeshⁱⁱⁱ. Women throughout the world have been accorded lower status than men^{iv}. Despite the seriousness of the problem in terms of violation of human rights and public health consequences, there is a dearth of knowledge on the extent, nature, and the context of domestic violence against women in Bangladesh and other developing countries^v. Gender based violence also becomes difficult to combat as it is directly and closely linked to cultural, socio-economic and political powers^{vi}. Family violence is manifested in physical torture, (murder for dowry or other reasons, assault, battering, female feticide, murder of girl-child, food deprivation, absence of health services, mal-nutrition, control over reproductive rights) sexual violence by rape and other sexual transgressions and mental torture by obstructing women's mobility, forced marriage, threats of eviction from the family etc.^{vii} The socialization process ensures men's control and disciplining power over women's body, mobility and labor^{viii}. The most unfortunate part is that the violence at the very personal/private level within the limits of the family is not even recognized as violence by the state in Bangladesh^{ix}. When it comes to attitudes towards domestic violence, more than 60 percent of respondents believe violence against wives is acceptable for disobedience and bad behavior, or when a wife's conduct affect the reputation of the family^x.

Violence against women is any act of gender-based violence which results in, physical, sexual or arbitrary deprivation of liberty in public or private life and violation of human rights of women in violation of human rights of women in situations of armed conflicts^{xi}. Broadly defined, violence is an act of aggression occurring in both personal and social contexts, and, therefore, includes women's experience of both domestic violence and violence outside the home^{xii}

The economic costs of violence are also very high. According to CARE Bangladesh, the nation has been incurring annual losses of minimum Tk. 14,071 crore and its advancement is being hampered due to violence against women^{xiii}. "In South Asia, one in every two women experiences violence in her daily life. Social, cultural, political, economic, and legal factors in the region combine to leave women vulnerable to community-sanctioned violence"^{xiv}. In Bangladesh, women with a lifetime experience of physical or sexual violence, or both, by their husbands were significantly more likely to report poor or very poor health (for urban women and rural women) and to report problems with walking or carrying out daily activities, pain, memory loss, dizziness, and vaginal discharge^{xv}. Results of another study showed that physical abuse of a mother was associated with lower quality of maternal-infant feeding interaction, overtly negative maternal behaviors', and lack of interaction from the infant's side^{xvi}. This paper is an attempt to discuss about various forms and reasons for women rights violation in Bangladesh and analyze whether Islam provokes women rights violation in Bangladesh.

Forms of Women Rights Violation

There are various forms of women right violation in Bangladesh. They are mainly murder, suicide, infanticide, rape, sexual harassment, torture, trafficking, verbal abuse, dowry, mental violence etc. The following sections will discuss various forms of violence against women in Bangladesh.

Murder

“One can rarely read a daily newspaper in Bangladesh without coming across a headline that reads ‘Housewife Killed’. Physical torture and beating are common causes of death in murder cases”^{xvii}. “In a study of deaths from intentional injury to women aged 15-44 years registered in the ICDDR, B's Health and Demographic Surveillance System in Matlab from 1992 to 1998, verbal autopsy data linked violence by husbands and/or other relatives to 10 percent of homicides. The investigators suggested that this is probably an underestimate of spousal violence-related homicide”^{xviii}. Unfortunately, violence that stems from dowry demands may lead to the death of the wife by her husband or her in-laws and only after her death is the crime acknowledged, and the perpetrator arrested^{xix}.

Suicide

Suicide is an issue of growing concern in Bangladesh with some areas reporting 37 percent of all deaths of women aged 15-44 years attributable to suicide^{xx}. When a woman has been raped and the crime made public, the first thought that enters the mind of the community is that she must have encouraged the perpetrator with sexual advances or flirtatious remarks^{xxi}. For instance, a large number of suicide cases involving women are the result of depression, mental torture, and violence in the family, but suicide is often passed off as normal, due to the family's fears of social and religious sanction^{xxii}.

Infanticide

In societies where a higher value is placed on sons, discrimination towards female children can take extreme forms such as sex-selective abortions and female infanticide^{xxiii}. In general, boys are considered to be assets who remain in the family to carry out responsibilities in later life. In contrast, a daughter is likely to be regarded as a burden by her own family^{xxiv}. The lives of unborn girls are terminated through sex selective abortions. Every sixth death of a female infant in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan is due to neglect and discrimination^{xxv}.

Rape

In a culture that holds a woman's chastity sacred, rape crimes are particularly injurious to a woman's self-identity and social future as well as her physical and psychological wellbeing^{xxvi}. Rape cases in Bangladesh remain largely unreported because of the social stigma and loss of family honor (*izzat*) that results^{xxvii}. In 2009, 446 women were raped^{xxviii}.

Harassment

Incidents of sexual harassment in schools, colleges and universities, the workplace and public spaces continue to be reported. According to a study of women in Dhaka City, 84.7 percent of garment workers, 100 percent of day laborers, 28.9 percent of school teachers, and 10.9 percent of office staff report some form of harassment (physical, psychological or sexual) in the workplace^{xxxix}.

Torture

Wife beating is the most commonly occurring act of domestic violence in Bangladesh^{xxx}. In the patriarchal family structure in Bangladesh, the women are taught to consider themselves as inferior to men and husbands were socialized to “own” their wives including to the use of force when necessary^{xxxi}. In Bangladesh it is common knowledge that husbands exert their authority and physically assault wives for even minor mistakes, such as an unsatisfactory meal, an untidy room, a conversation with another man, or any act of disagreement or disobedience.^{xxxii} “Acid-throwing is an innovative form of brutal violence against women that is rising at an alarming rate in Bangladesh. The flinging of acid on the bodies and faces of women became a common means of taking revenge by rejected suitors in the 1980s but has reached the highest peak in recent years. Bangladesh has the highest worldwide incidence of acid violence and, acid burns constitute 9 percent of the total burn injuries in Bangladesh”^{xxxiii}. It was reported that 50.8 per cent of the women were battered by their husbands, 2.1 per cent by other family members, and a small proportion (5.2 percent) by both their husbands and other family members^{xxxiv}. One study, conducted in 1992, reported that about 19 percent Bangladeshi women were the victims of the physical assault by their spouse^{xxxv}. The forms of violence commonly found are slapping, tearing hair, pushing and pulling, kicking, hitting with an object, attempting to strangle and threatening^{xxxvi}. Tortures during pregnancy can put the unborn baby and the mother in danger. It may increase the chance of miscarriage, infection, pre mature birth and sometimes death of the baby^{xxxvii}.

Trafficking

Trafficking involves the recruitment and transportation of persons, using deception, coercion and threats in order to place and keep them in a situation of forced labor, slavery or servitude^{xxxviii}. Trafficking is a violation of human rights, which has various consequences at the level of the individual, family, community, and country^{xxxix}. Trafficking of women and children is a significant problem in developing countries around the globe, and particularly in South Asia^{xl}. Women were trafficked from village to town to foreign countries. The Traffickers have a strong net works from village to town, they allure the simple minded women promising to provide jobs in towns, sometimes, force kidnaps take place in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, the number of women and children trafficked is estimated to range from 10,000 to 20,000 per year^{xli}. Trafficking occurs both within Bangladesh and across its borders to India, Pakistan, and Middle Eastern countries – primarily Dubai and Kuwait. From Bangladesh, most women and children are trafficked for prostitution, domestic work,

and industrial labor (textile factories), or to Arab states for begging or to be camel jockeys^{xlii}. “The border areas of Khulna, Jessore, Satkhira, Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Mymensingh, Comilla, Brahmanbaria, and Sylhet are frequently used as land routes for trafficking. In the northern region, the districts of Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Nilphamari, Panchagarh, Thakurgoan, Dinajpur, Naogoan, Chapai Nawabganj, and Rajshahi, and in the south, Jessore and Satkhira are the areas in which women and children are most susceptible to trafficking”^{xliii}. The traffickers at these locations look for migrants who come from rural areas for job or poor young people abandoned by their families; they allure them with false promises of wealth and better prospects. For trafficking, the factors include low employment opportunities, low social status of women, economic and social vulnerability of women and children, urbanization, migration, etc^{xliv}.

Verbal Abuse

It was revealed from the key informants that 66.8 percent of the women were verbally abused by their husbands and 23.7 percent by other family members^{xlvi}. Even middle age women while go outside of home, they are more likely to become a victim of indecent verbal comments or physical gestures, anytime, anywhere and by anybody^{xlvii}. There can be found numerous instances where due to teasing girls being forced to discontinue their education, working women to quit their job^{xlviii}. Eve teasers are any person on the street, in front of schools and colleges, in the bus, train, lift, shopping mall anywhere teases girls in any form of vocabulary, gesture, or directly physical assault^{xlviii}.

Dowry

The practice of dowry demand (*Joutuk*) is not deeply rooted in Bengali Muslim tradition, but has emerged as a major social evil in recent years^{xlvi}. Dowry-related violence is a common feature in Bangladesh, affecting the lives of many women¹. For instance, in the last two decades, the state’s liberalization policies have opened up a market for luxury goods (televisions, VCRs, cars, jewelry, etc.) and the easiest way for men who aspire to own these goods to acquire them is through a dowry at marriage. Although illegal, dowry continues to be demanded and paid and leads to serious abuse, even death in some cases^{li}. A survey is made to test why this is so and whether people understand consequence of maintaining the practice^{lii}. “Failure to fulfill dowry demands is a major cause of violence against women in Bangladesh. Rising unemployment has contributed to the phenomenon; as more and more young men are unable to find employment, their families use marriage and dowry demand as a source of income”^{liii}.

Dowry murder is a brutal practice involving a woman being killed by her husband or in-laws because her family is unable to meet their demands for her dowry — a payment made to a woman’s in-laws upon her engagement or marriage as a gift to her new family^{liv}. “On average 5,000 complaints of dowry are recorded annually. In 2010, police reported 5,331 cases of dowry, which jumped to 7,079 in 2011”^{lv}. On 10 January 2004 the Daily Star newspaper in Bangladesh observed:

"....A woman on fire has made dowry deaths the most vicious of social crimes. It is an evil prevalent in the society and despite efforts by some activists and women's rights organization to eliminate this menace, the numbers have continued to climb. In villages marriage was once considered a very sanctified bond united in the worst or best of times, in sickness or in health through the vicissitudes of life. But dowry related deaths have shattered that bond of peaceful and happy relationship. A recent survey by the Bangladesh Human Rights Organisation, and Bangladesh Women Lawyers Association revealed that in 2001, there were 12,500 cases of women repression, in 2002 the figure rose to 18,455 and in the year ending in 2003 the figure climbed to 22,450. The grisly act of a brute and greedy husband in Chapai Nawabganj as reported in the newspapers in December 27 last is a story better not be heard. Having failed to realise a dowry claim of Tk. 20,000/= Shamsher killed her wife Marina just on the 22nd day of their marriage. The most grisly side of the story is that Shamsher hired three other monsters for Tk. 300/= and Marina was slaughtered by Shamsher after she was forced to be gangraped by four human monsters including himself". (Text as received)^{lvi}.

Mental Violence

Forms of psychological abuse were also found to exist, for instance, verbal abuse, sarcastic remarks in the presence of outsiders, imposing severe restrictions on freedom of movement, totally ignoring the wife in decision-making processes, making frequent complaints against her to her parents, friends, neighbors, and kin much to the embarrassment of the wife^{lvii}. Because psychological violence is harder to capture in quantitative studies, a full picture of the deeper and more insidious levels of violence defies quantification^{lviii}. In Bangladesh, 44 percent of urban women and 31 percent of rural women in 2001 reported ever having experienced emotional abuse—defined as those including insults, humiliation, intimidation, and threats—and 29 percent of urban women and 20 percent of rural women reported experiencing emotional abuse in the past year^{lix}. Emotional or psychological violence includes intimidation and humiliation where the victim is made to feel bad about oneself and is subjected to excessive controlling, curtailing and/or disruption of routine activities such as sleeping or eating habits, social relationship, access to money; verbal insults and so on^{lx}. There is evidence that Bangladeshi women are now facing more mental torture than before. "Unfortunately, mental torture cannot be quantified and often goes unreported. But, the fact that suicide is the biggest cause of female deaths in this country is telling."^{lxi} Another form of violence is the mental stress that stems from verbal abuse and harassment of a sexual nature by colleagues, teachers, local men and neighbors and the like. In Bangladesh, this has even led to the suicide of young girls, too ashamed to leave the house due to, among other issues, the fear that their families will be dishonored if men and boys continue to harass them^{lxii}.

Reasons for violence

There are many possible reasons of violence against women. A researcher enumerates and describes the reasons as:

“The list of possible proximate factors is long and inconclusive: husbands’ alcohol and drug use; husbands’ gambling; economic stress; differences in husbands’ and wives’ perceptions of women’s and men’s roles within marriage; differences in perceptions of the benefits of women’s autonomy and income generation; and relational factors in the husband-wife dyad. These relational factors are an important subcategory and include: age at marriage; dowry agreements; difference in age of husband and wife and associated differences in expectations; arranged marriages and the reasoning associated with the arrangement (i.e. financial, for the happiness of the couple); expectations of sexual relations within marriage; and marital conflict and communication within marriage”^{lxiii}.

Another study finds following reasons: Neglect of household chores, Beating of children, Quarrels with in-laws, Alleging husband as unfaithful, Not paying dowry/money, Not having a son, Complained by other, Asking husband not to drink, Meeting with other men.^{lxiv} “Many men vent their own frustration at their poverty and inability to fulfill their role as the male provider, according to gender based norms, by battering their wives. The strongest factor associated with violence of husbands towards their wives in both urban and rural areas was a history of abuse of the husband’s mother by his father”^{lxv}. In Bangladesh many laws aimed at protecting women against violence yet research indicates violence persist in particular domestic violence (especially by husbands); sexual violence, including rape; acid attacks; and sexual harassment in schools, universities, the workplace and public spaces^{lxvi}. Yet, police statistics and assessments by women’s rights organizations show that there is an increasing trend in violence against women^{lxvii}.

Violence against Women and Islam

In the previous chapters we have discussed forms and causes of violence against women. We observed that a large number of women were murdered. We know that Islam has strongly forbidden murder. It is a great sin and its reward is Hell^{lxviii}. The Shedding of blood is unlawful. Infanticides were also forbidden in Islam. Suicide is also a great sin in Islam. If we face torture physical or psychological, we all have right to redress it and are asked to keep forbearance, as Allah is with those who keeps patience. We cannot snatch away our own lives as Allah gives us this life as Amanat (gift). Allah commands us not to come close to fornication. How can Islam tolerate rape of women? Never had prophet SAW. tortured (beat) any one or any of his wives. Islam keeps the provision for (Mahr) dower for wife. It is mandatory for husband to provide dower to wife. So it is illegitimate to demand dowry from wife and carry out violence against women for dowry. Major causes of violence against women are husband’s alcohol taking, gambling, economic stress, dowry demand, history of abuse of the husband’s mother by his father etc. Violence against women for the afore-mentioned reasons are not legitimate in Islam. We can claim that Islam does not allow violence against women under any circumstances. All the violation of women rights in Bangladesh is occurred due to ignorance and non-observance of prophetic practices.

CONCLUSION

. “Violence against women is amongst the most serious threats to overall development and progress in Bangladesh. Widespread violence and repression in numerous forms puts women’s lives at risk in almost all parts of the country”^{lxxix}. This indicates that more and more women are at the direct risk of being subjected to different forms of violence at present and in the days to come unless appropriate measures are taken to stop such violence^{lxxx}. The Government of Bangladesh has made strides in harmonizing national legislation with international commitments to protecting the rights of women and eliminating violence against women^{lxxi}. But despite impressive achievements in a variety of fields and steady economic growth, Bangladesh continues to experience high levels of poverty and remains one of the poorest countries in the world, ranking 109th out of 135 countries in the UNDP Human Development Report (2010)^{lxxii}. As for implementation of the laws, it has long been widely criticized that the laws protecting women are not being implemented properly due to inadequate and ineffective mechanisms and this has a close connection with the persistence and increase in violence against women^{lxxiii}. There is a consensus that both the lack of understanding the law and the lack of implementation of the law are reasons that are seriously hampering justice^{lxxiv}. “Results of several studies conducted recently in Bangladesh showed a decrease in spousal violence as levels of education increase. Bates *et al* found that women with six years of education or more had significantly reduced odds of experiencing spousal violence. Koenig *et al* found that even some level of primary school attendance is highly statistically significant and inversely related to the risk of spousal violence”^{lxxv}. Even though most societies proscribe violence against women, the reality is that violations against women’s human rights are often sanctioned under the garb of cultural practices and norms, or through misinterpretation of religious tenets.^{lxxvi} “Action research to develop and test interventions (preventive and curative) involving the Government of Bangladesh, health systems, women, men, communities, NGOs, and private-sector businesses is required to facilitate means of preventing spousal violence and of providing care, counselling, shelter, and rehabilitation for women who experience spousal violence and their children. For these activities to have a maximum impact, monitoring, evaluation, and sharing results efficiently are critical”^{lxxvii}. Islam does not play any role in the violence against women, rather socio-cultural and economic factors contribute to violence against women in Bangladesh. Observance of Islamic norms and practices can play a significant role in stopping violence against women. Besides, a public education campaign, using mass media and other innovative means of communication, have to be engaged to stop violence against women in Bangladesh.

End Notes

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