

International Day for Women's Rights and International Peace

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March 8 is the observance of International Day for women's rights and International Peace. The two concepts-women's rights and peace- have been interlinked because promotion of women's rights promotes peace. In other words peace prevails in society when women's rights are established and protected as those with men.

The origin of women's subordination lies in political theories, propounded by men. The concern for individual autonomy and freedom for men has later been extended to a concern for women's equality, freedom and autonomy. Female writer such as Mary Wollstonecraft is the venerable classical precursor in advocating women's equality with men and their rights.

Mary Wollstonecraft (mother of Mary Shelley) believed that inequalities between men and women are created and sustained by male-dominated society, which therefore needs to be changed. In 1792, she published her most important work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, whose content created a storm in society. She argued for the equality of women with men, including female voting rights and pointed out that the ways in which the nature of most women was created by the education chosen for them by men, and perpetuated by the social structures imposed by men.

UN & Women's Rights:

After the UN was set up, establishment for human rights for men and women have been come to fore. First the 1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights, followed by the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the most important one for women's rights is the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Under the Convention, "discrimination against women" shall mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality with men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.

This definition is very comprehensive and covers all women's rights as those for men. States-parties are obliged to adopt legislative and administrative measures for rights of women on an equal basis with men.

The UN Commission of Status of Women held Women's Rights Conference in 1995 in Beijing and in New York in 2000. The two conferences have focused promotion of women's rights and mechanisms for promotion and protection in this field.

Factors against women's rights:

The UN Decade for Women (1976-85) served to internationalise women's concern and contributed to making the women's movement a transnational pressure group. Some critics to the observance of the Decade had argued that it had limited practical consequences.

Some say this is because poverty among women in developing countries impedes the promotion of human rights for them. Elimination of poverty is the mother of human rights and until and unless poverty is eliminated, poor women will not be able to secure their rights.

Another reason is the lack of education among women. Unless women are educated, they will not know their rights. According education for women and girls will automatically generate an environment in which women cannot be denied their basic rights.

In traditional economies, women's role was not recognized in the field of economic development. Traditional economists did not construe women as belonging in the economic sphere except as exceptions. Moreover rational economic man is pre-eminently masculine.

In 1970 Esther Boserup's work titled, *Women's role in Economic Development* (1989) is undoubtedly seminal in this respect. She argued that the recruitment of women into the modern sector accelerated economic development. She also argued that industrialization affects women differently in different societies and technology and cash crops often benefited men while increasing women's burden.

Although nationally various approaches towards women's rights are promoted, modernization, according to some writers, has tended to consolidate patriarchy and expand its control, because women have inadequate access to resources and receive low wages.

Another important issue is who decides when to have children. It is men who control it. As far as rural women are concerned, increased productivity without relief from reproductive tasks increases women's burden.

Although women have played an important role in national liberation struggle, they did not benefit collectively from their active participation. In the developing countries, women have achieved legal equality, such as the right to vote, education and property but the basic problem of women's subordination remains.

Where nationalism is combined with Islamic fundamentalism, women are literally made invisible in public life and male dominance is increased over women's life and conduct.

Women's rights and peace:

If women are allowed to have a say in public life as integral part of human rights, it is argued that international peace shall prevail. Many female writers argue that women are, by nature and nurture, pacific. Women's natural alienation from war arises from the contradiction between mothering and war. Nonviolence, is a natural extension of maternal practice, and represents the powerful image of the "Moral Mother", symbol of compassionate vision of women as innately pacifist. Some argue that there is a logical connection between maternity and pacifism in the liberal principle of the inalienable right to life and liberty underlying both.

The implicit corollary of innately peaceable women is that men are inherently warmongering. There is also a connection between male aggressiveness and war and patriarchy and militarism. Some however argue that women have frequently encouraged their husbands and sons to go to war and are cautious about simplistic gender equations.

Bangladesh and Women's rights:

The most important reason why women's rights have been neglected is the prevalent belief that women have no role to play in public life, dominated by men. Women are destined to raise children and manage housekeeping. That is why most of the women designate themselves as "housewife" as their profession

Although the 1972 Constitution provides equality of men and women, traditional social practices and orthodox religious precepts have discriminated between men and women in society.

For examples, marriage without the consent of girls occurs regularly in the countryside. Most young girls are married off to men because families cannot either protect them or maintain them because of weak implementation of law and poverty. Violence on girls is a constant fear among parents, when they go out.

In the matter of seeking divorce, women face numerous difficulties and have to present very strong reasons for it. The rule 18 of Nikahnama allows men to divorce the wife any time and even without assigning any reason. Rule 5 of the Nikanama provides women to say whether she is unmarried, or widow or divorced while men are exempt to say anything about their marital status.

It is heartening to note that Women Human Groups and NGOs in Bangladesh have been vigorously campaigning for promotion, protection and preservation of human rights for women. They have carried out awareness campaign among women about their rights under the laws of the country, especially in the field of age of marriage and their consent to marriage, inheritance, property, divorce and custody of children and children's maintenance.

Side by side the government's programme since 1993 to spread education to girls has been a good effort in making aware of their rights in society.

Conclusion:

In Bangladesh on this day, there needs to be a pledge that women are not to be discriminated in society. The state institutions and mechanisms established to implement laws are to be strengthened. Few areas of national and international life remain untouched by the influence of human rights and a society is known by what kind of rights women enjoy in the country. Enjoyment of human rights and equality with men is a mirror of nation's morality, civility and respect for women.