

The Good Life for Bangladeshi Women!!!

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Starting even before they are born, and continuing throughout their lives, girls are subjected to violence, exclusion, and exploitation based simply on the fact that they are female. Injustices committed against girls occur at all levels of Bangladeshi society in families, communities, schools, governance and politics.

When a man threw acid on Rina, she reported to the police. But instead of implicating the true culprit-her husband –in the crime, she named a different man altogether. She figured that if her husband went to jail, the family would lose its breadwinner, and none would want to marry her daughters. Months later when Rina realized that the whole strange chain of events had taken place because her husband wanted to remarry; she decided to tell the truth about the attacker. But by then her testimony had become unreliable and her case became weak. Three months later her husband remarried. In protest of his remarriage, Rina left home. She joined to PHREB Leadership Academy for Girls to learn handicrafts. She received a three months training on sewing. In February 2007, she got a loan from local bank "Bank Asia Limited" to open a tailoring shop in the Chandgaon Balir Hat Slum area. She has achieved a grand success in this business. She has developed herself as an idle for the hundreds of thousands of oppressed women and girls in the area. In her shop she has three other girls working together. During the Eid festival (1st October to 14 October) she has earned more than 60,000 taka. The writer of this Article has asked her what is good life? She answered: "I am enjoying a good life NOW, this is good life. Good Life is a life with freedom of choice, decision making, right to enjoy life how I want and to be equal".

Shakila, though went to school in the UK, coming from a wealthy family, she lead a very different life from her brother. She was made to go an all girls' school and was not allowed to go out unchaperoned. Her father eventually brought her to Bangladesh while her brother stayed on to complete his education and later pursued a career. In Dhaka she was not allowed to go back to school and had to take her education privately. She was not allowed to go anywhere and if she

got any crank calls she would be severely reprimanded, as it was her fault. Soon like millions of young girls Shakila had to get married, after which she found herself in yet another prison. Her husband used to return home at 1 or 2 in the morning then Shakila had to offer her body to her husband. She had no life, if she went out her mother in law would frown. Her husband does not allow her to a job and a freedom in her life, as she is a 'wife'. She dreams to get equality, freedom and right to participation. She knows nobody will offer them freely so she has decided to come out and joined a primary school as a teacher. She is searching for a good life. She dreams such a society where men and women are equal. She is not only a dreamer but also a gender activist now to fight for equality. She told the writer of this article she wants to join the fight of PHREB and BKAF to ensure equality in the society.

Women and girls are caught up in such various circles all the time. They are taught to be dependent on men and submit to them. They are kept ignorant of their basic human rights. They can not be educated on their wills, can not marry on their choices, they can not work as they will be become disobedient if they are economically independent, can not walk alone because it is not safe, can not work long hours as it will hamper their household duties, can not go abroad if they go astray, can not think their own thoughts, speak their minds or even breathe as freely as they want to.

For every step they take forward, they must go back a few steps more. Women's future are predetermined. Social prejudice and parochial state mechanisms ensures that women go only so far men allows them to go in every aspects of their lives. It is like the duck and chicken. Men are like ducks-whatever they do, when they come out of the water, they are dry. Women are like chickens; when they come out of water, they are completely drenched. They are made to think themselves the weaker sex. Eventually they become it, and the circle of oppression and violence continues.

Violence against women and girls by someone she knows, either parents, brothers, husbands, in-laws, relatives or boyfriends, is prevalent in all sections of Bangladeshi society. Domestic violence remains the greatest threat of women's human rights. The violence that don't only take

place in villages but among the urban, educated and even privileged classes. Violence that is not always visible. Violence that is never talked about. Domestic violence against women and girls, wives and daughter in laws, girl children transcended all boundaries of class and creed, age and relationships. It can happen to any woman, anywhere. Even educated and otherwise strong women remain in abusive relationships due to the pressures of an unaccepting family, unforgiving society and in inefficient corrupt legal and rescue system.

Violence is not only about bleeding wounds and acid burns but also about incidents many people in Bangladesh don't even refer to as violence that many women simply accept. Marital rape for example. For a woman, who, from childhood has been taught to obey and be submissive to men, be it father, brother or husband, and for a man who has been conditioned to be dominating, to exercise their authority over women, is marital rape really a crime? Does it even exist? Not in our legal system.

While on pen and papers we seem to have enough laws protecting women and their rights, their effect is obviously questionable. Domestic violence is just swept under rug as "private" affairs between a married couples or "family matters". Many husbands and wives believe that wife beating is permitted by religion.

Thousands of Girls are coming out breaking the cycle of oppressions. They want to pursue a good life for themselves for the future generation. The largest Adolescent Girls' Organization Bangladesh Kishori Adhikar Forum popularly known as BKAF is committed to ensure good life for Bangladeshi girls. BKAF helps girls in their transitions from the victims of gender based violence to the leaders for change.

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