



Advancing Women's Status in Family

by Najma Siddiqi

FAMILY is the basic unit of a society. It has been the social institution which provide the fundamental apprenticeship for life to its members. In all ages, family has been a self contained unit which acted as a growth centre for its members. It is at the core of socialization process through which the members learn various social skills. The structure and size may have differed across various cultures but its function has been universally similar. Briefly speaking, the family has met the biological, emotional, economic, social and other needs of its members.

Women have always played the most important role in the family. Women not only rear and bear the children, they also actively participate in many economic activities without which a family or for that matter the society cannot survive. But unfortunately her central role and contributions to the smooth functioning in the family has hardly been recognized.

1994 has been declared by the UN as the International Year of the Family. Even today, at the turn of the 21st century, in many developing countries including Bangladesh women have yet to enjoy an equal status with men in the family. In the households of Bangladesh which are mainly patriarchal, women's position is far inferior to that of men. As a wife, a daughter and/or mother her status is much lower within the household. Family frequently tends to be a site of abuse violence and violation of women's human rights. Majority of the families are male dominated and women have been denied equal opportunity in almost every sphere of life. Her status is as good as a second class citizen. Women are being discriminated against in the family in most aspects. The discrimination starts right from the birth of a girl child. In traditional Bangladeshi family sons are always preferred to girls. The discrimination is pronounced in following broad areas, viz. food intake (nutrition), access to education, freedom to choose employment, choice of marriage/divorce, reproductive right, freedom of movement and right to inheritance. This gender bias creates women to subordinate status in the society. As women have very little decision making power, family has become the site of violence, polygamy, desertion, coercion etc. This makes women's position vulnerable in the family. Women have been denied equal opportunity in almost every sphere

of life although without women's contribution harmonious family relation and sustainable development of the society is not possible. Rightly, therefore, the need for empowering women is felt not only in Bangladesh, it is so all over the world. The integration of women into development process is essential. However, women have to go a long way to enjoy equal status in all spheres of private and public life.

Impact of International Laws on Family

The International Women's Year, the World Conference held at Nairobi, and the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and

women to have access to outside employment.

7) Sense of physical insecurity and lack of safety discourage women to reach out to improve their status in the family.

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