

## COVER STORY

lence, abuse from spouses and other family members as well. The HIV positive men and women are equally devoid of their rights to residence, property, inheritance and face denial of custody of children in the case of an HIV orphan."

Commercial sex workers are also ostracised from society. They lack access to housing and social security as well as education and health care. Their profession has forced them into a category, which is either badly protected or completely unprotected by law enforcement agencies. They are often subjected to harassment from both law enforcement agencies as well as community people. There have been many instances in which a commercial sex worker has been raped and the case has not been properly investigated.

Being victims of sexual harassment and physical abuse without any form of justice being served is also common occurrence within homosexuals and transgenders. According to Akhter's presentation, starting from a very early age, these people are stigmatised by their families and friends as societies such as ours not only look down on them, but also hold a kind of disgust and hatred for people falling into this category.

One of the panelists of the workshop, Dr. Nafeesur Rahman, Executive Director of the National Forum of Organisations Working with the Disability (NFOWD), mentioned the importance of incorporating disabled people into the category of marginalised people. He mentioned that there were not many facilities for disabled people. To support his argument he gave two examples. One was that even in new buildings such as Basundhara city, which prides itself on its modernity, there is no access for people who are handicapped and disabled. The other was that Bangladesh spends a great amount of money on sports events such as cricket matches and the Olympics, which mostly come up with empty results. However, in the Special Olympics, Bangladesh came in fifth, even though they were given little to no funding. The Special Olympics team only got a sum of 15 lakh taka after they



According to Dr Nazneen Akhter, many marginalised people are harassed by law enforcement agencies instead of being protected.



Hindus have been systematically marginalised in Bangladesh.

came back. Khushi Kabir, Coordinator of Nijera Kori stressed that it is also crucial to make sure the rights of women within these marginalised communities (especially within the indigenous population) should not be put on the back burner. According to Kabir, adivasi women are even more marginalised because they are a minority within a minority and their needs are sometimes overshadowed. Their rights and the problems they face are not seen as a primary issue. After all, when fighting for rights, a community should make sure that all its members are being equally represented. In her conclusion, Kabir said, "Unless we are all willing to be frontline soldiers in this fight for rights, there is no point in being here today. We cannot only just talk about the issues that we have to overcome, we have to take action." It is those few frontline soldiers that are fighting to make a difference. Regardless of class, creed, gender, sexual orientation, health status, profession, cultural background, all people of Bangladesh hold the universal right to exist in the land they know as their own, and enjoy basic human rights, without any stigma or prejudice being attached to them. Unlike those who enjoy the freedom and liberty of being a part of the majority population, these groups of people are fighting to have their voices be heard and fighting for the right to remain what they are, without encountering harassment, prejudice, stigmatisation and alienation. It is these soldiers that are taking action and breaking the silence that plagues the marginalised population of Bangladesh. ■