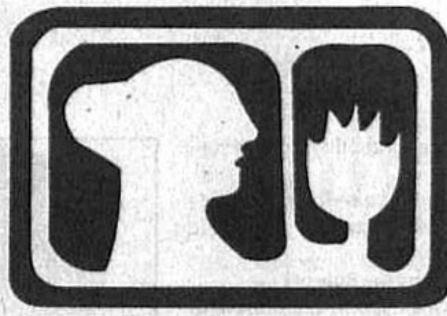


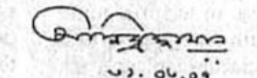
Women as Agent of Development, Empowerment of Women Requires Initiative from the State & Family



37th Founding Anniversary Bangladesh Mahila Parishad

Message on 37th Founding Anniversary of BMP Prof. Dr. Anisuzzaman

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad is continuing its relentless effort to establish women's legitimate rights in Bangladesh. The members of Mahila Parishad are playing an active role with dedication and sincerity to change the society. I greet them all in the 37th Founding Anniversary of Mahila Parishad.

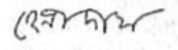

(Prof. Dr. Anisuzzaman)



Message on 37th Founding Anniversary of BMP

Today is April 4, 2007, the 37th founding anniversary of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP). On this day in 1970 BMP started its prosperous journey. This very day is highly lovable and of pride to all well-wishers members of BMP. Today we recall those lost mothers and sisters with profound respect, who were workers, organizers and members of BMP and sacrificed their lives and succumbed to death while pursuing I movement and struggle under the leadership of BMP. All the branch of BMP throughout the country are commemorating and observing those glorious days with festivity and emotion. Since 1970 to date in this long span of history we have been striving through different movement. BMP drafted Uniform Family Code, protested oppressions on women and providing shelter to the victims of violence against women and rehabilitate them. We are working for women empowerment. For the last two decades we are struggling to increase the number of reserved seats for women in the parliament and direct election in those seats. We are also continuing our movement for the full ratification and implementation of CEDAW and observing 3rd September in this regard, every year. A united movement is continuing by the Women's Human Rights organization to implement the National Women Development Policy (NWDP), which was established on 8 March 1997. We highly condemned the changing of NWDP '97 and demanded the full restoration of the NWDP'97. With all these movement BMP has become a pioneer organization at present with 1,50,000 members across the country.

We express our deep gratitude towards all well-wisher who extended their all-out co-operation to reach the same. Hope BMP will be able to strengthen women's movement of Bangladesh and will remain in the leading position.



Hena Das
President

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad : 37 Years of Struggle

Ayesha Khanam

General Secretary, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad

Today is the 37th foundation day of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad. This event is very significant and important for a section of people who are disadvantaged and lagging behind politically and economically for more than three and a half decade. Today if we review what our achievements and struggles are in all those 37 years, and if we look back at the struggles of the 70s, 80s and 90s and also that of the new millennium, we shall find that in every decade there are some significant national and international characteristics of all these movements and their outcomes. Policies that we have carved out through our struggle for freedom and liberation war, the policies that we had incorporated in the constitution of 1972 as core national values; are the main proclamation of Mahila Parishad since its inception. On 4 April, 1970 we started our journey with the aim of establishing a secular, democratic state with equal rights for men and women, a state of humanitarian culture, where there will be equal footing for all human souls, an equal and mutually respectful environment for both men and women. This declaration of Mahila Parishad has a unity with the basic proclamation of 1972 constitution. The women have actively participated in our freedom fights. Mahila Parishad was established in the 1970, just before the start of our liberation war, and since then, there were mass mobilization of women, direct and indirect participation of women in various national movements. People from all strata of national life actively joined the liberation war in which women played a forceful and major role. This historical struggle is a milestone event in the annals of hundreds years of our history. Women have impregnated themselves with such historical events to establish their rights, honour and also have combined their movements with the main stream of national movements. In the post-liberated Bangladesh there was the task of reconstruction, elimination of the discrimination in education, culture and society, to establish women in the main stream of state administration for national economic advancement, to stop violence against women, to ascertain a respectful position for women within family set-up. Mahila Parishad has been working relentlessly. This means through our struggle for independence Mahila Parishad has started its journey as a strong social force.

In this three and a half decade time period, Mahila Parishad has persistently worked for creating a wider scope in the lives of women, to ascertain the democratic rights of women and to set up women in a strong and active position in the main stream of state administration. Despite some shortcomings, Mahila Parishad is the icon of a national movement. Mahila Parishad is a powerful voice of common women in our society. The synonym of the movement that fights for establishing the privileges of women who are poor farmers and workers is called Mahila Parishad. From the decade of 80s Mahila Parishad is actively creating public opinion against dowry, building mass awareness, conducting thoughtful research and staging various movements and struggles with a view of passing an anti-dowry act in the parliament. If we briefly review the struggle of three and a half decade movement, we shall observe that till 2007 we have led the movements for establishing women rights, for stopping violence against women, to institute equal rights between men and women in the family, from the guardianship of children to establish their citizen rights, their role as a mother and women and moreover, to establish individual rights of women. In independent Bangladesh, for establishing the rights and to change their providence, for uplifting women causes irrespective of their caste, creed and religion Mahila Parishad has taken multitudes of initiatives and programs.

Throughout the entire decade of 1980, Mahila Parishad has moved forward with definite programs with a view of stopping oppression against women and raising social consciousness on collective suppression against women in society. We have created social action committee for the rehabilitation of women who had been the victims of oppression, various discrimination and endless tortures and, at the same time, we have undertaken various programs and action plans to bring those helpless souls back to the main stream of normal life. With this objective in mind Mahila Parishad has established a shelter, a rehabilitation centre, named 'Rokeya Sadan' in a small scale. For example, if a woman is isolated from her family and society and becomes victim of torture, she can take refuge for a while in this shelter and gain the courage to return to normal life. Bangladesh Mahila Parishad has also taken initiatives and concrete steps to provide humanitarian and legal assistance to a victim, so that, she can resume normal life and establish her in society with a new dream and aspiration.

It may not be something comparable to Begum Rokeya's Tarini Bhaban, but in the same ideology and spirit of Tarini Bhaban we have tried to bring back the rootless and isolated women to normal life through our multi-dimensional activities (for example, women movement, social resistance, mental treatment, legal advice, humanitarian assistance, running Rokeya Sadan) we are continuing our efforts. While creating

movement to stop violence against women we have experienced that all existing laws are unfair and biased against women; these laws embodies the outlook and philosophy of patriarchal society where men and women are not viewed equally, where woman is dependent on man and where society has a pitiful notion towards women. In the book 'The Second Sex' written by Simon De Bover, we have seen women are in second position in society. By giving women equal rights and by eliminating the differences, we started the law reform movement. Women related issues like marriage, divorce, custody of children and distribution of property to women, equal rights to women of all religion, caste and creed have been incorporated in the Universal Family code or family policy. One of the strength of Mahila Parishad is, form its birth, it has received the cooperation of all conscious, educated and progressive people of the country. The conscious lawyers of the country, the enlightened teachers and intellectuals and guardians have supported our cause immensely and without raising any question. We are continuing the movement for reforms of existing laws, if we observe closely the anti-dowry law of the 80, the law stopping violence against women which have been passed in 1993 and, later on, family courts where taking legal steps to resolve disputes between husbands and wife and much later the reforms of all laws to curb violence and oppression against women and passing of a complete law Mahila Parishad is working continuously on its agenda. A comprehensive legal system that views men and women with equal notion, laws that would strike at the very root of patriarchal laws, create a level ground for women where a woman can establish herself as a mother, a guardian and an individual in society. She will enjoy equal rights of a citizen.

The 37 years struggle of Mahila Parishad is the struggle to change the outmoded values of society. To bring a radical change in the existing laws of society Mahila Parishad is, for example, trying to bring a reform of the law, establish equal rights for men and women in education policy, to include topics that foster equal rights of men and women in the curricula and syllabi of schools and colleges. Women leaders like Begum Rokeya in the East and Simon De Bover, Mary Olstone Craft, Clara Jetkins in the West have historically worked for the emancipation of women, for their establishment in society based on equal rights. In the whole world - in Europe, America, Germany, France and England - where ideology for establishing a society based on equal rights of men and women has been promoted. In this subcontinent Begum Rokeya, Raja Ram Mohon Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and many other Bangalis who were the social reformers created new awareness. Today we hold the same thoughts and philosophies advanced by those great thinkers for establishing equality between men and women and to bring women on the main stream of state mechanism. We call upon all the conscious people of the country to extent their support to this noble and humanitarian cause so that women rights can be established. Mahila Parishad is trying to establish a conscious women society vis-a-vis a society of conscious women citizens. Mahila Parishad is trying to launch those policies through the state machinery so that there is a radical change in the outlook of people. To set up a democratic, secular and humanitarian society Mahila Parishad has been associated with all these movements. Whenever any issue or controversies that went against humanity, against equal rights of women, Mahila Parishad has taken a brave and strong stand. In the 90s when fundamentalist forces were gaining strength in Bangladesh, Mahila Parishad took a firm stand against its expansion and adopted a secular outlook for combating evil design. It helped women who were victims of fundamentalist forces. Mahila Parishad has participated in all progressive, democratic and civic movements of the country.

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad is staging a total war against the philosophical, educational, social and political bases of fundamentalism with a total and complete outlook to stop reactionary activities against a democratic society, against the minimum humanitarian rights of women. To spread this idea and to stand beside women, beside the victims of fundamentalist forces we have adopted many programs. As a result of which today we see Bangladesh Mahila Parishad has stood as a force recognized by the state against all evils against women. It is true that after the 80s, particularly from the 90s many development partners and donor agencies are participating in similar programs and sharing their global experience for the emancipation of women. Since 1993, United Nations has been undertaking programs to establish equal rights of men and women and its member states are supposed to adopt similar programs. From 1975 to 1995- in these two decades we have witnessed a number of significant programs have been declared by the UN. Women decade have been announced; progressive actions plans for the betterment of women have been adopted. We have witnessed in 1993 Vienna convention the plan of action of Vienna was declared; the equal rights of women came in the forefront; two slogans became prominent - 'oppression of women is a violation of human rights' and 'women rights are human rights'. In the 90s throughout the entire world, human causes have been brought forward and attempts have been made to advance those causes.

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad have been associated with these global thoughts and been associated with those movements. Its influence has also spread rapidly within the organization. 'Women rights are human rights'; 'oppression against women is a violation of human rights' - to establish the message embodied in these slogans at national level Mahila Parishad has played a very decisive role. The NGOs also came forward with donor patronage for establishing the rights of women and to resist violence against women. Mahila Parishad started these activities long back and played the pioneering role. At the time of its birth Mahila Parishad upheld the philosophy, ideology and vision in the same spirit of all humanitarian movements, movements that foster equal rights of men and women and demand for establishment of a democratic society. The declaration of our organization has captured all these values. Today on the occasion 37th foundation day, if we look back to the declaration of 1972 constitution, we shall discover that Mahila Parishad had been working for the last three decades in the same light and spirit. In the declaration of 1972 constitution there were long term vision and strategy. In various decades our programs did not change radically. Keeping our objectives intact we have brought some changes in our strategic directions. The salient characteristics, the inception of voluntary service that is still our main strength remains integral in our works. There are more than 150 thousand members and five thousand trained organizers who are working relentlessly. They receive no remuneration. Housewives of Rural Bangladesh and working women are the main strength of our organization. Considering the world event in 1992, especially in the programs of stopping violence against women, taking the help of lawyers for running cases for a longtime and considering some practical aspects we had to take the contribution fund form a donor agency. Today we must express our gratitude to America based women organization Sanghati, the London based women organization BOLO, 2050 of Japan and the rich and affluent as well as broad minded who have helped us in our initial days - to all of them. We are also grateful to those ordinary women whose financial assistance has helped us to build Sufia Kamal Bhavan. Today's Sufia Kamal Bhavan has been erected by the generous contributions and charity of Sanghati Sheffield. If we look back at the women empowerment throughout the last three and a half decade, then we shall observe we have struggled for the equality of both men and women. We believe in the philosophy of Thomas Paine who talked about human rights, humanitarian approaches. That famous saying of Begum Rokeya: "Rise, wake up, say together you are human beings" have inspired all of us!

Mahila Parishad has directed the women empowerment trend with its multitude of programs. It is trying to change the anti-women outlook of traditional society. Not only we have focused on curricula and syllabi we got involved with various media, newspapers, films, drama where the traditional outlook of society is reflected and through which our society get influenced in that cultural movement. To see that our language echoes in those media, and the outlook regarding humanitarian treatment of women are upheld we have incorporated our movement with those of others. We tried to introduce a gender perspective within the current movement and we gathered strength and support from that movement.

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad is working as a lobby or agent for women. It has used on going humanitarian movements as a pressure on the state and society. From its inception, Mahila Parishad, beside its own separate movements, has kept contact and coordinated with other women and humanitarian organizations to build joint movements, develop unified vision and action plans. From year 2000 Mahila Parishad is working with social resistance committee of 41 women and humanitarian organizations and development agencies so that they can come forward united to resist oppression on women, to bring the marginalized women to the main stream, to unite all aboriginal and ethnic minority groups under one banner. To organize women, to awaken them, the leaders of the movements should also be trained and skillful. For this purpose we are taking a organized approach and initiative. From time to time we are announcing Organizing week, organizing fortnight and organizing month. Year 2004 was our organization year. The aim of organization year was to spread the ideology and thoughts of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad in the whole country. We have adopted some slogans there 'There is no substitute of voluntary service'. As citizens this voluntary service means show of patriotism. We have devoted ourselves to transform this patriotism into an effective force through a well trained process. That voluntary service requires professional skill for its fullest delivery.

Today in Bangladesh we see the picture of awakened, spirited and courageous women in their actions, awareness and responsible behaviour who are moving forward with incessant speed, caring no obstacles. The picture of spirited women that we see now in our country Mahila Parishad is a proud part of that picture, of that upsurge. The state and

society is also acted silently behind this achievement. Our founder chairman Poet Sufia Kamal, the legendary Begum Rokeya, Monoroma Basu and all the inspiring leaders of women lib are with us as well. Mahila Parishad has carried the flag of social reform that has been continuing for the last 100-150 years. Day by day it is becoming large entity, like a giant tree, for establishing individual rights of women.

We have included the programs for the establishment of democratic rights, democratic society and state as well as a democratic culture in our action plan. Various declarations on international women movements, CEDAW convention, Vienna Plan of Action, 1994 population and development related women reproduction right came in front; keeping the individual right of women as a priority, rendering appropriate recognition of women in their role in national and social life as mother has been attached in the programs of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad. The household works of women, economic valuation of many invisible services women provide, came in limelight in various international conferences. In the programs of UNDP the evaluation of various works of women have been focused and social and state recognition of their invisible works have been emphasized. The rights of men and women within family have been discussed. In the Beijing Conference through rigorous and detailed discussions a 12-point program has been formulated and accepted. This program is known as Beijing Work-Plan.

This 12-point demand captures the summary experiences of women liberation movements that swept Asia Africa, Europe and Latin America. Mahila Parishad, in conjunction of several other organizations, took a non-government program in the country to uphold the 12-point demand. A committee was formed, and between 1994 and 1995 we worked together for one complete year. Based on the experiences of this movement more elaborate programs have been included in main program. In the same manner the CEDAW (Convention for Elimination of Discrimination Against Women) document that entails eradication of all discrimination against women working with a long term vision. This entails some related actions like translating CEDAW document in Bangla, inclusion of the topic in the school curricula and training programs, creating interest among other organizations about CEDAW, receiving state approval for submitting alternative proposal to United Nations every 5 years. Nationally the women empowerment policy which has been declared in 1997, where the demands of last 40 years of Bangladesh as well as the then Pakistan era women rights in family issues e.g., property ownership, guardianship of children, representation in all profession and workmen have been covered. Encompassing all these issues a resolution had been adopted in the women development policy. But in 2004 when it was molded as a result of anti-people process Mahila Parishad instantly protested and demanded immediate reinstatement of 1997 policy. Mahila Parishad, from the very beginning, is pressing hard demand for the implementation of development of women as individuals and as citizens of the country.

Women movement is the result of joint struggle of men and women. Men have been consciously united with women liberation movements. Begum Rokeya has said, 'Society has two wings - one of it is women and the other is men'. Nobel laureate Amartya Sen has said, 'Women are the bearer of development'. The philosophy and spirit of hundred years of women struggle has been captured by this statement. Women are not only the target of development, they are also the partner of development, a beneficiary of development.

These words have truly reflected the programs that Mahila Parishad has undertaken in the last 37 years since independence of Bangladesh. Both Men and women are independent by birth; there should not be any discrimination between them. To establish this theme Mahila Parishad has launched multi-dimensional activities. This organization has tried to establish an awoken, secular and modern movement of women. We need to go to every door and corner of rural Bangladesh. In a country of 150 million people, half of whose population are women, we could reach only a fraction of them. As Bangladesh women have advanced much in their stride towards progress; our responsibilities have increased in the same magnitude and speed. That's why in the year 2005 we have adopted the slogan - 'there is no substitute of voluntary service, similarly there is no substitute of developing the professional skills of our volunteers'. We have to play an active role in establishing the human rights for women by equipping ourselves in the spirit of this ideology and with theory, information and technology. We call upon the social political and cultural movements of the country and reaffirm women rights movements are not only for women, but also a part of the greater national movement, so that, together we can create an oppression-free equal rights based society. For the greater part of women folks of the country we need to create supportive environment, so that, Mahila Parishad can mobilize stronger movement by attaching itself with the national, social, and cultural movement of the country.

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad puts forward the following demands to the state and society:

- To incorporate large number of women in the main stream of state and social administration;
- To ensure appropriate and effective participation of women at every stage of national policy making and administration - from Union Parishad to National Parliament - 33% of the positions should be reserved;
- To arrange direct election for the reserved seat for women candidates and increase the number of seats to 33% or 100 seats;
- To assign 33% of the economic decision making roles to women representatives at every tier of administration;
- To enforce laws promulgating violence against women in order to stop oppression and violence against women;
- To alter the attitude of the male dominated society towards girl child and women within a family;
- To include gender perspective in the education, economic and labour laws of the country and reflect the true notion of gender in all of them;
- To include women rights, human rights and the overall humanitarian approaches and themes in the curricula;
- To include the writings of feminist philosopher and writers in the national curricula and syllabi of schools and colleges;
- To reinstate the 1972 constitution and take pragmatic step to turn Bangladesh into a secular, democratic state sensitive to equal rights of men and women and establish a humanitarian and culturally advanced society.