could not pay and she could not ask him. Abused and battered, one day Karim and his family threw her out. Karim would be married again for a good price.

Rose returned to her parents' home, with her a little baby. She would be taunted. She would live as a recluse afraid to eat, afraid to speak, and afraid to ask. A woman without a husband is a woman with no identity. Rose thinks: where she should go? What should she do, a burden to the family with no skill and no education.

"Here lies your husband's home and there lies your father's, where is your home, dear, where is your home?" so goes an old Bangladeshi village saying.

The girl child begins her life with rejection and no space in society. Her family relieves its burden by getting her married off. In-laws throw her out for money. No place with father and no place with husband, she is out on the street. Out on the road, society, too, gives her no place, no work, no respect.

Without education or skills, she is ill equipped to tackle the challenges she faces. Treated as a "street walker," the girl needs unimaginable strength and determination to make a life for herself in a judgmental society that misses no chance to humiliate her. The girl child is born in pain, violence, neglect, poor health, and humiliation.

Does Rose become a street walker like many of her peers? Or does she commit suicide? No, she fights. She joined a group of young people in her village who decided to do something to protect the human rights of the poor, the children, the women and the marginalised.

They decided to resist violence against woman and the poor. A team of five girls and five boys from poor peasant families formed into village action research groups (gono gobeshona dal). They saved money to build a little capital to help one another during need. They began challenging dowry marriages, child marriages. They worked to put every girl child into school and succeeded, with 100% enrolment from every household through a house-to-house motivation of parents. These bigger children started voluntary coaching centres for children from ultra poor homes and brought down the drop out rate. The village youths have found new meaning in life. So has Rose.

The small village youth earned the respect of the elders, the local government. The local government body consults them and calls them to their meetings, taking their opinion in identifying the needy in distributing resources to poor families. A new generation of leaders, of resource persons, gender sensitive and caring, proudly begins to take responsibility for themselves, for the poor and their human rights.

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This gono gobeshona dal hold regular consultative meetings with villagers in gram shobha (village assembly), identifying problems, sharing information, finding solutions, and putting these into action.

Violence against the girl child

There is the violence that we do not see yet, it is embedded in a system of deprivation and exploitation. When the little girl does not get to eat what her brother eats, she is deprived. When she does not go to school like her brother, she is deprived. The psychological trauma she is forced to endure as a result of the injustice is a quiet violence on her mind that slowly destroys her confidence, her belief in herself, and dehumanises her as she learns to accept this position as natural.

Society expects this. In fact, praises her for her patience. The more she endures, the more she is glorified -- a clever way to sustain patriarchy and imbibe values of patriarchy in a woman, until she learns to value a son more, a son's mother more, and before she knows it she practices the same injustice to her daughter and daughter-in-law as she has endured, convinced this to be right. This is the worst form of violence, quietly eating away your dignity, your objectivity, and your sense of humanity -- the violence most difficult to tackle.

Of course there is the more obvious violence with its physical manifestations. While the poor child in general is subject to various forms of social exploitation, for the girl child it is more so.

A nation of young

Let me present here some simple facts. Bangladesh, firstly, is a nation of the young. Approximately 48% of the population is children below 18 years of age. According to the last census, some 41% of the population is below 14 years. Every year, 2.5 million children are born, of whom a large number do not reach 5 years of age.

Bangladesh is one of the few countries in the world where the number of girls (49%) is less than boys (51%) and this difference is a result of the social neglect of the girl child who at birth is born stronger than the boy but eventually becomes weaker and more malnourished due to her lesser social value.

One third of all children are underweight. 70% of 5-year-olds