



We are the other half in the human society. How will society progress if we do not rise? If a person's one leg is tied down, how far can she or he go limping on one leg. The goal of men and our goal are not different-- they are same. The goal of their life is just as same as our goal."

-Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain



There is the need to organize a wider, stronger movement for the realization of women's rights, dignity and freedom. But in this movement men will have to come and join with equal show of commitment. The movement for the emancipation of women shall have to be strengthened by both men and women.

-Sufia Kamal



We want to keep marching towards progress and for the emancipation of women. We want democracy to be effective and rule of law established. We want to see an end to repression on women, fundamentalism and communalism.

-Hena Das

Role of Mahila Parishad

PROF. REHMAN SOBHAN

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad's vanguard role in the struggle for women's human rights and its related initiatives in this area, which originated in the 1970s under the leadership of Poet Sufia Kamal, deserves to be recognized. Over four decades, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad has been at the forefront of the movement for establishing a democratic, secular, discrimination free society, inspired by the spirit of the liberation war. On the occasion of their 44th Founding Anniversary I congratulate and commend them for their commitment, courage and perseverance in the course of this ongoing struggle under difficult circumstances.

The women of Bangladesh have already established themselves as one of the strongest pillars of the national economy. Through the micro-credit system women have established their creditworthiness in the banking system as well as important sources of household income generation and savings. Correspondingly, women have become the main source of value addition in the dynamic garments sector. Women have also demonstrated their political maturity by coming out to vote in large numbers whenever they have been presented with the opportunity to freely exercise their choice.

We have reached a stage where women's right to political representation in parliament through direct elections, to equality before the law including the right to property, to gender justice in the work place as well widening of opportunities that vest them with equity rights in enterprises where they work, to safety and security, remain part of the unfinished agenda of the women's movement. All of us look to Bangladesh Mahila Parishad to play a leading role in bringing together all the principal groups as well as committed individuals, women and men, who are engaged in the struggle for gender justice to persevere with this struggle. It is only through such collective endeavours that sufficient strength can be mobilized to eradicate all forms of injustice against women.

THE WRITER IS CHAIRMAN, CENTRE FOR POLICY DIALOGUE.

Women will come out victorious

PROFESSOR ANISUZZAMAN

When in 1947-48 Dhaka became the capital of the province of East Pakistan, womenfolk of the country used to go to school and college, work as teachers, engage in agriculture work etc., but moving about within Dhaka city was almost a challenging undertaking for them. When a woman passenger traveled by rickshaw the vehicle used to be covered with a long piece of cloth. But the spontaneous participation of such a large number of women in today's convention proves that they have come a long way. They have progressed both at home and abroad. When Begum Sufia Kamal in the early years began to write in a bid to break the shackles, Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain had advised her to work for the emancipation of all and not of her own self only. Because, if others remain in shackles, her own freedom will be of little significance. Today, the goal of us all and of Mahila Parishad in particular is the emancipation of the womenfolk at large. Today, we see tremendous progress of women. They are working successfully at home and abroad and they are making the country proud. This is a great achievement. And yet there is no end to repression of women. Women are being harassed on the roads.

It's true that we have female speaker in our parliament. It is also true that four female workers in the garment sector are working hard to keep the wheels of economy moving. But men take control of their hard earned money. Though we have achieved progress in many spheres, women are still being deprived of their rights. And we have seen the reemergence of the obscurantist forces that consider women as an object of their lust. They want to put women within the four walls of their homes once again. They do not recognize the fact that women are earning a living independently and contributing to the economy in general. They want to thwart the forward march of women and put them in shackles once again. Therefore, despite the progress and achievements, women continue to face the adverse reality. They are still engaged in the fight against the evil forces in society. They are still in negotiation with the state authorities for their rights.

Ram Mohan Roy nearly 300 years ago observed that man fail to assess the economic price of women working from dawn to dusk in her household. Today, women shall have to demand for their rightful position in economy, society and state. Men and women shall have to work together and fight together to attain this goal. This is not the fight for the emancipation of women only; it is much more than this. In fact, it is women's human rights. Women's emancipation will mean holistic progress of the entire nation. Bangladesh Mahila Parishad has been working relentlessly for the last 44 years. They have been able to earn the confidence of the womenfolk of the country. A large number of women are members of this organization. The organization has hundreds of branches all over the country.

I am sure BMP will have more achievements to its credit in the coming days. The reason for their success is the firm belief in justice and welfare. Their fight is the fight for the total emancipation of the people of Bangladesh. We are engaged in a fight against communalism in a bid to establish a society on the basis of justice and equality. This fight encompasses rights, recognition and honor of women of the country. There is no doubt in my mind that women will come out victorious in this fight. They have courage, determination and fixed goal. I congratulate you will for undertaking the daunting task.

THE WRITER IS PROFESSOR EMERITUS, UNIVERSITY OF DHAKA.

Journey Towards Women's Empowerment

4th April 2014 is 44th birth anniversary of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad. Historically BMP was founded with a definite objective to establish women's human rights, democratic and equity based society and state on the basis of humanitarian principles. For the last 44 years this organization is working relentlessly in a multi-dimensional way with a right based approach, to promote and protect women's human rights in Bangladesh, to create broader space in the life of all walks of women and to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. During its four and a half decade journey it has attained certain features which makes it different or special from many others. From its very inception BMP's main salient feature is –

- Non-communal secular, democratic, progressive humanitarian culture and principles.
- Its voluntarism and patriotism
- Relentless/non-stop quest and struggle for innovating the rights and process to adapt for promoting the existing subjugated position of women in the family, society and state.
- To empower women economically, politically, socially and culturally.
- To resist and eliminate all kinds of violence and discrimination which exist against women and girls in the family, society and state.
- Strengthening and deepening democracy and democratic culture in every sphere of life.
- Transparency and accountability in its organizational life.

BMP is now identified as a strong advocacy lobby agent for policy intervention and for pro-gender policy and programs and culture in the state.

As a women's organization it has been engaged in the effort of integrating general mass women in the mainstream political process and policy making process of all state institutions in all tiers.

During this period BMP's remarkable stands are organizing a conscious integrated, target bound law reform movement.

From 1972 to 2014, BMP played a role as voice raiser, as an opinion builder, as a drafter and implementer of all the laws which has been introduced by the successive governments related to women's human rights and gender equality, to establish equality between men and women in the case of marriage, divorce, guardianship and laws of inheritance.

BMP has proposed a forward looking, advance, modern, scientific alternative family laws named Uniform Family Code (UFC) which has been able to get support from national women's movement and also to draw the attentions of regional and global women's human rights movement and UNCSCW and UNCEDAW committee.

From 1980 BMP started its effort to resist all forms of violence against women in a multi-dimensional way. By running a free legal aid clinic, law reform movement, giving legal and paralegal training to the mass women, running a home for deserted, destitute women and girls, women and girls who are victims of violence and trafficking BMP become a center of hope for distressed and destitute women and girls. Through alternative dispute resolution process BMP is playing the role of facilitator for crores of women and affected family members. The multi-sectoral approach for resisting violence against Women and Girls adapted by BMP in 1984-85 is now getting importance and becoming popular day by day. CSW 2013 had focused highly on the multi-sectoral approach to resist and eliminate all kinds of violence against women and girls. From an in-depth survey and both internal and external study BMP has become an agent of change which is working as an umbrella force or strength for hundreds of thousands of women in Bangladesh.

To aware general mass women and raising their consciousness as citizens of a state, BMP for four decades is running training program with a concrete gender based training module. By introducing gender certificate course and running and organizing study circle among young men and women, BMP opened a new venue for inclusion of the young in this women's movement. We are grateful to our resource persons.

As BMP started its functioning during the time of liberation war from its very inception it has been linked with the regional and global women's movements and organizations. Now, it is very closely working with UNWOMEN, CSW. As an ECOSOC affiliated organization it has been linked very closely and working with the global women's human rights movements. In the light of Vienna, UNCEDAW, Beijing and other UNHR declaration it has updated its programs after '90s.

As BMP believes women's movement is a part and parcel of national democratic movement of a country and state, BMP as an organization and its leaders are actively engaged in all of the national democratic movements. Organizing and participating in the 1971 liberation war by our founder president Poet Sufia Kamal and other first generation leading organizers, till now BMP has been very closely engaged in each and every democratic struggle. BMP always participated without any hesitation in each and every effort against all kinds of communal, religious fundamentalist and autocratic trends. To establish a non-communal, secular, democratic, equity based society, BMP has been following multi-dimensional approaches. BMP individually is trying to organize a strong mass women's movement within the society and state and is trying to build up a strong united national women's movement, sometimes in the name of "Oikkoboddha Nari Somaj" and other names.

Religious extremism has taken its many ugly forms which is a great hindrance for women's human rights. In this regards our slogan is "Stop using religion in politics", enhance and promote women's human rights, establish gender equality and democracy. Bangladesh Mahila Parishad as an organization and as a movement has walked a long way and still there is a long way to go. BMP and its workers, followers and supporters must get ready to face 21st century with its enormous possibilities and hundreds of new challenges have been created by this new era. We have to walk faster and stronger in a more skilled and dynamic way.

THE WRITER IS PRESIDENT, BANGLADESH



Organization Sub-Committee
Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP), a national non-political and voluntary women's organization, was formed on 4th April, 1970 under the leadership of poet Sufia Kamal. Mahila Parishad is pledge-bound to establish a society and state on the basis of gender equality in the light of the constitution of 1972.

Legal Aid Sub-Committee
This sub-committee is providing medico legal support, shelter and other services to the women victims of repression. It is also active in undertaking advocacy/lobbying as well as street based movements for reform of existing laws and formulation of new laws. The male members and the youth are being involved in the movement against women repression in an effort to create a women friendly environment in society and state.

Movement Sub Committee
Bangladesh Mahila Parishad since its inception has been undertaking movements aimed at political empowerment of women for equal opportunity in the running of the affairs of the state and society at large. To attain this goal, BMP president Sufia Kamal led a team to place demands for direct election of women in the reserve seats before Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

International Sub Committee
BMP has established an international network through attending various international programmes and UN Conventions and sharing information with other organizations.

Social Welfare Sub-Committee
Bangladesh Mahila Parishad chalks out different types of social welfare activities and assists in self-employment endeavors. This subcommittee has been extending relief assistance to the victims of Aila, cyclone, drought and flood. It distributes winter clothes among the poor people during severe cold spell.

Education and Cultural Sub-Committee
BMP is contributing to removing illiteracy from society through its free adult education centres. This subcommittee observes various national days, takes part in cultural movements and takes initiative to form cultural groups and organize cultural events on certain occasions.

Publication Sub-Committee
Bangladesh Mahila Parishad has been publishing its quarterly newsletter Mahila Shamachar since 1972. Since 2011, it has been publishing Mahila Parishad Journal.

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Rokeya Shadan Sub-Committee
Rokeya Shadan is engaged in activities directed at eliminating repression on women since 1983. It is a temporary shelter house of women victims of oppression.

Environment Sub-Committee
When the global movement for protection of environment started, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad also joined the movement. Laws for the protection of wetlands, women rights, building construction code etc., have been passed. BMP has been involved in the process of formulation of these laws.

Health Sub-Committee
Bangladesh Mahila Parishad Health

Sub Committee is working for the establishment of reproductive health and rights of women and creating an improved healthcare system for them in the light of ICDP, Millennium Development Goal 4 and 5 and BPFA in 4th world women congress. Presently, this sub-committee is involved in research on the health of pregnant women.

Publicity and Mass Media Sub-Committee
This sub-committee is responsible for networking with the mass media for publication of news items related to the activities and statements of BMP. It also monitors the role of the media in establishing the rights of women. The sub-committee ensures that the works of BMP and women in general are properly reflected in the media

Programmes of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad