

# 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

## Indigenous Women and the Coloniality of Gender

UCHCHA-A CHAK

VIOLENCE against women is normalised in our societies to such an extent that it is almost invisible, like the air we breathe. Neither the perpetrators nor the systems that permit and breed violence against women are put on the stand. Inevitably, the blame falls on the women, who have been beaten, raped and/or murdered because they were “asking for it”, by being in the “wrong place” at the “wrong time,” with the “wrong person” or for wearing the “wrong clothes.”

This is true for all women. However, when it comes to violence against indigenous women, the level of impunity is higher. Available data shows that indigenous women and girls are more likely to suffer from gender-based violence compared to non-indigenous women and girls, including those with disabilities. It is clear that, in the case of indigenous women, their racial/ethnic identities not only make them easier targets of violence but also provide the perpetrators a ground for rationalising their violent acts.

It is important to ask why and how indigenous women’s intersectional identities of being “women” and being “indigenous” make them more susceptible to violence. To answer this question, we have to go beyond the narratives of the prevalent culture of impunity and the “ineffectiveness of law and order.” Many theorists, including Maria Lugones, claim that it has a lot to do with the way the concept of gender was reconfigured due to colonial intervention, and how it changed the region’s social relations—a process she identifies as the “coloniality of gender.”

To be sure, no one can say exactly what pre-colonial societies were like. We can only gain perspectives from fragments of written and oral histories. These suggest that both in Africa and in our Indian subcontinent, pre-colonial conceptions of gender were complex and fluid, and they were structured differently from European conceptions, which are prevailing in most of the world now.

Let me share an example from the indigenous community I belong to—Chak in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh. One of the elders, who is in her nineties now, once pointed out to me how sexual ethics in her youth were far different from the ones we practice today in our Chak community. She told me a love story about a young couple who could not get married because their parents did not get along. So the woman married another man who was

selected by her parents. The surprising part of the story for me was that the woman was visibly pregnant with a child from her previous lover during the time of her marriage. I asked the elder, “And everyone was okay with it?” She replied, “Everyone, including the parents of the boy who was marrying her, knew about the romantic relationship, and becoming pregnant is a common consequence of making love.” Lowering her voice, she went on to say, “But these things are seen as immoral now. When a woman or girl becomes pregnant before

of women in the Chak community has been further subordinated. So, what happened during this time to cause such a shift?

Perhaps another story can help us understand what happened. My mother (*anno*) remembers, in the late 1970s, the Chak leaders who had travelled outside the community and been exposed to dominant Bengali culture had declared that wearing short *na-phings*—the traditional handwoven mini-skirt-length garb of Chak women—was “shameful,” and so was bathing “naked” in the river. They also explained that times were

*Decolonisation is not about merely being free from visible control of the British empire, or Pakistani rule, or Bengali hegemony (in the case of indigenous women in Bangladesh). It is about unpacking how the oppressive systems came into being in post-colonial countries.*



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PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

marriage, she and her family get a bad name.” This incident tells us that, in our Chak community, women did not use to be named and shamed for the act of pre-marital sex and pregnancy in a not-very-distant past (approximately in the 1950s). But now, not only is the woman condemned for such acts but their families are also socially humiliated. The other observation from the aforementioned case is that neither the woman nor the man was criticised for pre-marital sex and pregnancy, whereas now, the blame and shame of such acts fall solely on the shoulders of the women. It means that, from the 1950s to 1980s and onwards, not only did the ethics related to sex and marriage change drastically, but the position

changing and to protect themselves from outsiders (Bengalis), the Chak women should wear longer *na-phings*. Gradually, younger women in the community doubled the length of their *na-phings* to adhere to the newly founded “modest” behaviours for Chak women. It would be relevant to remember that this was the time when the Bangladeshi nation heavy-handedly asserted nationalist agendas in the Chittagong Hill Tracts through extensive securitisation and state-sanctioned population transfer from the plains to the hills. It was a population which had different ideas and expectations of gender, negotiated by different religious and colonial experiences.

This encounter of two peoples thus

## Should you chase awards?



A gentleman does not. But a man not so gentle does. A genuine award from a respectable organisation becomes a thing of joy, but an award given by a shady group to a questionable character raises eyebrows. Such a questionable character is a desperate “wannabe” who wants to be seen and heard by educated and sophisticated people in society. Since he does not have the required attributes to stand in the same rank with the enlightened ones, he begins to manipulate his way into the inner circle. He is thrilled when his half-literate sycophants cheer him up as he tries to go uphill to reach the goal. But then he falls from halfway to the pits of despair, which is painful.

After attending to his bruised ego, he declares with disdain, “Those men up there are no better than me. I shall start a campaign against them on social media where I can have many of my cronies help me in my measly mission.”

He approaches some television channels, run by the likes of him, and pours filth befitting his own ill worldview. Soon after, lo and behold, such a despicable and disposable character starts to get many “awards” from shady groups for “lifetime achievement” in wheeling and dealing! He sheepishly smiles at the camera as he accepts the awkward award. Now he begins to suffer from the delusion that he has become “somebody” in the midst of the minions. But there are whispers in the wind that such people spend a lot of money to “manage” an award.

On the other hand, a respectable award is a wonderful thing to happen to a deserving person in a progressive society. It may be given to a professor, physician, economist, researcher, novelist, poet, sportsman, stage performer, film or TV performer/director or to a singer. This formal recognition of one’s endowments and unique talent makes the recipient happy and humble, and they accept the award with a bowed head. This recognition in turn inspires others to work harder and better.

Good awards and deserving

candidates are not found in multitudes in any society. In our youth, we only knew about the Nobel Prize and the Oscar. Then we came to know about other awards like the Man Booker Prize, Magsaysay Award and some of our prestigious national awards like Ekushey Padak and Shwadinata Padak.

As Bengalis, we take a lot of pride in the fact that as many as four Bengalis have received the Nobel Prize since Rabindranath Tagore in 1913. In fact, out of 10 Nobel Prize winners from India and Bangladesh, three come from Kolkata and one from Dhaka.

People wait the entire year to know who the recipients of this year’s Nobel Prize or Booker Prize would be. And of course, in Hollywood, “This year’s Oscar for best direction goes to...” is awaited with equal fervour. The Dadasaheb Phalke Award is India’s most prestigious award for cinema. It is presented annually by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. The awardees in all categories are

*No one worthy of an award works with any thought of receiving one in the back of their head.*

selected by a competent body of talented persons. They no doubt select only the deserving candidates from among a bevy of names after going through their track records and recommendations. The names are kept a secret until the last days.

One really has to work hard for many years and reach the highest level of excellence in a particular field of work to be selected or nominated. People who have gotten these awards in the past had no idea that their names were proposed to the committee. No one worthy of an award works with any thought of receiving one in the back of their head.

Recognition, awards and rewards—however small—lift up the self-confidence of workers. They motivate workers to do better and strive to reach perfection. Employee of the month is a good form of recognition introduced in some hotels and restaurants. These rewards are small in

size but great for making employees happy.

So what happens when a non-deserving person gets an award? Well, nothing happens to him, but the systolic of the people who watch the man accepting the award goes through the roof. Viewers look up at the sky and mumble, “God! Why? Why him?” And then we watch the overnight metamorphosis of the unworthy recipient.

From a shy, cunning person, this underserving man turns into a boisterous bragger in the social club. Fellow members try to invent excuses to leave the room as soon as he enters through the door.

Awards can be fun, too. In many countries, gag awards are given to office colleagues. This is done with no malice in mind, rather to generate healthy laughter. These are given to co-workers who always come in early or late or are health freaks and so on.

In the field of journalism, the Pulitzer Prize is considered as prestigious as the Nobel Prize. According to the Encyclopedia, “It recognises a distinguished example of meritorious public service by a newspaper or news site through the use of its journalistic resources, which may include editorials, cartoons, photographs, graphics, video and other online material, and may be presented in print or online or both.”

The *New York Times* has so far won 132 Pulitzer Prizes since 1918. It has won more Pulitzer prizes than any other newspaper or organisation. A 19-member board, comprising senior editors, columnists, media executives, artists, as well as academic administrators from Columbia University, administers the prize.

We were fascinated by the story of the busting of the Watergate scandal by two journalists in the early 1970s. Journalists Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, through their investigative journalism, broke the Watergate story for *The Washington Post* that led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon.

Their hard work and taking of risks set the standards for modern investigative reporting. Both the journalists and *The Washington Post* were awarded the Pulitzer Prize. That particular report and its consequences were so huge that the award came to them almost automatically.

So, don’t chase an award. Let the award chase you.

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Shahnoor Wahid is a freelance journalist.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh  
Non Communicable Disease Control Program  
Directorate General of Health Services  
Mohakhali, Dhaka-1212.

Request for Expression of Interest (EOI) on Survey activities of Non Communicable Disease Control through DGHS for the year 2021-2022

1.	Ministry	Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MOHFW)		
2.	Division	Health Services Division		
3.	Agency	Directorate General of Health Services		
4.	Procuring Entity Name	Line Director, Non Communicable Disease Control Programme		
5.	Project / Program Code	224021008		
6.	Procuring Entity District	Dhaka		
7.	Expression of Interest for Selection of:			
	Thematic area	Objective	Expected Outcome	
	Designing a model for community-based intervention in reducing hypertension, diabetes and their risk factors in alignment with WHO PEN protocol in primary health care settings	To design a community-based intervention for reduction of risk for diabetes and hypertension diabetes and their risk factors in alignment with WHO PEN protocol in primary health care settings	1. Prevalence of hypertension and diabetes in a rural community. 2. Prevalence of risk factors for diabetes and hypertension in a rural community 3. Health system situation analysis and review to accommodate the proposed model 4. A sustainable, community based comprehensive model for management and control of NCDs in place and operating	
8.	EOI ref. no.	GoB_SD-09		
9.	Date	07/12/2021		
KEY INFORMATION				
10.	Procurement Method	Consulting Firm will be selected in accordance with the Public Procurement Act 2006 & Public Procurement Regulation 2008 of the Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh (Followed by QCBS Method)		
FUNDING INFORMATION				
11.	Budget & Source of	As per ADP allocation 2021-2022: GOB, NCDC (4*HPNSP);		
12.	Development Partners	N/A		
PARTICULAR INFORMATION				
13.	Program Name Code	224021008		
14.	Project / Program Name	Non Communicable Disease Control Programme, 4*HPNSP.		
15.	EOI Closing Date & Time	21/12/2021 (Up to 15:00). EOIs shall be submitted in sealed envelope to Line Director, Non Communicable Disease Control Programme (Room No#609, DGHS (Old Building, 5 <sup>th</sup> Floor), Mohakhali, Dhaka-1212 and be marked clearly as name of the task with EOI reference number.		
INFORMATION FOR APPLICANT				
16.	Brief Description of Assignment			
	Designing a model for community-based intervention in reducing hypertension, diabetes and their risk factors in alignment with WHO PEN protocol in primary health care settings: (1) To determine the prevalence of hypertension and diabetes among adults (18+) in a rural community of Bangladesh, (2)To develop thematic and conceptual framework for the for comprehensive management of diabetes and hypertension (3) To determine the distribution of risk factors for diabetes and hypertension in the community, (4) Review and document the existing primary health system and other community-based intervention suitable for developing country setting, (5) To design a community-based intervention and management model in the light of universal health coverage, in existing health system for comprehensive management of diabetes and hypertension, (6) To design a community-based intervention and management model for reducing modifiable risk factors for diabetes and hypertension, (7) To implement the designed intervention in the community that includes digital register and referral, (8)To evaluate/ compare the developed program in primary health care settings			
17.	Experience, Resources & Delivery Capacity required			
	The applicant shall have to submit the EOI with the following documents: (1) Category of the firm: Research/Survey organization/Consulting firm; (2) Brief description of the firm with proof of working in the relevant areas and of conducting Research/survey; (3) Valid Trade license/Registration; (4) Updated Income Tax certificate/Certificate of VAT; (5) 10 (Ten) years experience in the relevant survey/research; (6) List of major clients working with in last Ten (10) years with contact reference; (7) Bank solvency certificate; (8) Name of the central key personnel with C.V. who will be involved with the assignment; (9) Relevant documents in favor of organizational strength of the firm.			
18.	Association with other firms	Consultant firm may associate with other consultants to enhance its qualifications.		
19.	Association with foreign firms	N/A		
20.	Name of Official inviting EOI	Prof. Dr. Mohammad Robed Amin		
21.	Designation of Official inviting EOI	Line Director, Non Communicable Disease Control, Directorate General of Health Services		
22.	Address of Official inviting EOI	Line Director, Non Communicable Disease Control, Directorate General of Health Services, Mohakhali, Dhaka-1212.		
23.	Contact details of official inviting EOI	Tel No: +88-02-2222999207, E-mail: <a href="mailto:ncdo@ild.dghs.gov.bd">ncdo@ild.dghs.gov.bd</a>		

N.B: An Institute/Organization/Farm is requested to submit only one EOI for a single package. For any breach of the above condition, procuring entity preserves the rights to cancel the EOIs and may disqualify the Institute/Organization/ Farm (The Procuring Entity reserves the right to reject any or all of the EOIs).

(Prof. Dr. Mohammad Robed Amin)  
Line Director  
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GD-2261