

How corruption is perpetuated across generations in Bangladesh

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On January 31, Transparency International (TI) released its Corruption Perceptions Index 2022, and Bangladesh earned the 12th global lowest position. Keeping up with the worldwide trend, the overall situation in Bangladesh appears to have worsened compared to previous years.

Speaking from my personal experiences as a young adult growing up in Bangladesh, I find that there is little discourse around how the prevalence of corruption in our society is shaping the youth, the people who will go on to take charge in the future. This is not surprising in a country where adolescents are generally discouraged from thinking about politics and social issues, because these supposedly only concern adults.

Yet, there is no doubt that the misuse of power by authoritative bodies has an impact on the country's younger demographic in important sectors of their lives such as education and healthcare. The most recent example of this is a headmaster in Patuakhali who had been letting his brother occupy the school playground to run his contracting business, thus depriving students of school resources that are meant for their use.

Young people like me have grown up seeing how common it is to give or take bribes, where it has become the norm, sometimes even a necessary step to secure services that were supposed to be free in the first place. We see instances of embezzlement or nepotism, like the one in Patuakhali, being reported on the news daily.

The perception is such that high profile individuals in the most coveted positions, with the most money and influence, are the most corrupt. Young adults are expected to aspire to join these elite groups of the rich and powerful.

The irony is that the culture of corruption is so widespread now that it has infiltrated our schools and universities, the very establishments that are supposed to teach us about ethics and our duty to be law-abiding citizens. Even in our homes, we seldom get those teachings, because our loved ones are often actively partaking in this culture.

So, in a way, aren't we enabling a society where the best our newer generations can hope for is to end up on the side of the bribe-takers, or otherwise fall victim to the same corruption? In order to dismantle this broken system for good, there is a need to assess how young people are interacting with it.

Economists agree that rampant corruption is one of the main factors holding down the country's GDP growth rate. Extensive anti-corruption measures are the only way to curb this national crisis we are currently faced with.

At the same time, including the youth perspective in public dialogues surrounding corruption is very important. We are sick of never being heard while we silently suffer the consequences of a dysfunctional system we never helped to create, and if this is the legacy our predecessors are leaving behind, don't blame us for wanting nothing to do with it.

References:

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2. The Daily Star (February 1, 2023). *CPI 2022: Disappointing global and Bangladesh performances.*

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The need for women-only scholarships

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Newspapers and TV channels covering the success of female students right after board exam results are announced is a wholesome sight, but it should not be mistaken as a testimony of women's empowerment done right. The sad reality is that, for many of them, it will be their last academic triumph.

A report titled "Bangladesh Education Statistics 2021" from the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS) shows that there is a significant decline in the rate of girls' enrollment after college, and this trend continues as they progress through higher education. According to the report, in 2020, out of 55.41 percent of girls who were enrolled in middle school from sixth to eighth grade, only 40.78 percent of them pursued a master's degree. Behind such a decline, there are a number of contributing factors with financial barriers being one of them.

In low-income households, girls are often viewed as a liability and spending money on their education is deemed an unwanted expense. The scenario, unfortunately, is also prevalent in many solvent families who believe that spending on their daughters' weddings is a far better investment. This is where such scholarship opportunities come to their rescue.

Women-only scholarships provide female students with partial financial support. The criteria for availing this facility may vary depending on the institution. Some institutions award it based on merit, some provide it based on financial needs, and some keep it allocated for all the female students, regardless of their socio-economic background.

These scholarships, however, have been labeled as a "double-standard" by many, as they believe it defies what feminism preaches – equality. According to the flag bearers of equality, scholarships for women are "special advantages" that put their counterparts at a disparity. Their claim is that if equality is what women are fighting for, then why should they receive aid that men cannot?

To address this "double standard," the thin line between equality and equity needs to be understood. While equality is the term we casually throw in debates, it is not always the most effective way to approach every situation. Equality, in most cases, preaches a one-size-fits-all solution, whereas equity acknowledges unique circumstances.

Equality is Cinderella's lost slipper that can change life dramatically for those who can fit their foot into it. But the unfortunate reality is that a glass slipper will not fit everyone, and for them, we will need a pair that they can actually walk in.

Preaching the slogan of equality without trying to identify the root causes of the problem is futile. As long as society fails to provide women with basic human rights, we must look for solutions of equity.

More girls are pursuing education and occupying important positions now. There is no denying that progress has been made. But the amount of societal and systematic barriers they have to push through to achieve the same goal as a man, is greater still, and this is not what equality should look like.

So, until the day comes, we will have to seek tools that can drill through hindrances that stand in the way of women's basic rights. And till then, we will need advantages like women-only scholarships to exist, facilitate, and be in effect.

Reference:

The Daily Star. (2 July, 2022) *Why Are Girls Falling Behind in Higher Education?*

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