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OPINION

Child marriage impede women empowerment

Child marriage does not help women grow and develop into mature persons and enjoy the fruits of empowerment, writes **M Azizur Rahman**

ACCORDING to the UN definition, an offspring under the age of 18 is considered a child. The marriage of any child under the age of 18 is called a child marriage. Women in any society including Bangladesh are relatively less powerful compared with men. For the development of a country, it is important that we work for the improvement of health, education and working condition of women. Without the development of women human development remains incomplete. So, for the overall development of human beings women must be empowered. A child marriage is considered a constraint to human development, and is a matter of discussion all over the world.

Any notable achievement in this world can be credited to men and women equally. Men and women cannot ignore each other in their family life. Women are an integral part of family and social life. In unskilled jobs, men do relatively better com-

pared to women. But in white collar jobs, like businesses and in professional occupations, men and women can perform equally well. Recently, along with technological development, the importance of human resource and skilled labour in particular has also been increasing. For example, some countries including China are doing very well in economic performance because of its educated and skilled human resource. Higher productivity and efficiency for women through raising their empowerment will contribute significantly to the growth of the economy. It is regrettable that South Asian and the Middle Eastern countries are lagging behind in women development. There are many reasons behind it and child-marriage is one of them.

In most households women are considered non-earning members of the family. As soon as they are married off, parents can offload the responsibility of taking care of their

daughter's life and living, as she leaves her parents' house and goes to the father in law's house, who will take care of her. Therefore, in many developing and least developed countries (LDC) child marriage takes place. We will be discussing about the child marriage situation in some developing countries which stands against women empowerment.

Afghanistan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Iran are developing countries and Bangladesh is still considered a least developed country (LDC). In these countries, a high figure of child marriage is not very encouraging. Although there is law in these countries including Bangladesh that the under aged women (below 18 years of age) cannot get married. But this law is not respected fully and child marriages take place. The percentage of child marriage varies from 34 per cent in Pakistan to 80 per cent in Bangladesh according to a 2007 survey report. In the Middle East the

percentage of child-marriage is 42 per cent and in Iran 39 per cent.

The majority of Bangladeshi women are Muslims. Most of the married women are poorly educated housewives. Among the countries mentioned, Bangladesh has the highest rate of child marriage. Child marriage does not help women grow and develop into mature persons and enjoy the fruits of empowerment. The customs and culture of the country does not permit women to lead the life on their own. This is not a positive sign for women empowerment. The best way to empower women is to educate them in a job oriented vocation. Educated women will know what to do and how to improve their lot in society and contribute to good governance and economic development of the country.

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