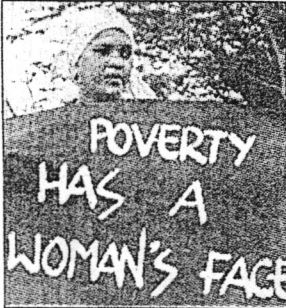


The constant trio: women, poverty and discrimination



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Wherever there is a noble and ever pleasing creation on earth, half of it is done by women and the remaining half, by men. But yet the utility or 'happiness in life' is not enjoyed equally. In the world of poverty, women and children are relatively poor because of discrimination. The terms 'women,' 'discrimination' and 'poverty' are closely associated. Due to the formula of maintaining balance in nature, the proportion of men and women is almost equal. It has already been mentioned that in the world of poverty, the number of women and children is proportionately high. Unexpectedly, women are relatively more victimized by poverty. The reason behind women's poverty is that most women are not direct earners.

Many people spend nights in a single room or two. They cannot afford basic needs like food, clothes house, education and health-care. The dwellers do not have an adequate sewerage system.

Safe water is scarce. Whatever they can afford is of the lowest standards of living. They cannot take or manage to have a balanced diet, nutrition, or access to health service. They cannot take part in any development activity due to lack of their education, training and experience. Again, because of the lack of financial ability they cannot initiate any business that could be productive. By the term 'female poverty,' we mean poverty of women and indirectly, children. Most of the poor women are divorcees or widows who are generally landless and many times, homeless. Fatherless children usually live with their mothers. Female poverty and its reasons are almost the same in the developing and poverty-stricken world.

Generally, women are biologically and historically often assumed to be weak. Additionally, because of a lack of education and experience, they become socially discriminated. As a result, they are deprived of business and leadership opportunities. The earning capacity of women is ultimately less than that of men. If the male members of

the family earn well, the female members do not have any authority over their income.

Typically, women face obstacles in entering government jobs and formal ceremonies because of religious superstition and lack of proper education. On the whole, women cannot enjoy social security in developing countries like Bangladesh. In other words, women face such problems everywhere; especially in developing countries. Even though there is an open market economy in these countries, the cultural atmosphere is adverse. Women face obstacles at every step due to family, social, and religious assumptions and notions. This situation is worse in fundamentalist areas like Chittagong, Sylhet and Noakhali. Again, due to the lack of education, jobs and financial ability, they cannot initiate businesses, and in conclusion, fall into danger.

In relation to many female-dominated families, women face this problem much more acutely. In such families there is no earning male member. Women are guardians. In India, 20% of poverty stricken people live in female-headed families. In Costa Rica, 17% are in female-headed families and in Kenya, 40% families are female-headed. The top reason for female poverty is that women receive a lesser salary, even if it is the same job, than men. But, women cannot get good jobs. In the civil service, private jobs and companies, women recruitment is relatively few. It is because there are preconceived notions that women are born to get involved in less productive activities. In male-dominated societies, women get less priority due to negative attitudes toward women and discrimination.

Due to the lack of mortgageable properties and training, women do not get loans from financial organizations for investment. They need joint signatories along with their husband to

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borrow, buy and receive ownership for permanent properties to be registered. Divorcees and widows often are deprived of any cooperation. As a result because of a lack of jobs and opportunities, they lead an uncertain life. They cannot ensure prospects for future generations.

At the same time, in male-dominated societies, women are neglected and deprived of food, health-care, education and training. Women are even sometimes denied of their heredity. For example, in India, women get one-fourth of the inherited property rights in comparison to men. A boy gets forty times higher service in hospitals than a girl (which is only 2.5%). As a result, there is an alarming rate of female child deaths. Women perform household jobs often not considered as work, according to the market provision. Still, a housewife has to work with twelve hands like the Durga idol.

At the outset, we mentioned that whatever is good and noble is done by men and women equally. Again, the proportion of the men-women population is almost similar. In brief, we



have to remove female poverty and their development if we think of the development of the country and the society as a whole. Women should be inspired to receive education, experience and training so that they can take part in activities in both government and private sectors. They should receive services like

health-care, employment and social security.

Women should be empowered. Future generations should be provided with education through educating their children. For the development of women and children, the government and private sectors should come forward in helping them become self-

employed and receive micro-credit programs and loans without collateral. We are hopeful that women and children will be given priority; for the development of the people as well as the developing countries themselves.

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