



Impact of International Human Rights Law on Gender-Based Political Violence in Bangladesh Since 2010

Ms.Shivani Bhadouria*and Prof. (Dr.) Nagalaxmi M. Raman**

*Research Assistant, MA (IR), Amity Institute of International Studies, Amity University, Noida, Uttar Pradesh

**Director and Head, Amity Institute of International Studies, Amity University, Noida, Uttar Pradesh

Abstract

The research explores the gendered dimensions of political violence in Bangladesh, focusing on the period since 2010 and the role of international human rights law in addressing such issues. Political violence in Bangladesh has disproportionately affected women, manifesting in targeted attacks, sexual violence, and exclusion from political processes.¹ Drawing on case studies, legal analyses and findings the study examines how gendered political violence intersects with systemic patriarchy, cultural norms, and political instability. This research contributes to understanding the complex interplay between gender, political violence, and international legal frameworks in Bangladesh.

With an emphasis on the function of UN interventions and treaties like CEDAW in fostering responsibility and minimizing gender-based harm, this study explores the relationship between international human rights institutions and gendered violence. It also looks into gaps in domestic legal frameworks and implementation, emphasizing how difficult it is to translate international commitments into local settings. The results indicate that although international human rights law has established a framework for norms, due to a lack of political will, ingrained cultural prejudices, and poor enforcement, its influence is still restricted. In addition to prevalent patriarchal views, social and cultural conventions enforce gender-specific duties, privileges, and responsibilities in a discriminatory and stereotyped manner. The paper concludes that while international human rights frameworks offer a crucial normative foundation, the persistent challenges in enforcement, political will, and societal biases hinder their transformative potential in addressing gendered violence in Bangladesh.

Key words: Bangladesh, political violence, CEDAW, Human rights, United Nations

Introduction

Social and cultural norms, alongside prevailing patriarchal attitudes, impose discriminatory and stereotypical roles, rights and responsibilities according to gender. Women form a particular social group (PSG) in Bangladesh within the meaning of the Refugee Convention because they share a common characteristic that cannot be changed and have a distinct identity which is perceived as being different by the surrounding society. Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) against women and girls, including domestic abuse, rape, dowry-related violence, early and forced marriage, and sexual harassment, is reportedly widespread although sources note underreporting, difficulties with

¹ Yasmin taslima (2020)International Labour Organization , Department of Law, University of Dhaka (pg 1-22)

available statistics and the lack of official data.² The human rights record of Bangladesh comprises a number of areas where the non-observance of international minimum standards can be documented. Rights of women and indigenous rights are not recognized to the degree required by international treaties to which Bangladesh is a party. Violations of the right to life, liberty and security are frequently reported and well documented. As a rule the Government does not investigate documented violations to determine the responsibility of its officials and enforce safeguards for basic human rights and freedoms.³ Bangladesh has made significant efforts to address the marginalization Of

women through a legal framework that addresses both violence against women and women's political Representation. Bangladesh ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1984, although it did so with reservations, stating that certain articles Conflict with Sharia law. Bangladesh also acceded to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 2000, and is party to other key international human rights treaties. The constitution of 1972 guarantees non-discrimination and equal protection under law for all citizens, and full participation In public life, and Bangladesh has enacted numerous legislative instruments in recent years to protect Women's rights. Such legislation includes the Prevention of Cruelty Against Women and Children Act (2000),

which prohibits rape, acid throwing and dowry-related crimes, and made sexual assault and Sexual harassment punishable offenses; and the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection Act)(2010), which criminalizes domestic violence, and defines domestic violence as physical, emotional or Sexual abuse, as well as financial damage, inflicted on a woman or child by any member of the family (Art. 3). In 2010, the High Court provided guidelines to employers and educational institutions to form Policies to address sexual harassment in work places,

educational institutions and other public places, And also directed the Government to enact legislation to address sexual harassment in public places. The Government of Bangladesh has also adopted the Women Development Policy (2011) and the Recent National Plan of Action to Prevent Violence Against Women and Children (2013-2025), which was Developed jointly with civil society. Measures such as the

establishment of One Stop Crisis Cells, which Provide health care, police and legal assistance, and other services, and of special units of female police Officers, among others, have been taken to address and prevent violence against women.⁴

Research Objectives

1. To analyse the role of international human rights treaties, particularly CEDAW, in addressing gender-based violence in Bangladesh.
2. To examine the impact of United Nations interventions in promoting accountability and reducing gendered violence in Bangladesh.
3. To assess the gaps in domestic legal frameworks and the challenges of implementing international human rights obligations in local contexts.
4. Identify the specific kinds of electoral violence women experience in their private roles as citizens and in their public role as activists and candidates;
5. Identify perceived obstacles to women as voters, candidates, and political actors; and
6. Understand how a violent political culture affects women's electoral and political participation.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to examine the impact of international human rights law on gender-based political violence in Bangladesh since 2010. It employs a doctrinal research method, analysing primary sources such as international human rights treaties, conventions, and legal frameworks, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and United Nations resolutions on gender-based violence. Secondary sources, including scholarly articles, reports from international

organizations such as the United Nations, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International, as well as governmental and non-governmental publications, are reviewed to assess the implementation and effectiveness of these legal instruments in the Bangladeshi context. Additionally, a case study approach is utilized to examine specific incidents of gender-based political violence, legal responses, and the role of domestic and international institutions in addressing such issues. Content analysis of legal documents, policy reports, and media coverage is conducted to identify patterns and assess the extent to which international human rights law has influenced national policies and judicial decisions. By triangulating multiple data sources, this methodology ensures a comprehensive and critical analysis of the relationship between international human rights law and gender-based political violence in Bangladesh.

² Uk home office. (2024, January). Country policy and information note: women fearing gender-based violence, Bangladesh.

³ Immigration And Refugee Board Of Canada. (1993). Bangladesh: Women's Rights And Protection, Including Issues Related To Domestic Violence, Sexual Violence, And Legal Recourse (1991-1993)

⁴international foundation for electoral systems. (2017, April 13). the effect of violence on women's electoral and political participation in Bangladesh

Women in Conflict Zones: A Broader Context

The plight of women in Bangladesh mirrors a broader global pattern observed in conflict and crisis zones. Women and girls are often the first to suffer in times of instability. According to the United Nations, over 600 million women and girls live in areas affected by armed conflict, a figure that has risen by 50% over the last decade. In such situations, gender-based violence, including rape, forced marriages, and sexual slavery, becomes a weapon of war and a means of asserting control over communities.

Efforts to address the gendered impacts of conflict require multi-pronged strategies. Governments must strengthen laws protecting women and minorities, ensure accountability for perpetrators, and provide survivors with access to medical, psychological, and legal support.

International organizations play a critical role in monitoring these issues and pressuring states to uphold human rights. The ongoing crisis in Bangladesh underscores the vulnerabilities of minority communities and the compounded risks faced by women during periods of political instability. Tackling these issues requires a concerted effort from the interim government, civil society, and global actors to restore peace, ensure justice, and protect the most vulnerable. Without decisive action, the country risks descending into further violence and entrenched cycles of discrimination, undermining its democratic and social progress.⁵

The Gendered Toll of Bangladesh's political Unrest

In Bangladesh, the political landscape has been tumultuous following the resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in August 2024. Her departure, led to a power vacuum and intensified political tensions. The interim government, headed by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, has struggled to maintain order amid rising unrest. This instability has exacerbated communal tensions, resulting in targeted attacks against minority communities, particularly Hindus. Reports indicate a significant increase in violence against minorities since Hasina's resignation. The Bangladesh government has acknowledged 88 cases of communal violence targeting minorities, primarily Hindus, with 70 individuals arrested in connection with these attacks.

The political crisis in Bangladesh underscores the vulnerabilities of minority communities and the compounded risks faced by women during periods of instability. Concerted efforts from the interim government, civil society, and the international community are essential to protect human rights and ensure justice for victims. Failure to act risks entrenching cycles of violence and discrimination, undermining the prospects for peace and development in Bangladesh.⁶

Impact of Violent Political Culture on Women's Political Participation

A violent political culture significantly hinders women's electoral and political participation in Bangladesh. Political violence, including intimidation, harassment, and physical attacks, creates a hostile environment that discourages women from running for office, engaging in political activism, or even voting. The dominance of male-centric politics, coupled with systemic gender discrimination, limits women's access to leadership roles and decision-making positions. Additionally, patriarchal societal norms and the fear of violence from political opponents or extremist groups further marginalize women in the political sphere. Despite constitutional provisions and affirmative action policies aimed at increasing women's representation, the persistent threat of violence continues to act as a major barrier, undermining democratic inclusivity and gender equality in Bangladeshi politics. Outside of politics, Bangladesh has made significant strides improving gender parity in education, economic participation, and other sectors. However, the reality of Bangladesh's politics belies this ostensibly gender-inclusive image. In the current cabinet, only five of 54 members are women. In the 2018 general election, only 36 women were nominated for 300 parliamentary seats, of which 22 won. At the local level, key positions like mayor and chairperson remain mostly occupied by men. There are only 44 women in local leadership positions compared with 5,541 men. To understand this problem, IRI conducted a barrier analysis, drawing on its She Votes Toolkit. The analysis found several drivers including conservative social attitudes, longstanding political traditions, and violent politics. Although these challenges are difficult to overcome, IRI's work in Bangladesh is empowering women leaders to join the debate, demand power, and transform politics⁷

⁵ smith, j. (2025, February 9). women and violence in Bangladesh. relief web.

⁶ Sikkim express. (2024, December 17). minorities in peril: the gendered toll of Bangladesh's political unrest. Sikkim express

The Effect of Violence on Women's Electoral and Political Participation In Bangladesh

Women in Bangladesh are uniquely impacted by pervasive violence in the country's electoral process, as voters, candidates, political party supporters and activists. To explore the effect of electoral violence on women's meaningful participation, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) convened seven focus groups of Bangladeshi women in 2013 and 2015 to discuss electoral violence they have experienced both in the home and in the public sphere.

Under the "Bangladesh Election Support Activities" (BESA) Program, IFES has worked through two key channels to engage interested stakeholders in preventing electoral violence, sharing information on the causes of conflict and promoting peaceful political processes:

The Women Against Violence in Elections (WAVE) Advisory Group, which has worked to identify ways to mitigate electoral and political violence against women as well as ways to engage their networks and utilize their expertise to promote peaceful, violence-free elections and encourage women's participation and leadership. The Electoral Conflict and Security Working Group, which serves as a platform to discuss successes of and lessons learned from grassroots initiatives that address electoral violence and improve electoral security, and strategies for new interventions in this area.

Additionally, under IFES' global "Bridging the Gaps: A New Framework for Gender and Electoral Violence" program, IFES is working to identify and address the unique issues related to gender-based election violence. Bangladesh was identified as one of several target countries to conduct research that would help 1) inform the development of a robust framework for assessment and documentation of women's experiences with electoral violence, and 2) enhance IFES programming that addresses the impacts of electoral violence on women through sharing the framework and recommendations to improve program design.

IFES conducted a series of focus group discussions (FGDs) with Bangladeshi women in 2013 and 2015 in order to better understand women's unique and often undocumented experiences with electoral violence. IFES drew from its institutional knowledge, both from prior electoral violence research as well as experience with country-based initiatives to monitor, report on and mitigate electoral violence in determining questions to ask during the FGDs. In addition, starting with the 2013 FGDs that were conducted under IFES' global program, the BESA project utilized the subject matter expertise within the WAVE Advisory Group and the Electoral Conflict and Security Group to identify additional FGD participants to support a holistic view of this issue within the Bangladesh context.⁸

Domestic laws against gendered violence in Bangladesh

According to the World Bank, Bangladesh is one of the poorest and most densely populated countries in the world, and women have suffered disproportionately more from poverty than have men. Bangladeshi women live in a state of dependency as a result of poverty and a lack of education, employment and training opportunities. Many of the systemic disadvantages facing women cut across religious lines. Furthermore, as one source has pointed out, international aid programmes have only increased these disparities, both in Bangladesh in general and between men and women in Bangladeshi society in particular. By working within established distribution systems these programmes have tended to reinforce already existing patterns of discrimination in Bangladesh, and have placed "the target population...in the passive position of recipients rather than participant. In accordance with the traditional Muslim practice of purdah, the seclusion or veiling of women, a woman was expected to stay within her homestead and was discouraged from contact with anyone outside her close family. This practice limited the social and educational development of most Bangladeshi women and restricted their access to employment opportunities. Although the institution of seclusion is being challenged as poverty forces more and more women

⁷ gupta, r. (2024, august 28). political turmoil in Bangladesh: hasina's fall, the rise of an interim government, and regional dynamics. Asia society

⁸ International foundation for electoral systems. (2017, April 13). The effect of violence on women's electoral and political participation in Bangladesh. International foundation for electoral systems

to seek employment outside the home. The ideals of purdah—modesty, humility, domesticity and non-involvement in public life—are still strong, even if physical seclusion is not as commonly practised. A woman's status is defined not only by gender but also by the occupation and income level of her nearest male relative. In general, Bangladeshi women are valued less than both children and property. For example, men are generally fed first and most while women usually eat last and least. Early marriage is a common practice in Bangladesh. According to the UN, 73 per cent of women are married and 21 per cent have had at least one child by age 15. Whereas the birth of a son is celebrated, the birth of a daughter is reportedly viewed as a "disappointment". Baby girls are given less food than are their male siblings and are therefore at greater risk of malnutrition and disease. As well, parents may be less likely to seek expert medical care for a sick girl. Women are disadvantaged in the field of education. In order to limit their contact with males, girls are often taken out of school when they reach puberty. The literacy rate for females is estimated at roughly 20 per cent, about half the rate for males, despite government efforts to raise the level of literacy among females⁹

Constitutional Guarantees

The 1972 Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees gender equality, prohibiting discrimination based on sex and ensuring women's equal rights in all spheres of life. It also allows for special provisions to support women and marginalized groups, recognizing existing inequalities.

Beyond the Constitution, laws like the Civil and Criminal Procedure Codes offer protective measures, such as exempting women from arrest for debt and providing workplace benefits. However, these protections sometimes reinforce restrictions. For instance, concerns over human trafficking led to rules limiting women's ability to travel abroad without special clearance. Critics argue that instead of addressing the root causes of gender-based vulnerabilities, such measures restrict women's freedoms under the guise of protection.

Muslim Family Law

Despite criticism from some political parties and minority groups, on 7 June 1988 the parliament of Bangladesh passed a bill making Islam the state religion. The move was reportedly an attempt by the government to curry favour with the Muslim faithful and politically undermine the fundamentalist.

While Islam is the dominant ideology governing relations between women and men in Bangladesh, one observer notes that the country's geographic and historic isolation have made it resistant to the "divine, theocratic, centralist and establishment-based" version of Islam, linked to Arabic learning and oriented to the Middle East, practised for instance in Pakistan.

This fact partially explains the low support in Bangladesh for the type of fundamentalism characterizing state policy towards women in other Islamic countries, and has helped frustrate any systematic attempts to curtail women's rights in the name of Islam. The concept and practice of divorce is one example of the unequal treatment accorded men and women under Muslim family law.

The Child Marriage Restraint Act

The 1984 amendment to the 1929 Child Marriage Restraint Act raised the minimum age of marriage from 16 to 18 years for females, and from 18 to 21 for males. Section 4 of the amended act provides punishments for any individual (male or female) above the legal age of marriage who marries a person below the legal age. At least one source notes that the average age of marriage for females has risen to 17.6 years but others suggest that the amendment is not being effectively enforced, particularly in rural areas where it is still customary for females to marry at 15 or 16 years of age. The Coordinating Council for Human Rights in Bangladesh (CCHRB) indicates that girls as young as six or seven are being married to boys of nine or ten years by parents confronting poverty.

The Dowry Prohibition Act

The Dowry Prohibition Act, enacted in 1980 and amended in 1982, makes the giving, taking or demanding of a dowry an offence punishable by fine, imprisonment of up to one year or both. However, according to the International Women's Rights Action Watch, an international network monitoring the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Dowry Prohibition Act "is so contrary to social norms and practices that it is simply ignored". Although the Dowry Prohibition Act offers protection to women in law, few Bangladeshi women have the financial resources to exercise these rights in the courts. Mohammad Abdul Matin, executive director of the Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights (BSEHR), notes that in most cases brought before the courts, "the women are too poor to continue with costly and time-consuming procedures". Social stigmatization is another factor keeping women from exercising their legal rights. In the words of one BSEHR investigating officer, "in 98 percent of the cases ... a woman who complains against her husband cannot return honourably to his home".

⁹un women. (2024, September 26). take five Bangladesh: "laws protecting women's rights have been enacted, but enforcement remains inconsistent". un women Asia-pacific.

Cruelty to Women Act

The 1983 Cruelty to Women Act, also known as the Deterrent Punishment Act, reiterated certain offences that were first defined in the Penal Code of 1960, and strengthened the penalties for infractions. The act made the rape, sexual exploitation for gain, abduction, kidnapping or attempt to cause the death of a woman, offences subject to life imprisonment or death. In September 1992 the government also brought in the Anti-Terrorism Ordinance, which provides stiff penalties for the abduction or harassment of women, among other offences.

In response to questions raised at the 12th session of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women about the effectiveness in dowry disputes of the Cruelty to Women Act, a Bangladesh government representative indicated that the act has led to a decrease in the incidence of death and injury and an increase in the rate of prosecutions. However, other sources

argue that there has actually been a rise in dowry-related crime and that dowry practices remain the single largest cause of violence against women in Bangladesh.

Because of the social stigma attached to crimes of domestic violence, few women have come forward to press charges under the act

Trafficking in Women

According to the Pakistani organization Lawyers for Human Rights and Legal Aid, thousands of Bangladeshi women have been smuggled into Pakistan and forced into prostitution and marriage in operations involving police and army officials from Bangladesh, Pakistan and

India. Women and children have also been forced into pornographic films, bonded labour, drug smuggling and other illegal activities. Many others have been imprisoned in Pakistani jails for illegally crossing the border.

The LHRLA notes that the agents of this traffic are extremely well organized, have networks in most major cities of the subcontinent, and have strong links to law enforcement agencies. In some instances women and children—usually very poor—are deceived with offers of

better lives and jobs in Pakistan or India and are asked to pay a fee for this “service,” while in others cases they are simply abducted from their homes or places of work. These women are vulnerable to abuses such as sexual assault and have no recourse to legal action

Violence Against Tribal Women

Amnesty International has reported numerous incidents of rape by army personnel of tribal women in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. These violations have taken place in the Larger and historically recent context of non-tribal settlement of the area, a process which has been

encouraged by successive government administrations. Human rights violations in the area have been extensively documented and continue to be reported

The CHTC has also documented cases of forced marriage of tribal women to Muslim men. According to the CHTC, “forced intermarriage is one way in which women are used as an instrument to integrate the hill peoples into Bengali society and to change the demographic balance in the area”. A secret memorandum encouraging army officers to marry tribal women was reportedly circulated in the area in 1983¹⁰

Gaps in Bangladesh’s Domestic Laws on Gendered Political Violence and Their Fulfilment by International Human Rights Law

Gendered political violence in Bangladesh remains a pressing issue, but domestic legal frameworks often fail to comprehensively address it. Here are some key gaps in Bangladesh’s domestic laws and how international human rights law fills them:

Lack of Specific Legal Definition of Gendered Political Violence

Bangladesh lacks a specific legal framework defining and addressing gendered political violence, particularly violence targeting women in politics. But Internationally, The CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) and UN General Recommendation No. 35 (on gender-based violence) emphasize the need for comprehensive legal definitions covering all forms of gendered violence, including in political spaces.

Weak Protection Against Online and Psychological Violence

Laws such as the Digital Security Act (2018) and Information and Communication Technology Act (2006) address cyber harassment but do not specifically protect women politicians or activists from targeted online violence. But Internationally Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and the Beijing Platform for Action call for robust protections against online abuse, including gender-specific cyber threats faced by women in politics.

Limited Legal Protections Against Political Harassment

Women and Children Repression Prevention Act (2000) and the Penal Code criminalize certain forms of harassment but do not explicitly cover gender-based political harassment or intimidation. Internationally CEDAW Article 7 mandates states to ensure women’s political participation without discrimination, requiring laws to explicitly protect women in politics from harassment.

¹⁰ Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. (1993, December 1). Human rights briefs: Women in Bangladesh. Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

Impunity and Weak Enforcement Mechanisms

Law enforcement agencies and the judiciary often fail to adequately investigate and prosecute cases of gendered political violence, especially when influential political actors are involved. Internationally, The UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) and CEDAW General

Recommendation No. 33 stress the importance of accountability and mechanisms to combat impunity in gender-based violence cases. Lack of Political Party Accountability

Bangladesh lacks a legal mandate requiring political parties to prevent gender-based violence within their structures. Internationally, The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Guidelines on Eliminating Violence Against Women in Politics call for internal accountability mechanisms in political parties.

Insufficient Legal Framework for Electoral Violence Against Women

Electoral laws, such as the Representation of the People Order (1972) do not sufficiently address gender-based electoral violence. Internationally, CEDAW Article 7 and SDG 5 (Gender Equality) urge states to implement measures ensuring free and fair political participation for women.

Bangladesh's legal framework lacks specificity, strong enforcement, and preventive mechanisms for gendered political violence. International human rights law, especially CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, and IPU guidelines, provide a more comprehensive approach by defining gendered political violence, promoting accountability, and ensuring protective measures for women in politics. Strengthening domestic laws in line with these international standards could significantly improve protections for women in political spaces.¹¹

National Human Rights Bangladesh and CEDAW

Bangladesh acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) on 6th November 1984. In compliance With the Convention, Government of Bangladesh submitted its 8th State Party Periodic report to the UN CEDAW Committee in 2015. In line with its mandate, the National Human Rights Commission of Bangladesh (JAMAKON) submits the Present report to provide an independent assessment of the status of Government implementation of its legal obligations under CEDAW. National Human rights Bangladesh is constantly paying special attention to the rights of the women. It has Formed a special thematic Committee dedicated to the Women's right. The Committee remains vigilant regarding the rights of Women in Bangladesh and Reviews the state obligations under different International Instruments addressing The rights of Women. National Human rights Bangladesh organizes innumerable series of workshops, seminars, and roundtable Discussions etc from time to time with stakeholders regarding women's right. Besides these, it conducts huge research works relating to women rights issue. National Human Rights Commission of Bangladesh (which also goes By the name 'JAMAKON' in Bangladesh) submits the report to Provide an independent assessment of the status of Government

¹¹ the daily star. (2016, december 19). gender-based violence and its impact on bangladesh's development. the daily star

Implementation of its legal obligations under CEDAW and it access the women role in different sector and what rights and position women holds and what impact CEDAW had made in past years, let's discuss role of women and CEDAW impact on these sectors separately.

Women at the parliamentary level

The parliament of Bangladesh was established after gaining independence from Pakistan in 1971. In support of women's representation, the government took the initiative to reserve seats for women by establishing a quota in 1972. Many countries have chosen to adopt a gender quota to ensure the representation of women in their political leadership. In Bangladesh, the candidates for the reserved seats have never contested in elections and are directly appointed by their party leaders. The Parliamentary Standing Committee for the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, together with Women in Development Focal Point (WIDFP), WIDFP Implementation and Evaluation Committee (WIDFPIEC), Women in Development Focal Point Coordination Committee (WIDFPCC) and Women in Development Focal Point Network Committee (WIDFPNC) have been operation and that these Mechanisms address gender concerns within the policies and plans of Their respective ministries. A Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) with performance criteria on Women's advancement and gender equality was adopted and that Ministries provided estimates of budget allocation for gender equality And poverty reduction within the sectoral policy aligned with the Identified priority areas. A report with action of all ministries was Submitted to the Parliament on the progress of GRB during the Budget Session.

To ensure equality of women, the Women Development Policy (WDP) And National Action Plan (NAP) were developed in 2013 as well as a National Action Plan to prevent Violence Against Women and Children 2013 2025 to protect and ensure women's human rights.

Bangladesh has reserved seats in the Parliament and local government Institutions and women can also contest in all elections. The total Number of women members including the 50 Members in reserved Seats in the current Parliament is 70, which represent 20% in the total Members that there is an orientation programme for women Members of Parliament that has been conducted in cooperation with

Development partners that the Prime Minister is a woman, a Woman has been appointed as the Speaker of the Parliament, and that The Leader of the Opposition, Deputy Leader and Whip of the House in The Parliament are women . However, the State report also Notes that at the local government level the number of women has been Increasing, and yet “their capacity is low in leading and negotiation” and That

“due to the existing social norms and the political practices, Women are still not competing in the general seats as expected.” Moreover, notes the State report: “The social norms again prevail in the Dynamics of the local government institutions and men do not take Women members as equal partners and colleagues” ¹²

International Human Rights Law

Gendered political violence in Bangladesh is a critical human rights issue that falls under the purview of international human rights law (IHRL). Various international treaties, conventions, and mechanisms address this issue and provide a framework for holding perpetrators accountable and protecting victims.

Of the 75 existing international instruments on human rights, to date Bangladesh has accepted 11, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Suppression of Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

When the government ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1984, it submitted a restrictive interpretation giving precedence to Islamic law where it conflicts with the convention. Bangladesh continues to maintain

reservations to certain provisions of the convention, including article 2 on the pursuit “by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating discrimination against women,” paragraph 13.(1)(a) on the right to family benefits, paragraph 16.(1)(c), which ensures “the same rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution,” and paragraph 16.(1)(f) on the rights and responsibilities with respect to guardianship and adoption of children. In response to questions on article 2 at the 12th session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the representative from Bangladesh noted that while the constitution had granted equal rights to men and women, a degree of inequality was still present in both Muslim and Hindu personal law

AREAS OF CONCERN

According to Katarina Tomasevski, a researcher with the Danish Centre of Human Rights, The human rights record of Bangladesh comprises a number of areas where the non-observance of international minimum standards can be documented. Rights of women and indigenous rights are not recognized to the degree required by international treaties to which Bangladesh is a party. Violations of the right to life, liberty and security are frequently reported and well documented. As a rule the Government does not investigate documented violations to

determine the responsibility of its officials and enforce safeguards for basic human rights and freedoms .Although a number of laws have

been passed that specifically address the status and rights of women in Bangladesh, there are still many problems with the implementation of women's legal rights. One reason given for this situation is ignorance of the law, which is caused by a “lack of social and political consciousness, low literacy, observance of seclusion and submission to husbands' wishes, lack of exposure to mass media, information, etc.

Although the civil law guaranteeing the legal rights of women may appear substantial, customs and traditions based primarily on Muslim personal or family law still take precedence in practice. Furthermore, even in cases where women are aware of their rights and the legal

means for redress are in place, lack of access to legal assistance is another impediment to women's ability to exercise their legal rights. There are few “effective agencies to provide intervention or support for women's legal rights,” and the limited availability of legal aid services

generally means that any woman initiating a court proceeding can expect a “long and expensive process “. As well there is the social stigma to consider; according to Wilson-Smillie, it “is not considered socially acceptable for women to go to the courts” on issues of family law

such as dowry, divorce, custody, maintenance and guardianship of children.

¹² National Human Rights Commission, Bangladesh. (2015). Report of the National Human Rights Commission, Bangladesh, on the Government's 2015 CEDAW State Report: Responding to CEDAW's 2011 Concluding Observations.

Conclusion

Women in Bangladesh face persistent structural and systemic barriers in political spaces, where violence and discrimination limit their participation. Despite legal frameworks like Bangladesh's National Human Rights Framework and CEDAW, inconsistent enforcement and societal resistance weaken their impact. While Bangladesh has signed CEDAW, its provisions on political violence remain inadequately integrated into national laws.

Women politicians and activists frequently encounter threats, harassment, and exclusion, discouraging their involvement in elections and governance. Political parties often lack gender-sensitive policies, further restricting leadership opportunities. Beyond direct violence, women also face structural challenges—protests, strikes, and political instability create unsafe environments that marginalize their political agency. This pattern mirrors global trends, where women in conflict zones suffer displacement, sexual violence, and economic hardships that further hinder political participation. Although Bangladesh has laws like the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, they do not specifically address political violence against women. Weak enforcement, legal loopholes, and patriarchal biases within law enforcement agencies leave many without protection or justice. International human rights laws offer principles of gender equality, but without stronger domestic commitment, their influence remains limited. To create a safer and more inclusive political space, Bangladesh must strengthen law enforcement, hold institutions accountable, and integrate gender-sensitive policies into political and electoral systems. Political parties should adopt affirmative action measures, and grassroots movements must challenge patriarchal norms. Collaboration between international human rights bodies and domestic institutions, along with stronger political will, is essential for ensuring women's full participation in Bangladesh's democracy.

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