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## Protection of women's rights in Bangladesh : a legal study in an international and comparative perspective

Afroza Begum  
*University of Wollongong*

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# **Protection of Women's Rights in Bangladesh: A Legal Study in an International and Comparative Perspective**

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the  
award of the degree**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**from**

**UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG**

**by**

**Afroza Begum LLM (Western Sydney) LLM (Rajshahi) LLB Hons (Rajshahi)**

**FACULTY OF LAW**

**2004**

## **THESIS DECLARATION**

This is to certify that I, Afroza Begum, being a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), am fully aware of the University of Wollongong's rules and procedures relating to the preparation, submission, retention and use of higher degree theses, and its policy on intellectual property. I acknowledge that the University requires the thesis to be retained in the Library for record purposes and that within copyright privileges of the author, it should be accessible for consultation and copying at the discretion of the Library officer in charge and in accordance with the Copyright Act (1968). I authorise the University of Wollongong to publish an abstract of this thesis.

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## **CERTIFICATION**

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(Signature)

Afroza Begum

Date .....

*To*

*My devoted father who sacrificed the most to our joys*

## **Abstract**

Women's legal rights are one of the most significant determinants of their status. In Bangladesh, a series of laws ensuring women's rights have proven largely ineffective in promoting their positions. The prime reasons for this are: the shortcomings and ineffectiveness of laws, women's inability to access legal proceedings, the traditional and cultural negative views about women's rights, the absence of an accountable and transparent government, the expensive and time consuming judicial process, the lack of an efficient judiciary, and other socio-economic reasons. The core theme of the thesis concentrates on the shortcomings and ineffectiveness of laws, although viewing them within the context of those other factors. To signify the 'ineffectiveness of laws', emphasis is basically placed on the administrative and judicial approaches in the country to achieve the underlying objectives of law concerning women's rights in pertinent areas.

This study aims to promote protection of women's rights by recommending remedies to flaws in prevailing laws in Bangladesh in four areas. Recommendations are made by reference to comparative and international practices. The primary arguments developed and maintained throughout the thesis are: (i) the protection of women's rights is imperative to improve their status and law is an essential instrument to ensure these rights; (ii) the legislative, administrative and judicial efforts in Bangladesh are not appropriate and conducive to dealing with women's rights; and (iii) improvements in those efforts can better protect women's rights.

This study critically examines laws regarding women's employment and political participation and the laws on dowry and rape. It also explores the ways laws have been structured and enforced in Bangladesh, and how law can be an effective means of women's



pursuit of rights. In so doing, this thesis analyses and compares a range of legislation and judicial decisions of a number of selected common law jurisdictions. Findings of the research demonstrate that the legal efforts of those countries resulted in significant improvements in traditional laws and enforcement procedures regarding employment, dowry as a form of domestic violence, and rape.

Conversely, in Bangladesh, the age-old common-law grown formalities continue to dominate the legal and judicial proceedings and therefore fail to provide remedies to the contemporary needs of women. The present legal regime also suffers from an important flaw with regard to the scope and extent of liabilities for the violation of laws designed to protect women's equal and special rights. The absence of any independent administrative body to monitor the compliance of laws presents another serious flaw in the current legal regime of the country. Such shortcomings eventually encourage and favour the wrongdoer, worsening the vulnerability of already disadvantaged women in the traditional culture of Bangladesh. In responding to such a situation, the present study recommends the reconceptualisation of laws to accommodate women's unique experiences in Bangladesh. The study ends with a number of specific recommendations for ensuring women's rights through strengthening the legal and enforcement mechanisms in Bangladesh.

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The opinions expressed in this study are entirely mine and I alone take the full responsibility for any shortcomings.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .....	i
Acknowledgement .....	iii
Contents .....	v
List of Diagrams, Tables and Figures .....	xi
List of Abbreviations .....	xii
List of Law Reports .....	xiv

## Chapter 1: General Introduction

1.1. Introduction .....	1
1.2. Introducing Bangladesh as an Independent State .....	2
1.3. Emergence of Women's Rights in Bangladesh .....	4
1.4. Definition of Women's Rights .....	10
1.5. Women's Rights as Human Rights .....	12
1.6. Administrative Framework and Government Policies on Women .....	19
1.6.1. Administrative Framework .....	19
1.6.2. Government Plans and Policies .....	20
1.6.3. A Brief Evaluation of Government Plans and Policies .....	21
1.7. The Legal System of Bangladesh .....	27
1.8. The Legal Framework of Women's Rights in Bangladesh .....	27
1.9. The Judicial System in Bangladesh .....	31
1.10. Summary and Conclusion .....	34

## Chapter 2: Objectives and Methods of the Study

2.1. Introduction .....	36
2.2. Aims of the Study .....	36
2.3. Scope and Limitation of the Study .....	37
2.4. Rationale and Importance of the Study .....	41
2.5. Research Methodology .....	42

2.6. Treatment of the Data .....	47
2.7. Chapters Overview .....	48
2.8. Conclusion .....	50

## **Chapter 3: Impediments to Women's Rights in Bangladesh**

3.1. Introduction .....	52
3.2. Socio-economic-cultural Situation of Women in Bangladesh .....	55
3.3. Cultural Relativism, CEDAW and their Impact on the Socio- Cultural Status of women .....	59
3.4. Religious Attitudes Towards Women .....	66
3.5. Good Governance and the Government Commitment Towards Rights and Justice ....	69
3.5.1. Executive and Parliament .....	71
3.5.1.1. The Position of the Executive Under the Constitution.....	71
3.5.1.2. The Constitution and its Amendment Process.....	72
3.5.2. The Independence of the Judiciary .....	80
3.5.2.1. The Executive's Influence on the Highest Court .....	82
3.5.2.2. The Executive's Influence on the Lower Courts .....	84
3.5.2.3. Separation of the Judiciary from the Executive .....	86
3.5.3. The Role of Law Enforcing Agencies .....	88
3.5.3.1. Arrest under Section 54 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) .....	89
3.5.3.2. Remand under Section 167 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) .....	92
3.5.3.3. Prejudicial Acts under the Special Powers Act (SPA) .....	97
3.5.3.3.1. The Impact of SPA on Pre-trial Detainees in Bangladesh .....	98
3.5.4. National Institution for Human Rights .....	99
3.6. Summary and Conclusion .....	104

## **Chapter 4: Equal Right to Employment**

4.1. Introduction .....	108
4.2. Defining Equality .....	111
4.3. Women's Employment Rights under the Constitution of Bangladesh .....	115
4.4. Employment Rights under Labour Legislation .....	122

4.4.1. Employment Rights under the Garment Industries of Bangladesh .....	123
4.4.1.1. International Initiatives for Eliminating Discrimination in Employment.....	128
4.4.2. Employment Rights under the Protective Legislation in Bangladesh .....	132
4.4.2.1. The Maternity Benefit Act 1939 .....	132
4.4.2.1.1. The Implementation of the Maternity Act in Bangladesh .....	136
4.4.2.2. Other Protective Legislation in Bangladesh .....	139
4.5. Substantive Approach to Equality .....	141
4.5.1. Affirmative Action .....	142
4.5.1.1. Women's Quota in Bangladesh .....	143
4.5.2. Shared Parental Responsibility .....	145
4.5.3. Comparative Judicial Decisions Reflecting Substantive Approach .....	147
4.6. Enforcement of Employment Rights in Bangladesh .....	152
4.6.1. Administrative Measure for Monitoring Equal Employment Rights .....	152
4.6.2. Judicial Enforcement of Employment Rights .....	155
4.6.2.1. Courts Dealing with Employment Rights .....	155
4.6.2.2. The Labour Court (LC) of Bangladesh .....	156
4.6.2.3. The Supreme Court (SC) of Bangladesh and Women's Employment .....	160
4.7. Summary and Conclusion .....	165

## **Chapter 5: Equal Right to Participate in Politics**

5.1. Introduction .....	168
5.2. The Political System of Bangladesh .....	171
5.3. Women's Rights to Participate in Politics and Legal Provisions in Bangladesh .....	172
5.3.1. Women in the Parliament .....	173
5.4. Causes of Women's Under-representation .....	176
5.4.1. Electoral System .....	178
5.4.2. Difficulties in Obtaining Party-Tickets and Insignificant Positions of Women in the Party Organisation .....	184
5.4.3. Unfavourable Political Environment .....	189
5.4.4. Low Level of Education .....	194
5.4.5. Other Variables and the Role of Women's Organisations .....	200

5.5. International Commitment and the Parliamentary-Quota of Bangladesh .....	205
5.6. Women in Local Government .....	209
5.6.1. Women in the City Corporations .....	210
5.6.2. Women in the Union Parishad .....	214
5.7. Summary and Conclusion .....	223

## **Chapter 6: Right to Freedom from Torture and Other Forms of Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment**

6.1. Introduction .....	228
6.2. Limits of International Law and Domestic Violence .....	231
6.2.1. International Legal Framework for Domestic Violence .....	233
6.2.2. Domestic Violence as ‘Torture’ .....	235
6.2.3. Recent Development of Domestic Violence .....	238
6.3. The Provisions and Practices of Dowry in Bangladesh .....	241
6.3.1. Meaning, Origins and Development of Dowry .....	241
6.3.2. The Dowry Prohibition Act 1980 .....	244
6.3.3. Legislative Impact on Women .....	245
6.3.3.1. Divorce, the Non-payment of Dower, Polygamy and their Impact on Dowry .....	248
6.3.3.2. Legislative Initiatives of Foreign Jurisdictions for Dealing with Domestic Violence .....	252
6.3.4. Major Flaws in the Dowry Prohibition Act 1980 .....	255
6.3.4.1. Scope of Dowry .....	255
6.3.4.2. Penalty for Taking Dowry .....	256
6.3.4.3. Similar Liability for Giving and Taking Dowry .....	257
6.3.4.4. Transfer of Voluntary Property to the Bride .....	258
6.3.4.5. Penalty for Demanding Dowry .....	259
6.3.4.6. Voluntary Gifts to be for the Benefit of the Wife or her Heirs .....	260
6.3.5. Administrative Intervention .....	262
6.3.5.1. The Role of the Police .....	262
6.3.5.2. Prevention of Violence against Women Cell .....	271

6.3.6. Dowry Cases and the Judiciary in Bangladesh .....	275
6.3.6.1. Prosecution of Dowry Cases .....	275
6.3.6.2. Dowry and the Role of the Judiciary .....	284
6.3.6.2.1. The Dual and Confusing Jurisdictions .....	285
6.3.6.2.2. Back Log of Dowry Cases, Faulty Investigations and Benefit of Doubt ....	286
6.3.6.3. Judicial Decisions of Other Jurisdictions .....	288
6.4. Summary and Conclusions .....	295

## **Chapter 7: Rape Laws and Trial Proceedings in Bangladesh**

7.1. Introduction .....	300
7.2. Rape as a War Crime .....	303
7.3. How Rape Causes the Deprivation of the Right to Life .....	306
7.4. Provisions and Practices in Bangladesh .....	308
7.4.1. Rape under the Penal Laws of Bangladesh .....	308
7.4.2. Definition of Rape .....	310
7.4.3. Filing and Investigations of Rape Cases .....	313
7.4.4. Prosecution of Rape Cases and Sexual History of the Complainant .....	318
7.4.5. Presumption of Innocence .....	325
7.4.6. Medical Examination .....	329
7.4.7. Corroboration of Victim's Testimony .....	332
7.4.8. Absence of Consent and Resistance as Required by Law to Establish Rape .....	337
7.4.8.1. Resistance .....	339
7.4.9. Rape in Police Custody .....	345
7.5. Due Diligence Standard .....	350
7.6. Summary and Conclusion. ....	356

## **Chapter 8: General Conclusions**

8.1. Introduction .....	360
8.2. Major Findings in Conceptual and Descriptive Accounts .....	361
8.3. Major Findings and Recommendations of the Thesis .....	364
8.3.1. Employment .....	364



8.3.2. Political Participation .....	367
8.3.3. Freedom from Torture .....	370
8.3.4. Rape Laws and Trial Proceedings.....	375
8.4. Conclusion and Future Research .....	377

## **Bibliography**

Legislation .....	381
Cases .....	384
International Human Rights Instruments/Conference/ Declarations/ Resolutions.....	392
Reports and Surveys .....	396
Secondary Sources .....	401
Selected Daily Newspapers and Other Sources .....	433

## **List of Diagrams, Tables and Figures**

Diagram 1.1: Hierarchy of Courts in Bangladesh .....	33
Table 5.1: Percentage of Women in the Ministerial Levels .....	175
Table 5.2: Percentage of Women MPs Across 23 National Legislatures, 1945-1997, and 1998 (covering 24 democracies) .....	181
Figure 4.1: Male and Female Ratio in the Civil Service .....	117
Figure 4.2A: Male and Female Ratio in Major Establishments .....	118
Figure 4.2B: Male and Female Ratio in Major Establishments .....	119
Figure 5.1: Women's Positions (excluding reserved seats) in the Bangladesh Parliament	174
Figure 5.2: Women's Illiteracy Rate in Some Developing and Islamic Countries .....	196
Figure 6.1: Reported Incidents of Dowry Violence 1997-2002 .....	246
Figure 6.2: Ratio of Cases Filed for Dowry Related Violence .....	265
Figure 7.1: Reported Rape Incidents in Consecutive Five Years .....	309
Figure 7.2: Ratio of Cases Filed on Rape Charges .....	309

## **List of Abbreviations**

AD	Appellate Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ASK	Ain O Salish Kendra
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BLAST	Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust
CAT	Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CPC	Civil Procedure Code
CrPC	Criminal Procedure Code
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
DAW	Division for the Advancement of Women
EC	European Council
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
EEC	European Economic Commission
ESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
ETV	Ekushey Television
EU	European Union
GA	General Assembly of the United Nations
GIS	Garment Industries
HCD	High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh
ICCPR	International Covenant on the Civil and Political Rights
ICESC	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ICJ	International Court of Justice
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
IWWA	International Women's Rights Action Watch
LAT	Labour Appellate Tribunal

LC	Labour Court
MOWCA	Ministry of Women and Children Affairs in Bangladesh
MP	Majority Plurality Electoral System
NAP	National Action Plan of Bangladesh
NCWD	National Council for Women's Development in Bangladesh
NFLS	Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies
NPWA	National Policy on Women's Development in Bangladesh
OJ	Official Journal
PC	Pakistan Code
PC	Penal Code
PR	Proportional Representation Electoral System
PW	Payment of Wages
RSC	Consolidated Statute of Canada
SC	Supreme Court
SCC	Supreme Court Cases
TIB	Transparency International Bangladesh
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UP	Union Parishad of Bangladesh
US	United States
USCS	United States Code Service
WID	Women in Development
WP	Writ Petition

# List of Law Reports

Abbreviation	Title	Jurisdiction
A 2d	Atlantic Reporter, Second Series	USA
AIR	All India Reporter	India
AIR SC	All India Reporter Supreme Court	India
All ER	All England Law Reports	UK
ALD	Administrative Law Decisions	Australia
ALR	Australian Law Reports	Australia
BHRC	Butterworths Human Rights Cases	EU
BLC	Bangladesh Legal Chronicles	Bangladesh
BLD	Bangladesh Legal Decisions	Bangladesh
BLD (HCD)	Bangladesh Legal Decisions (High Court Division)	Bangladesh
Cal App	California Appellate Reports	USA
Cal 3d	California Reports, Third Series	USA
CCA	United States Army Court of Criminal Appeal	USA
CCC 2d	Canadian Criminal Cases, Second Series	Canada
CCC 3d	Canadian Criminal Cases, Third Series	Canada
CLR	Commonwealth Law Reports	Australia
CPR	Canadian Patent Reports	Canada
CR 2d	Criminal Reports, Second Series,	Canada
Cri LJ	Criminal Law Journal	India
CRR 2d	Canadian Rights Reporter, Second Series	Canada
DLR	Dhaka Law Reports	Bangladesh
DLR (AD)	Dhaka Law Reports (Appellate Division)	Bangladesh
ECHR	European Court Reports	EU
ECJ	European Court of Justice Cases	EU
ECR	Reports of Cases before the Court of Justice of the European Communities	EU
EHRR	European Human Rights Reports	EU

EOC	Equal Opportunity Cases	Australia
ER	English Report	UK
Fam LR	Family Law Reports	Australia
FLR	Federal Law Reports	Australia
F Supp	Federal Supplement (District Court Reports)	USA
F 2d	Federal Reporter, Second Series	USA
F 3d	West's Federal Reporter, Third Series	USA
GLR	Gujral Law Report	Pakistan
IRLR	Industrial Relations Law Reports	UK
LRC	Law Reports of Commonwealth (Const)	UK
LRI	Law Reports of India	India
MLR (AD)	The Mainstream Law Report (Appellate Division)	Bangladesh
Neb	Nebraska Reports	USA
NJ	New Jersey Reports	USA
NJ (SCTD)	Newfoundland Judgments, Supreme Court of Newfoundland and Labrador, Trial Division	Canada
NTR	Northern Territory Reports	Australia
NW 2d	North Western Reporter, Second Series	USA
NY 2d	New York Reports, Second Series	USA
OFLR	Ontario Family Law Reports	Canada
OJ (Sup Ct)	Ontario Judgments	Canada
ONCA	Court of Appeal Ontario	Canada
OR 2d	Ontario Reports, Second Series	Canada
P 2d	Pacific Reporter, Second Series	USA
SACLR	South African Constitutional Law Reports (Butt)	SouthAfrica

SCC	Supreme Court Cases	India
SCCDJ	Supreme Court of Canada Decisions and Judgments	Canada
SCR	Supreme Court Reports	India
SCR	Canada Supreme Court Reports	Canada
SW 2d	South Western Reporter , Second Series	USA
US	Reports of Cases in the Supreme Court	USA
US App	United States Court of Appeals Reports	USA
VR	Victorian Reports (Butt)	Australia
Wn App	Washington Appellate Reports	USA
Wn 2d	Washington Reports, Second Series	USA