



Distance Education for Law Promotes Gender Equity in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT :

Education is regarded as an instrument of change and transformation of society. Women status in the society and education are interrelated. Bangladesh is a highly dense country with low literacy (about 44.3 %) and high dropout rates (about 70%). There are mixed pattern of society, economical status and educational status. Mixed pattern means some where there is low to high level of perception and discrimination. To avoid discrimination in social and personal life and to get the proper judgment there must be education. Legal education can help the people to know the human rights and social justice. In Bangladesh the status of women is structured by the social, cultural and religious traditions. Female children have little access to education, especially in poor families, scarce resources are invested in the sons as potential provides. Most of the women of Bangladesh are living in a society which does not provide them with adequate or satisfactory facilities. Women are also ignorant of their fundamental rights. But the constitution of Bangladesh provides the equal rights and opportunities to men and women. However most of women do not know their constitutional and civil rights and how they can benefit for them, even through it is an established principle of law. Legal education through distance mode among women to be effective and fruitful in the long run, vital element is human resource development. It has a great impact on the improvement of gender equity as well as socio-economic development of a nation. But formal legal education is provided by either a department of a university or an affiliated college in our country. There are five public universities and above twenty seven private universities in our country with law as a regular subject of teaching. Besides, the National University imparts teaching of law through law colleges in the country. All public and private universities providing law graduate degree by conventional system but many people are deprived from this opportunities. Thus to increase equitable access to education and to develop the human resources of the country particularly women, out of school and adults who must do work to support their families, need the support of distance education of Bangladesh. Bangladesh Open University is the only public institution in Bangladesh which imparts education in open and distance mode and offers 23 formal programmes. The introduction of LL.B programme for the benefit of those who have been, for various reasons, deprived of the opportunity of undertaking graduate course in law in conventional mode of education is a good endeavor of it. Distance learning is, indeed, presently considered as a viable alternative to the conventional system of education to fulfill the growing demand for legal education for women. This paper presents the aspects of the women's legal education through distance mode and impact on the development of gender equity in Bangladesh.

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh is a developing country with low socio-economic status and lack of access to education. The population of Bangladesh is more than 120 million of which 46 percent are women. Approximately 80 percent of the total population lives in rural areas of the country. According to Saira (2000) reported that from the beginning the girl child has faced a lot of disadvantages. As the girl becomes a women these disadvantages become magnified. But the status of women has direct relationship with the level of development of a society. In this context it is emphasized on the need for women to develop self reliance, especially through legal education. Bangladesh Open University Consultancy Services (1998) suggest that open and distance learning extends learning opportunities at various level in the society to people who do not have access and or who have limited access to traditional educational system for various reason. Education is the continuous unfolding of ones potentialities; it is a life long process. Now there is a need to promote legal education and awareness, especially for women. Annual Report of UNIFEM (2000) on *Progress of South Asian Women* stated that gender considerations play an important role in determining women's participation in higher education in Bangladesh. Distance learning is one of the greatest inventions of modern education in that it allows people to study for qualifications that they would otherwise have been unable to undertake. Balancing the pressures of study with full time employment and other social commitments is possible but it is a real discipline.

In Bangladesh besides traditional universities, there are a lot of law colleges which follow all conventional system. But the degree of law through distance was first introduced at Bangladesh Open University. This programme explores the development of basic legal education. It focuses on the legal development of practical plans for the effective use of distance education approaches at the

university level. Distance education is not intended to substitute the traditional studies. It should be integrated in the traditional education to complement it and to contribute to the creation of a new flexible educational environment. In practice, women officers of Government Organizations and Non-government Organizations are highly interested to obtain law degree through open and distance learning system as they have no scope to get study leave from their working institutes. According to report of Teri Crotty (1995), the legal education through distance learning activities encourage autonomy and independence as well as cooperation, support, and self regulated learning of women. Bangladesh Open University has taken this challenge by new perspective of legal education through distance mode.

SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF WOMEN IN BANGLADESH

Though the government demands the literacy rate of Bangladesh is 66%, but this means that of this huge percentage, many can only sign their names without being able to read and write. For the women sector in Bangladesh the situation is more painful as they are supposed to stay at home with an unwritten socio-religious stigma to kill all the dreams that a girl possess. Though the government has made the education free for the girls up to Secondary School Certificate (SSC); but very few girls can go for that. Early marriage, early motherhood is a very common phenomena and the drop-out rate from the school too. Thus, social stigma, family orientation restrains them from using their potential and sometimes even in the modern age they live a segregated and protected life. Ideologies of male-domination and misinterpretations of religion have led to the seclusion of women. In cities there are now enough opportunities for women to get educated as well as employed, the inherited family stigma being blended with the social one made women more vulnerable to social

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stigmas and unable to use their personal potentials. This is mainly seen in the rural and city areas. Insecurity and lack of mobility in their family, workplace and public place is common scenario. The women of today want to compete professionally with their male counterpart and want to retain their dignity and self-esteem in society and home. They are therefore, prioritizing self-employment, which would make them able to take family decision and they prioritize legal knowledge in this respect as it provides them with the knowledge of the contemporary world.

NEED FOR WOMEN LEGAL EDUCATION

Women legal education has an important role in the development of the nation. Education is regarded as the key factor in overcoming the barriers that women face and the basic tool for women development. Education not only provides knowledge and skills to improve health and livelihoods, but it empowers women to take their right place in the society and development process. The literacy rate of the women has also impact on the economical condition and reduction of the poverty of the country. Legal education gives status and confidence in decision making in their life. There is need for equal opportunities of education to male and female in Bangladesh. Importance of legal education is to develop women status, enhance of the standard of living, economic prosperity, and reduction of poverty.

DISTANCE EDUCATION IN BANGLADESH

Distance education is a technology based education. In distance learning, the teacher, through the use of technology, delivers instructions to a student at a separate location. The nature of distance education as:

- Flexible learning opportunities to the learners

- Open admission to learning to all
- Free of duration and space
- Use of Printing media and technology
- Provide educational facilities to the students who can not take advantage of conventional system of education
- Serves the remote areas in Bangladesh by regional resources centers
- Provide flexible programmes in Television and Radio
- Provide substitute arrangement of education
- Provide educational access on equal basis

IMPACT OF WOMEN LEGAL EDUCATION ON GENDER EQUITY

Baset Majumder (2003) reported that law is a fascinating subject, with a great tradition and a dynamic future. It is a foundation stone of society and plays an increasingly important and visible role in virtually all areas of modern life in Bangladesh. Social and environmental responsibilities, business operations and international codes of conduct are all determined and upheld by legal systems. Further according to paper of Amirul Islam (2001) law is considered as one of the most effective vehicle of development especially for women, it being the embodiment of social values and at the same time the means of attaining them. It can thus be an instrument to further social objectives and equality at all levels.

In practice, some do not get study leaves for face to face learning and some are involved with their family circle, so that they are not interested to obtain their law degree through face to face study. They want to get some opportunities through distance mode. Simion Caisin (1998) have analyzed that the democratic society continuously requires qualified and competent citizens. Through distance mode legal education can reach those groups who have been denied access to this opportunity. The Seminar on Empowerment of women- Nairobi to Beijing (1983-1995) reported that women need general awareness about their rights.

Because women do not get the remedies to their problems regarding dower, maintenance or right to property in the law or in the formal legal structure. For this reason distance learning law degree first introduced in Bangladesh Open University. Women from all stages and girls could be benefited from law programme through distance mode. These are mentioned below:

- The basic aim of the legal education is to increase awareness of legal rights and access to justice especially among women.
- The legal education must inform students about crucial societal issues, including poverty alleviation
- The role of women the environmental and human rights
- Legal education must be able to help develop inter- disciplinary approach for building the personality and the intellectual ability to understand the society and human interaction in changing social order.
- Legal education must focus on ways in which the legal system can help to solve the problems plaguing society.
- It must provide students with the vision and skills to make the law more responsive to the development needs of this country.
- To ensure contribution of all to building a society free from oppression exploitation and unlawful treatment of persons.
- To reduce the disparity and discrimination between women and men.
- Make women self reliance in every stage of their life.
- To develop the personal career.
- To increase the efficiency in legal knowledge.
- To create awareness and legal knowledge
- To inform all classes people about personal law human rights gender equality and environmental issues.

The ultimate purpose of this programme to establish a just and equitable society where rule of law and

human rights are maintained a cardinal principle in all walks of life. All citizens have vital role to play in society.

PLACE OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING IN BANGLADESH

Bangladesh Open University (BOU) is the only public institution in the country that imparts education in distance mode. In place of campus based teaching, this university uses technology including electronic devices to reach people in different corners of the country. The learner in this system is not restricted by time, space or age. A learner can think and learner at his own place and at any time whenever he feels free to learn. Therefore, the modern society needs a lifelong education for its citizens that could be performed through the distance education system. According to Bangladesh Open University Act (1992), the Bangladesh Open University (BOU) was established on October 20, 1992 by an act of the Bangladesh Parliament with a view to ensuring access of people. Particularly the deprived and disadvantaged ones may have access to education, through distance mode, using information technology including electronic devices to reach people in different corners of the country.

The project profile of the university (1991-1999) has portrayed the objectives of the establishment of an open university in Bangladesh. It is need to increase equitable access to education, to develop the human resources of the country and to improve quality, relevance and efficiency of the education system. It will also support the Government's current and long term education policy on eradication of illiteracy and thus help alleviate poverty in the country. The role of the Bangladesh Open University will primarily to provide to those sections of population who are currently excluded from the conventional education system for a wide variety of reasons. The potential clientele of Bangladesh Open University will therefore include

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significant number of students of rural areas, particularly women, out of school and adults who must do work to support their families. Bangladesh Open University offers 23 formal programmes and 19 non-formal programmes with introducing of LL.B. programme for the benefit of the people.

OBJECTIVES OF THE BACHELOR OF LAWS PROGRAMME

According to the Academic Regulation of School of Law (2005) the LL.B. programme aims at achieving following specific objectives:

- To enable students contributing to their professional growth and career advancement and country's development.
- To produce highly competent law graduates with appropriate legal experience to meet the needs of society. The lawyers play a significant role in the development of the society. Rule of law is the essence of democratic country. It can be protected and sustained by a strong, impartial and independent judicial system.
- To promote legal research and studies in order to stay with current developments and trends of legal field. Today, when the society is engaged in social and economic development, we need professional lawyers, jurists who are already in the process of democracy.
- To encourage members of the legal profession and the general public to uphold justice and maintain high moral standards.
- To provide society with academic services by disseminating legal knowledge, relevant to their professional and occupational needs, as well as to provide continuing education at various levels.

School of Social Science, Humanities and Language is now working for developing the law programme in

Bangladesh Open University. Well designed curriculum, appropriate instructional materials and efficient delivery systems have also to do a much in maintaining acceptable quality and standard. Audio-Video materials are likewise developed, produced and previewed by a team of experts competent to do so.

PROSPECTS OF LEGAL EDUCATION FOR GENDER DEVELOPMENT

Basically law is a special art and effective instrument of social justice, demands high standard and quality of service. The study of law must be of that quality which justifies the standard of profession. A seminar on Review of the Legal Education System in Bangladesh (2005) discussed that law help students to develop inter disciplinary approach for raising the personality and the intellectual ability to understand the society and the human situation in a changing social order. Knowledge of law, both professional and general, therefore, is indispensable for human development. In every society some portion of the population cannot get their legal remedy, though they desperately need the advocacy of a good lawyer. These women students can make a significant, if only partial, contribution to fill this gap.

Legal education can contribute to meeting this need, particularly in those cases that do not present a level of complexity requiring an experienced lawyer. The learners can help them find an organization that provides support for the betterment of women and their children and start criminal proceedings against her husband for domestic violence. In Bangladesh, where a majority of people live in poverty, a significant portion of the population need for legal services.

CONCLUSION

Legal education is the most effective

strategy for promoting development of women in Bangladesh. The legal education through distance mode holds special implication for the women, especially in a developing society. It also holds great advantages for the entire society, almost anyone can benefit from this unique system of education. Legal education will be able not only to provide an insight into the society but also acquire a working knowledge of subjects in a variety of disciplines. Bangladesh Open University has taken this challenge by new prospects in legal education through distance learning system. It can play an important role by providing law degree to persons who could not afford to go to the conventional university. Educated women are getting familiar to this new wave. They accumulate knowledge and skills to accommodate themselves to enjoy the rights and positive sides of the new age. Tradition of good practices in developing women through legal education will help to provide the goal which adopted in Sixth Five Year Plan (2003-2008) "Equal Education for Men and Women-Build a Better Bangladesh."

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