

Original Research Article

Human Rights of the Senior Citizens in Bangladesh: Political, Administrative and Economic Challenges

ABSTRACT

Human rights are the essential rights to all for their proper living and proper amplification of the qualities of human personality. These common rights are recognized by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and also incorporated in the constitution of Bangladesh. But in some cases, these rights are violated in many ways. This study is an attempt to depict the causes and hostilities for which the senior citizens cannot enjoy these rights properly. Its finding presents the political, administrative and economic challenges of human rights of the elderly people. Study sample of this research consisted of 60 respondents divided into three categories such as old home, general and key respondents. Respondents are divided into two equal parts of male and female. This study has been conducted on the basis of both primary and secondary sources of data. The finding revealed that a number of challenges and hostilities cumber the senior citizens in the way of their enjoying human rights with satisfaction. Lack of clear and transparent laws, inadequate national economy, lack of distinct institutions, want of old homes etc. are responsible for the challenges. Corruption and nepotism are the common problems here. This study recommends that raising moralities, creating proper laws and enforcing properly, establishing old homes etc. can play an important role to prevent the human rights violation of the senior citizens. Besides, there has to be a conscious, resistant social movement against all sorts of corruption.

KEYWORDS: Human rights; senior citizens; universal declaration of human rights; corruption; old home.

1. INTRODUCTION

As a human being, everybody deserves some common and essential rights to amplify his/her personality and to live properly. These are called human rights in the international arena and recognized as fundamental rights by our domestic law. These are applicable to all in everywhere irrespective of color, sex, religion, caste, gender, etc. These rights are declared by the UN as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948 [1]. Human rights are those common rights and facilities which are essential for living as a complete human being [2].

Old age is a natural stage of life. It is one of the five main stages of a man's life. Everybody has to pass through this stage at the end of his/her lifespan [3]. A person's activities, relationships to family, attitudes towards life, biological capacities etc. are confined by the

levels of age [4]. The United Nations (UN) selects the age of 60 and above as the elderly. 13% of the total population remains in this age all over the world (2017) [5]. There are many mentionable efforts for the elderly which are taken by several reputed international organizations like the United Nations. UN principles for Aged people were adopted in 1991 through passing resolution no: 46/91 [6]. On 16 December of 1991, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) established 18 rights for elderly [7].

Bangladesh is a developing country. Like many other countries of the developing world, it is constantly trying to improve its all sectors constantly. Mohammad Abdul Hamid, the President of the People's Republic of Bangladesh has declared the age of 60 as the elderly to attain United Nations [8]. The President also declared the elderly people as the 'Senior Citizens' of the state and urged people about their social security, dignity, and all other facilities [9]. The government of Bangladesh has already passed an act for social security and better living of the senior citizens which is named as "*Parents Care Act, 2013*".[10].

Despite these attempts to give proper human rights, there are a lot of incidents which are examples of human rights violation. There are some specific reasons which are responsible for the human rights violations for a long time. These are called challenges of human rights. Political, administrative and economic challenges are of them. The following literature describes these challenges elaborately.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is empirical because the aim of this research is to intensely identify the challenges in the study area that the elderly of the country face to enjoy their human rights. It combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches for the validity and reliability of the data. Required data are collected from both primary and secondary sources and analyzed accordingly. The total number of respondents for this study is 60. The respondents of this research have been categorized into 03 categories, such as general respondents (25), old home respondents (25), and responsible officials and key informants (10). All of the general and old home respondents are 60 and above years old. Half of them are male and half are female and they have been selected following a simple random sampling process. On the other hand, responsible officials and key informants have been selected purposively. Data have been collected from the respondents through face-to-face interviews using an open-ended and close-ended questionnaire.

This study has been conducted at the district level of Bangladesh. There are 64 districts in Bangladesh. Among them, Rajshahi has been selected purposely for the study. All the districts of Bangladesh are now functioning under the same act. All types of basic service are available in all districts. Each of the districts has a rural area and an urban area. Rajshahi is such a district that represents all districts of our country. Moreover, it is a divisional city too. It has a city corporation, 15 municipalities, and 10 Upazilas (sub-district). Rajshahi Sadar Upazila is divided into four model Thanas (Police stations). All classes of people are available here. This research on this district thus may be considered as the representative of all areas of Bangladesh.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A man achieves human rights by birth. These rights are not restricted under any border rather open to all people all over the world irrespective of their ethnic, political, national or

any other identities. Human rights are essential for the overall development of a human being. But in practice, all men cannot enjoy these rights properly. There are some hindrances which are responsible for this. These elements are called challenges in the way of enjoying human rights.

Bangladesh is a developing country which has been gaining the average life expectancy of its people. 70.8 years and 73.8 years are the life expectancies of male and female people respectively. The average life expectancy of the people of Bangladesh is 72.3 years according to the report on *Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2018* by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics [11]. The World Bank indicates 72.32 as the average life expectancy of the people of Bangladesh [12]. The life expectancy of the people of Bangladesh remains at a gradual increasing level. It was 70.7 in 2014, 70.9 in 2015, 71.6 in 2016 and 72 in 2017 according to the report of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics [13]. As a result, the number of elderly people has been increasing day by day. According to the *Population and Housing Census 2011*, 7.5% of total populations are in elderly level in Bangladesh [14]. Elderly age is a vulnerable period of total lifespan. They need more caring from the family members and concerning state bodies in this period of life. They deserve the rights of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights like others. But these rights of aged people are violated in several ways in Bangladesh. According to the field data, the elderly people cannot enjoy these rights properly due to political, administrative and economic challenges.

As considering the importance of human rights, it is necessary to find out the obstacles for which the aged people cannot enjoy these rights. There are many reasons which are responsible for this situation. Internationally some challenges are noticed as the main obstacles for ensuring human rights. A United Nation's report identifies some universal challenges of ensuring human rights presented by Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations. It identifies some challenges, such as, poverty and global inequities, discrimination, armed conflict and violence, impunity, democracy deficits, and weak institutions [15].

Figure 1: Political, Administrative and Economic Challenges



However, this study reveals some specific challenges on the ground of human rights of the senior citizens of Bangladesh. These challenges are categorized into political, administrative and social challenges. The political, administrative and economic challenges are depicted in the below.

3.1 Political and Administrative Challenges

Sometimes the lack of clarification of some national laws and strategies is responsible for the human rights violation of the aged people. Now and then, the laws are theoretically

appropriate but in reality, these are not implemented properly. The budgetary amount very often is not adequate for the welfare of the aged people. The allocated amount for the aged people is enough somehow but few and far between it is not utilized properly because of corruption and nepotism or the lack of skill. These are the political and administrative challenges and hostilities in the violation of human rights of the aged people. These are described in the following points:

3.1.1 Inadequacy of Laws

The parents are neglected and ignored by their children in Bangladesh also. There are a lot of examples. There are many children in our country who are well established in several sectors but their parents are passing their days grievously and are running very miserable lives. They cannot enjoy their fundamental needs such as food, clothing, shelter, healthcare etc. although their children run luxurious lives. Considering this situation the government of Bangladesh has passed *The Parents Maintenance Act 2013 (Pita-Matar Voron-Poshon Ain 2013)* for keeping up the human rights of the aged people [16]. According to the act,

- a) Both male and female children are responsible to maintain their parents;
- b) No child shall send his/her parents to any old home jointly or separately;
- c) Every child shall take care of his/her parents regularly;
- d) Every child shall provide the basic necessities to his/her parents;
- e) Every child must maintain the communication with parents regularly;
- f) They have to ensure medical facilities to their parents;
- g) Every child must provide a logical amount of money to the parents from their income regularly [17, 18].

If any person violates any provision of the act, he/she shall be entitled to the highest punishment of 1 (one) lac taka and in default of money he/she will be punished for 3(three) months jail. Besides, if the wife or husband of any child or any other relatives, hamper or non-cooperate in providing maintenance, they shall also be liable to the same punishment [19].

Undoubtedly, this is a visible landmark development in the history of laws in Bangladesh. But there are some gaps in the implementation of this law which can be considered as the challenges in the sphere of human rights of aged people. Such as: the complaint shall not be accepted without filing by parents according to the article 7 (2) of this law. Naturally no parents want to see their children to be punished. So the parents do not file any complaint against their children. Besides, the parents do not want to go to the bargaining process with their children to get a logical amount of money. Thus, the law is not appropriate in practice despite its sharpness.

In this regard, a key informant recommends some suggestions to make the law effective for the parents. He says,

There are a number of people including policy makers in our society who send their parents to several old homes like *Prabin Hitoishi Sangha* (Elderly welfare organizations). They can make sure the laws are as supportive to parents. By the way, the government can take a step to open a bank account for every senior citizen. Then the government can

deduct the logical amount (10%) of money from the income of children and one credit that deducted money to the bank account of their parents directly that will make the parents strongly benefitted easily. Besides, the government can make a monitoring committee to verify and to ensure the parents maintenance activities of children [20].

3.1.2 Want of Old Home

Old home is a place where the old people live who have no housing and are driven away by their children. Sometimes it is seen that the children keep their parents at old homes at old age. An old home supplies necessary food, clothing, shelter and medical facilities to its residents. It is a reliable place for these old people who have no economic adequacy. In the present era, the children are busy with their career. They are busy thinking about money and official matters. So they cannot give enough time to their parents. At an old age, parents suffer from loneliness and they desire a company. In this situation, an old home is a place where the parents get many people to share their attitudes, feelings and sufferings, views, opinions, beliefs, emotions, etc.

But in our country, old homes are not available everywhere. Rajshahi is a divisional city but there is no old home at Rajshahi. Though the government has taken a project of six state-run old homes in six divisions, It has not been implemented till now [21]. Even there is no registered private old home at Rajshahi. In this regard a key informant says, "There is no registered government or registered private old home in Rajshahi district. Even the old home under the '6 old homes in 6 divisions' project has not been implemented here till now [22]."

However, the researchers have found a private old home at Bagha, Rajshahi. More than 40 old people live there. The old home is run by a rural physician. Several noble persons donate here several times. This old home supplies the necessary food, medicine, clothing and shelter to the old people who live here. But it has no government registration. In this question a key informant claims that he has faced several types of sufferings to register an old home. As a result, he has not registered this old home to avoid these sufferings. He says,

The registration process is so difficult. Corruption is a common phenomenon where registration is run. Each file does not run to the next table from the previous without any illegal gratification. A large amount of illegal gratification is needed to register an old home. The amount of such illegal money can provide food and clothing to the helpless old people at least for a month. The old home has been established with a noble purpose. So, I have not gone to register it [23].

3.1.3 Inadequacy of National Economy

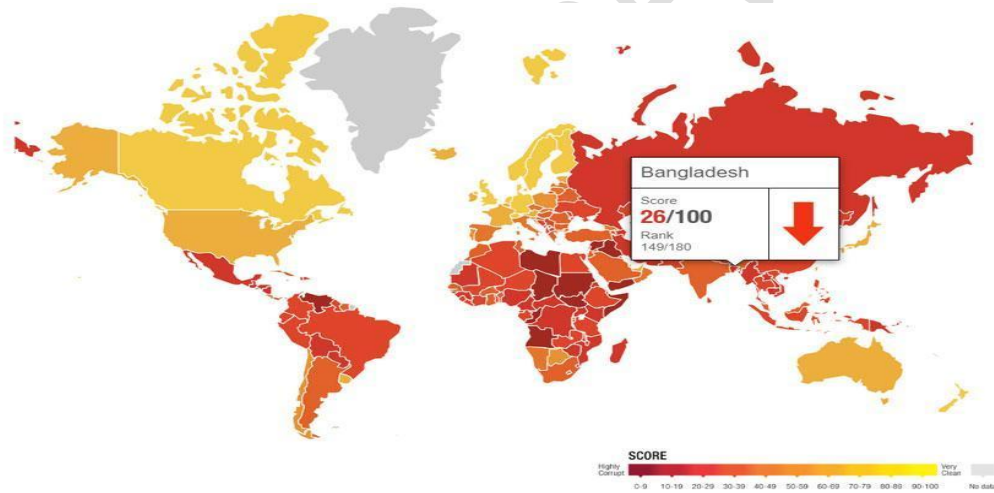
A strong economy is a great factor for the overall development of a country. A country which has an affluent economy is more developed and more powerful. No developmental project of a country can be implemented without money. A man cannot execute his social service aims without money. Money is needed from the beginning to the end of a life. Similarly a state cannot implement its welfare base activities without economic affluence. Money is needed to supply food, and supply clothing, to build up a house and to supply medical facilities. These all are essential for human beings and the responsibilities of a state are to ensure these facilities to its citizens. But these cannot be executed without money. So, an affluent economy is a great factor for a welfare state.

Bangladesh is a developing country like many other countries of the world. Its economic condition is not so good. It is trying to ensure the development of all sectors constantly. But the inadequacy of the economy is an obstacle for these developments. Government cannot provide all kinds of instruments of social security to the vulnerable group of people because of the lack of economic affluence. 'Old people' is a part of the vulnerable group. According to the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, the government is bound to supply all elemental support of social security to them as the safeguards of human rights. In this ground, inadequacy of the national economy is a great obstacle.

3.1.4 Corruption

Corruption is a detrimental obstacle in the way of the development of a country. It devastates the economy of a country and all other structures. Generally, corruption is a process of illegal relation deals with power and money. Mostly, it indicates the misuse of entrusted power. According to Transparency International, "Corruption is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. It can be classified as grand, petty and political, depending on the amounts of money lost and the sector where it occurs [24]."

Figure 2: Corruption Perceptions Index 2018



Source: The Dhaka Tribune, 29 January 2019

Bangladesh is one of the most corrupt countries of the world. It scored 26 out of 100 points and it was ranked 14th from the bottom and 146th from the top among 180 countries according to the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2019 by Transparency International (TI) [25]. It was in 149th position from the top among 180 countries in the Corruption Perceptions Index 2018. Besides, it is the second corrupt country among the South Asian states where Afghanistan is in the first position [26].

However, corruption is a common phenomenon in war and militant attacked countries. But Bangladesh is an independent country from about fifty years ago. From the very beginning of its journey, it has been trying to eradicate the root of corruption from the society. But government machineries have failed to root out the corruption from the country. Corruption has been increasing day by day and it has been making the country's national economy vulnerable. It is true that the national economy of Bangladesh is not affluent. It makes a big

budget every year and the budgetary allocation behind development projects is not utilized properly because of the unlimited corruptions. The political representatives and government officials assimilate huge amounts of money from the budgetary amount in every fiscal year. So, the welfare activities are not executed properly that can bring change in every span of life of all people.

Besides, the local representatives assimilate the governmental grants which are granted for the vulnerable groups. They do not properly distribute the resources of social security among the stakeholders. Sometimes they distribute these elements to their nearest persons who are not eligible for these. A large number of the respondents claim that the local representatives do not give their due grants. But their nearest persons get these without necessary eligibility. One of them claims,

I am a disabled old person of the age of more than 75 years. Although I am 75 years old, the local representatives did not play their exact role to securitize me like many others fit for old age allowance or disability allowance. Thus, I do not get any old age allowance or disability allowance. But there are some allowance holders who are under 65 years and economically solvent. This is the irony of fate of our society [27].

So, it can be said that corruption, nepotism and mismanagement of governmental grants are the major obstacles in the way of ensuring the elements of social security among the vulnerable people. Especially, old people are not covered by social security based programs of the government for these heinous acts of local and national representatives. So, corruption is a great challenge to the human rights of the aged people in Bangladesh.

3.1.5 Lack of Distinct Institution

An institution is made with a definite purpose. Each institution always works for the betterment of its subjects. There are a lot of institutions all over the world which work for the vulnerable class of the people. Aged people are recognized as a vulnerable group in our society. But it's a matter of great sorrow that there is no leading distinct institution for the aged people that promotes the rights and interests of the aged people.

Aged people are the assets of a society, not a burden. But there is no distinct institution that can promote the idea of the elderly among the people of our society. The aged people are suffering from a lot of problems. But no institution comes forward to present such an issue as a societal problem to the government seriously. Even there is no old home at Rajshahi which is an old divisional city in the country.

3.2 Economic Challenge

Money plays an important role as a key factor in every activity. A person does not get any food without money; similarly he/she cannot take any medicine without money. Money is essential for all basic necessities of a man. So, a sound economy and its adequacy are the preconditions for maintaining the life of every human being. But poverty is a serious problem for a large number of people in Bangladesh. 24.3% of the total population of Bangladesh are living below the national poverty line [28]. Moreover, the poverty and extreme poverty headcount ratio of Rajshahi district are 31.4% and 16.5% respectively according to the Bangladesh Interactive Poverty Maps 2016 organized by the World Bank [29]. Moreover, a large number of senior citizens do not get their minimum food properly. A study found that

among the lower class (economic class) senior citizens, 48% senior citizens earn their livelihood by begging, 12% by day laboring, 20% by rickshaw pulling, 8% by other ways. The remaining 12% of them are not capable of doing hard work [30].

Among the respondents of this research, most of them are suffering from extreme poverty. Life passing process is very difficult for them only because of their poverty. They do not have necessary food due to the want of money. They cannot think about nutrition, happiness or other rights. Because where hunger is the main factor, there is no time to think about anything without food. They have no chance to take rest. They face a lot of sufferings in their ways of collecting food such as mental torture, forced labor etc. Election or the right to vote, right to rest and leisure, right to education etc. are luxurious items to them. They have no time to think about these. They do not get such ingredients or elemental opportunities which are essential for human beings and which are the parts of human rights only for their poverty. The essential ingredients are necessary food, ingredients of nutrition, necessary clothes, healthy housing, necessary medicines, adequate sanitation, adequate education, rest and leisure, freedom of labor, freedom of movement, freedom of right to be free from torture, freedom of right to be elected, etc.

Besides, most human rights are hampered due to poverty. So, economic inadequacy or extreme poverty is the main challenge of human rights of the aged people in Bangladesh according to the field survey.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Aging is an extreme and imposed chapter of human life. Today's children and young people will be senior citizens of tomorrow. But at this declining stage of life, they are deprived of enjoying their human rights. Different obstacles stand in the way of enjoying their human rights. Inadequacy of law, lack of old age home, economic inadequacy and corruption are some of these obstacles. On the basis of field survey and respondent's valued opinions, the researchers suggest some recommendations for overcoming the above mentioned obstacles and for the betterment of the senior citizens of Bangladesh. The recommendations are:

- Senior citizens need to be aware of their rights first. They need to be informed about what to do if human rights are violated in any way.
- We have to look out for the senior citizens and make the young generation of the society and all people aware of the rights of the senior citizens.
- Effective and timely laws need to be formulated and implemented properly. If the law is violated, strict action should be taken against the culprits.
- Adequate old age homes are needed to be set up so that homeless or abused senior citizens can lead a safe life there.
- Lack of money is at the root of all kinds of suffering and deprivation of the elderly. To address that, the Social Security program needs to be expanded and distributed impartially to the real needy.
- We have to build a united social movement against corruption and opacity.
- Above all, the senior citizens are not the burden of the society; rather they are the builders of the present society. So it is the responsibility of all of us to make the last life appropriate and enjoyable for them with respect.

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