



Human rights movement: The role of media, civil society and NGOs in Bangladesh

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Abstract

The three actor's media, civil society and NGOs can play a key oversight role in the human rights sector and build public awareness for more accountable democratic governance. Efforts are need to promote an enabling environment for media; civil society and NGOs. Media can act as a watchdog by exposing corruption and can help to promote good governance and accountability by providing accurate; balanced and timely information that is interest and relevance to the public and civil society and NGOs can help to counter balance the power of the state, oppose authoritarianism and ensure that the state is doing works for human rights interests. All these actors are or should be paying attention in the popularizing and protecting all the three generations of human rights. Efforts are needed to increase media, civil society and government integrity-building partnerships in situations where such mutually-beneficial relationships are lacking or inadequate. It is important to promote change in public attitudes and practices by fostering ongoing dialogue, cooperation and trust between the government, media, civil society and NGOs.

Keywords: human rights, promote, role, efforts

Introduction

Human rights today, as a concept, pervades plethora of disciplines and with each day passing new dimensions of human rights are being revealed. Anything and everything of human life has the touch of human rights today. Protection and promotion of human rights is now considered one of the main goals of modern welfare states. Human rights are conceived as minimum conditions of human life and human dignity. Human rights are now globalised and represent universal norms of entitlement of human being. Universality of human rights is now well established and gained universal acceptance to all, as a result, human rights movement at state level become challenging on in real sense. Bangladesh, as a developing country, is facing such challenge in every steps of national life, therefore, for ensuring human rights movement or human rights activities in state level can't run properly without helping of many basic organs such Media, civil society and NGOs. The role of media, civil society and NGOs are basic pillars regarding to carry on proper initiative to for human rights movement in perspective of Bangladesh.

Conceptual statement on human rights movement, media, civil society and NGOs

Human rights are moral principles or norms^[1], which describe certain standards of human behavior, and are regularly protected as legal rights in municipal and international law^[2]. They are commonly understood as inalienable^[3] fundamental rights "to which a person is inherently entitled simply because she or he is a human being^[4], and which are "inherent in all human beings^[5] regardless of their nation, location, language, religion, ethnic origin or any other status^[6]. It also denotes that human rights do not differ with geography, or history, culture or ideology, political or economic system, or stage of societal development^[7]. They are applicable everywhere and at every time in the sense of being universal^[8] and they are egalitarian in the sense of being the same for everyone^[9]. Such rights are universal. No regional, cultural, national or historical variations can deny their applicability^[10]. The doctrine of human rights has been highly influential within international law, global and regional institutions^[11]. Human rights are not creation of states or state

¹James Nickel, with assistance from Thomas Pogge, M.B.E. Smith, and Leif Wenar, December 13, 2013, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Human Rights, Retrieved August 14, 2014

²Nickel, James (2010). "Human Rights". *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2010 ed.).

³The United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, What are human rights?, Retrieved August 14, 2014

⁴Sepúlveda, Magdalena; van Banning, Theo; Gudmundsdóttir, Gudrún; Chamoun, Christine; van Genugten, Willem J.M. (2004). *Human rights reference handbook* (3rd ed. rev. ed.). Ciudad Colon, Costa Rica: University of Peace. ISBN 9977-925-18-6

⁵Burns H. Weston, March 20, 2014, Encyclopedia Britannica, human rights, Retrieved August 14, 2014

⁶The United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, What are human rights?, Retrieved August 14, 2014

⁷Louis Henkin, 'Human Rights Idea: The age of Rights' in: Louis Henkin et al. (eds.), *Human Rights University casebook Series*, Foundation Press, (1999), p.9.

⁸James Nickel, with assistance from Thomas Pogge, M.B.E. Smith, and Leif Wenar, December 13, 2013, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Human Rights, Retrieved August 14, 2014

⁹The United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, What are human rights?, Retrieved August 14, 2014

¹⁰Richard Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (1978); Barin Tierney, *The Idea of natural Rights*, Scholars Press, Atlanta, (1997); Annabel S. Brett, *Liberty, Rights and Nature: Individual Rights in Later Scholastic Thought*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (1997)

¹¹The United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, What are human rights?, Retrieved August 14, 2014

as they exist independent of state system or legal order. Human Rights are essentially claimed against state instead of individuals^[12]. Actions by states and non-governmental organizations form a basis of Public policy worldwide. The idea of human right suggests that "if the public discourse of peacetime global society can be said to have a common moral language, it is that of human rights."^[13] The strong claims made by the doctrine of human rights continue to provoke considerable skepticism and debates about the content, nature and justifications of human rights to this day. The precise meaning of the term *right* is controversial and is the subject of continued philosophical debate^[14]; while there is consensus that human rights^[15] encompasses a wide variety of rights such as the right to a fair trial, protection against enslavement, prohibition of genocide, free speech^[16], or a right to education, there is disagreement about which of these particular rights should be included within the general framework of human rights^[17]; some thinkers suggest that human rights should be a minimum requirement to avoid the worst-case abuses, while others see it as a higher standard^[18]. Many of the basic ideas that animated the human rights movement developed in the aftermath of the Second World War and the atrocities of The Holocaust^[19], culminating in the adoption of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* in Paris by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. Ancient peoples did not have the same modern-day conception of universal human rights^[20]. The true forerunner of human rights discourse was the concept of natural rights which appeared as part of the medieval natural law tradition that became prominent during the European Enlightenment with such philosophers as John Locke, Francis Hutcheson, and Jean-Jacques Burlamaqui, and which featured prominently in the political discourse of the American Revolution and the French Revolution^[21]. From this foundation, the modern human rights arguments emerged over the latter half of the twentieth century^[22], possibly as a reaction to slavery, torture, genocide, and war crimes^[23], as a realization of inherent human vulnerability and as being a precondition for the possibility of a just society^[24]. Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world^[25]. All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights^[26].

The implementation of such rights depends considerably upon international cooperation and not merely domestic legal and constitutional measures^[27].

The constitution of Bangladesh committed to safeguards human rights and reflecting the guidance based on universal declaration of human rights, equality before law, right to life and personal liberty, safeguards as to arrest and detention, freedom of assembly, freedom of occupation, protection in respect of trial and punishment, right to property, such eighteen fundamental civil and political rights included the constitution of Bangladesh and surely its one of the great millstone regarding the establishing of human rights. Human rights are constitutionally the fundamental principles of Bangladesh, it has ratified almost all of the major international human rights instruments, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and there is National Human Rights Commission in Bangladesh.

The media refers to foremost means of communication and mass media refers to the main ways that large numbers of people receive information and entertainment particularly: newspapers, radio, television and more recently internet. But mass media is characterized by very few people communicating to a big number of people at once on the one hand; while on the other hand the audience has no effective way of answering back^[28]. This is very common with newspapers, radio and television. Media is of course regulated by government and the interests of the owners whether government or private persons. Therefore ownership of the media matters a lot as this determines what kind of information, debate or none is available. In 2008 for instance UHRC reported that: The lack of independence for some media remained a point of concern. Most of the broadcast media stations are tightly controlled by their owners who either pay allegiance to their political, religious or tribal affiliations or have serious concern for their business interests. Self – censorship was

¹²Al faruque Abdullah, International human rights law: protection mechanisms and contemporary issues, New warsbook corporation, p.4, ISBN 978-984-33-5662-9.

¹³Beitz, Charles R. (2009). *The idea of human rights*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-957245-8.

¹⁴Shaw, Malcolm (2008). *International Law (6th ed.)*. Leiden: Cambridge University Press. ISBN 978-0-511-45559-9.

¹⁵Burns H. Weston, March 20, 2014, Encyclopedia Britannica, human rights, Retrieved August 14, 2014

¹⁶Macmillan Dictionary, human rights - definition, Retrieved August 14, 2014, "the rights that everyone should have in a society, including the right to express opinions about the government or to have protection from harm"

¹⁷James Nickel, with assistance from Thomas Pogge, M.B.E. Smith, and Leif Wenar, December 13, 2013, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Human Rights, Retrieved August 14, 2014

¹⁸ ibid

¹⁹Gary J. Bass (book reviewer), Samuel Moyn (author of book being reviewed), October 20, 2010, The New Republic, The Old New Thing, Retrieved August 14, 2014

²⁰Freeman, Michael (2002). *Human rights : an interdisciplinary approach*. Cambridge: Polity Press. ISBN 978-0-7456-2355-9.

²¹Gary J. Bass (book reviewer), Samuel Moyn (author of book being reviewed), October 20, 2010, The New Republic, The Old New Thing, Retrieved August 14, 2014

²²Moyn, Samuel (2010). *The last utopia: human rights in history*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. ISBN 978-0-674-06434-8.

²³Gary J. Bass (book reviewer), Samuel Moyn (author of book being reviewed), October 20, 2010, The New Republic, The Old New Thing, Retrieved August 14, 2014

²⁴Burns H. Weston, March 20, 2014, Encyclopedia Britannica, human rights, Retrieved August 14, 2014

²⁵*1st sentence of the Preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*

²⁶ *Article 1 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)*

²⁷ ScottDavidson, HumanRights,Open University press,Buckingham,(1993),p.26.

²⁸ Scott, J & Marshall, G 2005 :Oxford Dictionary of Sociology, O.U.P, Oxford

reported to be rampant within the mainstream media [29] and such tendencies are definitely not supportive

Civil Society as a concept is contested territory. But one common, naturalistic definition, as a good starting point is given by G. White who defines it as:

An intermediate realm of formal associations between the state and the household populated by organizations which are separate from the state, enjoy some autonomy in relations with the state and are formed voluntarily by members of society to protect or extend their interests or values [30].

In Bangladesh most civil society organizations have clear significance. In most social, political, cultural and legal activities are done by them but role from the root level are not well organized at all. Civil society is also not static but its engagement with the state is determined by historical and political circumstances.

Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national international levels'' [31]. The term non-governmental or non-profit is normally used to cover the range of organizations which go to make up civil society. Such organizations are characterized, in general, by having as the purpose of their existence something other than financial profit [32]. Non-governmental organizations have played a primary role to focusing the international community on human rights issues. NGOs have a vital role to play in the promotion and protection of human rights, especially in the developing country, has the largest number of NGOs whose activities are spared in different fields in the for welfare of human right being including the promotion and protection of Human Rights. It is in this context that the role of NGOs should be seen vis-à-vis the promotion and protection of human rights.

Linking among human rights movement, media, civil society and NGOs in brief

Human rights movement, role of media, civil society, NGOs are closely interlinked to each other. Human progress can only attained if the human rights of individuals groups are established and protected. to establish human rights will perfect one if we able to ensure social and economic rights of the people, here media, civil society and NGOs are vital and can play an effective role on this regards. Definitely, activities of single persons of institutions are not able to ensure proper initiative to run movement, therefore, combine measure of basic organs such as media, civil society; NGOs are ultimate one in perspective of not only Bangladesh but any nation of the world. Media, civil society and NGOs activities have had a significant impact on running human rights movement. So, internal efforts by the whole body can proper applicable instruments regarding the carry on human rights movement. Each forum has each formula or activities are not same but ways are vividly same among the body and by this combine efforts can give ultimate result to ensure it.

The role of the media, civil society and ngos in the promotion of human rights

We have looked at the meaning of human rights and the place of the media, civil society and NGOs in Bangladesh. We now turn to the tasks before these three actors in relation to the promotion and protection of human rights movement in the state.

The three actors (media, civil society and NGOs) have some tasks that are common to them. All these actors are or should be paying attention in the popularizing and protecting all the three generations of human rights. However civil and political rights are basic because they provide a basis for struggling for the others especially the socio-economic and cultural rights. While the NGOs can describe and eloquent the issues around human rights, to have a broad reach and appeal the media, civil society and NGOs would have to play a superior role.

While the above tasks are for the three actors and even political parties, there are tasks that are specific to each group.

NGOs have a responsibility to do research and move accessible knowledge beyond the ordinary and pedestrian. NGOs (wherever located) should be a voice for change and progress the movement. They need to understand and transform concepts of human rights into perception that Bangladesh can speak about with.

Public opinion or debates relating to concern of human rights are vital one. NGOs must also engage in public debate to shape public opinion especially on matters not so easily or commonly understood; as a result the majority of citizens in Bangladesh do not truly believe that the states owes them a duty to ensure all their rights are protected and actually enjoyed. NGOs should disabuse them of this opinion and civil society and the media can then popularize it through mass communication.

On the other hand civil society can and should concentrate in certain major areas of human rights. Civil society has access to arrange or do many creative initiate on this regards in Bangladesh. The limitation in Bangladesh is that this has more been a concern mainly of non –representative NGOs. Weaknesses and limitations civil society can in coalition with political and (at times) progressive religious forces have an impact on specific human rights but also the broad independent framework.

The media at the end of it all is the one concerned with popularization of human rights, identifying violations and violators and generally advancing the cause of human rights. If media can and desire to play role they have many opportunities. This is why governments are interested in owning, controlling, censoring or at times banning some media. It is the end point of the dissemination of ideas and propaganda. This is why journalists are harassed, imprisoned, charged with numerous offences, tortured and at times killed. Without an independent media there can be no articulation of issues of human rights violations. All democratic forces therefore must have an interest in defending media freedom and it's an utmost one. Otherwise, Human rights movement and protection will ineffective.

²⁹ UHRC (Uganda Human Rights Commission) 2008 : 11th Annual Report 2008, Popular Version, UHRC

³⁰ White, G 1994 :“Civil Society, Democratisation and Development (I): Clearing the Analytical Ground,” *Democratisation*,Autumn.

³¹Article-1, UN Declaration on Human Rights defenders.

³²www.coe.int/en/web/compass/human-rights-activism-and-the-role-of-NGOs.

In conclusion, it is obvious that civil society, the media and NGOs have a common attention in the definition, protection and promotion of human rights. However they cannot act alone. They need to work with all those paying attention in human rights including but not limited to legitimate and progressive political parties, religious organizations and individual citizens.

Role of media safeguarding human rights movement

It is here that the media can play a constructive role in creating larger awareness of the concept of human rights, basic human rights that would constitute the rights of every individual to his fundamental freedom without distinction as to race, sex, language and religion. Media is a communication of the public, today its role extends not only to giving facts as news. It also analysis and commits on the facts and thus shapes the views of the people. Media can play major role in protecting and promoting human rights in the world. It can make people aware of the need to promote certain values in the cause of human rights which are of eternal value to the mankind. Peace, non-violence, disagreement, maintenance and promotion ecological balances and unpolluted environment and ensuring human rights to all irrespective of caste, color and creed should be the minimum common agenda of the media. In human rights issues media can plays role as a mirror of the society.

Role of civil society safeguarding human rights movement

It is of supreme importance to clarify the roles and limits of civil society in the safeguard of human rights. Civil society, as a basic part of the state, can take proper initiative to human rights movement or protection mechanism. The safeguard of groups and individuals as well as their rights falls under the State functions.

It goes without saying that the role of civil society in promoting human rights takes in this context a fundamental value. Ultimately, it is about forming a citizen sufficiently armed to defend his/her rights. The aim is to achieve the empowerment which entails the participation of individuals in the definition of their rights and freedoms. Beyond its role of monitoring respect for human rights, laws and their constitutionality, safeguarding the physical security of person, safeguarding the lawful property, safeguarding public properties, elements that are central in the protection and empowerment, civil society has a role to play as a force of proposal of new social values that respect human dignity, physical security of person, freedoms and responsibilities, as every right implies its corollary.

Within this context, particularly in societies under transition, civil society cannot act alone and should support the establishment of national institutions for the protection or running movements of human rights. As mediation bodies, these institutions can fully play their role only if they enjoyed full autonomy with regard to the state and acted in strong collaboration with civil society.

Role of NGOs safeguarding human rights movement

NGOs in Bangladesh have been actively working to protect and Uphold human rights from root level and they have scope to do so. They are very active in creating awareness among the policy-makers and actors working among the general masses. They are trying to reform laws to get rid of social, legal and political discrimination on the basis of gender, class, ethnicity, race and

religion. They carry out encouragement at different levels i.e., local, national and international through awareness building, lobbying and mass communication. Taking any program from the root level and nursing activities by chain of organs also possible by NGOs and them also most successful on this point in the context of Bangladesh. Management of funding, manpower, optimum utilization of assets, easy access on door to door of suffer also can be possible by them easily. Few NGOs also provide legal aids as possible as to the poor and victims, particularly to women, workers and children in the forms of counseling, mediation and litigation. Since awareness about rights and responsibility is the key means to protect rights and establish justice, many NGOs have awareness campaign on issues like human rights and constitutional laws, family laws, women rights and violence against women and children. As the protection of human rights is a fundamental part of constitution, human rights defenders play an important role in promoting the rule of law through defending people's rights and by continuing their efforts to set standards to ensure that no rights are violated by either state or non-state actors.

Conclusion

However, as far as the issue of human rights is concerned, Bangladesh has hardly achieved positive results over the last thirty years. Democratic norms and civil liberties have been difficult to establish due to frequent military intervention into state affairs. On this point role of bodies of the state are sufficient enough but implementation on the overnight is really a difficult jobs without combine utmost efforts. Problem is here that there is a lack of political consensus, weak legislative authority, and injurious modes of political competition, undemocratic political party structures, political and administrative patronage, and weak local governance. There is also a lack of accountability and transparency of political and administrative institutions. When political stability, concern regarding to realization of human rights and implementation mind will properly set up by the state body and efforts of the media, civil society and NGOs with others at the same time then movement of human rights in Bangladesh will successful one.

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