

## Peace Tables Bangladesh – An Inspiring Event

On 14<sup>th</sup> of October 2015, Sangat together with two local organisations, Pragroshor and Nijera Kori, were holding the Peace Tables in Dhaka as part of the Peace Tables being held globally on behalf of Peace Women Across the Globe.



As a volunteer for PWAG in Bangladesh, I was invited to take part with the help of a Bangladeshi translator. The day-long event was held in Bangla. After an introductory presentation “Women in Peace-building”, the women were discussing four different topics in groups of about 10 persons and subsequently presented their findings in the plenum. There were about 100 women attending the event. They discussed four topics: Economic freedom: the situation of rural women and their struggle; religious conflicts and its effect on women; women’s struggle: home and public space; ethnicity and women.

*“Women are not confident, women are afraid, women depend on men, women get raped, women are victims of domestic violence...”*

Many of the statements I heard at the peacetables were drastic and discouraging, but the way the women presented them gave to me another, much brighter picture. The women stood tall behind the mic in this big conference room, they showed through their sheer posture and way of talking how strong they are and how determined to make change happen for themselves and for generations to come. They had come from all parts of Bangladesh, some of them had been travelling during the whole night before the seminar, but none of them seemed tired or bored.

Some of the participants were young, well educated women, students from different universities, lawyers, or other professionals, others were long time activists, NGO-workers, rural women without education, or indigenous women. There was even a former freedom fighter present.

Each and every one of them was keen to take the mic at least once in their hands to tell their stories, voice their grievances, or speak about their successes. I saw the whole range of emotions, the frustration and the excitement in their eyes, their strong voices, and their vivid gestures.



There was only one man in the round. The story he told was a real eye-opener: “When I was a child and they asked me what my father does, I said he is a farmer. Asked the same question about my mother, I answered, she is a housewife. But actually, she too, was a farmer.”

A rural woman told how a woman’s group in her village managed to stop men gambling, which had often caused domestic violence before. The women clasped approvingly and shouted in Bangla: “Let’s get rid of discrimination!”

A young student said how comfortable she was feeling in this round, because there were so many women here who shared her feelings. The same woman, at the end of the day, said: “Let’s not just talk and go home and forget about it. Let’s take the things we discussed outside and continue our fight against discrimination.”

When at the end of the day, all women began to sing and dance together, it seemed to me like a symbol of the day: “Together we can be strong and raise our voice for a peaceful society”.

Gabriele Grossenbacher, October 2015