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Women Empowerment in the Local Government System in Bangladesh: A Study of Elected Women Members of Some Selected Union Parishads

Aktar, Shajeda

University of Rajshahi

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**Women Empowerment In the Local Government
System In Bangladesh: A Study of Elected Women
Members of Some Selected Union Parishads**

*Thesis Submitted to the University of Rajshahi for the award
of the Degree of Master of Philosophy*

By
Shajeda Aktar



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June-2005

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রাজশাহী বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়, বাংলাদেশ

CERTIFICATE

It is a pleasure to me to certify that the thesis entitled “Women Empowerment In the Local Government System In Bangladesh: A Study of Elected Women Members of Some Selected Union Parishads” submitted by Shajeda Aktar, for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is her original research work. It is done by the candidate under my direct supervision.

I have gone through the work and found it satisfactory for submission to the Department of Public Administration, University of Rajshahi, for the partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Philosophy in Public Administration.

M. Rahman.

(Dr. Md. Moksuder Rahman)

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সাজেদা আক্তার
প্রভাষক
লোক প্রশাসন বিভাগ
রাজশাহী বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়, বাংলাদেশ

DECLARATION

I, **Shajeda Aktar**, hereby declare that this thesis work “**Women Empowerment In the Local Government System In Bangladesh: A Study of Elected Women Members of Some Selected Union Parishads**” has been originally carried out by me under the guidance and supervision of **Dr. Md. Moksuder Rahman**, Professor, Department of Political Science, Rajshahi University, Bangladesh. This work has not been submitted either in whole or in part for any degree at any university.

Place: Rajshahi
21, June, 2005

Shajeda Aktar
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Shajeda Aktar

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CHAPTER-ONE

INTRODUCTION

“The things, which are good for the world

Half of them have been done by women and half by men.”¹

Kazi Nazrul Islam

The National Poet of Bangladesh.

Nazrul might have been impelled by conscience while observing injustice towards women.² And we see, “too often women and men live in different in access to education and work opportunities, and in health, personal security and leisure time”.³ Due to low status of women approximately half of Bangladesh population is left behind in darkness. In fact there is positive relationship between disempowerment of women and backwardness of any society. Clearly, there can be no sustainable human development, nor any successful population programme without the full and equal participation of women. The ICPD Cairo 1994 acknowledged that the empowerment of women is a cornerstone of population and development policies⁴. The Fourth World Conference on Women 1995, Beijing, declared a Platform for Action that describes itself as “an agenda for women’s empowerment”⁵.

In Bangladesh, like many other developing countries, women access to positions of influence and power is limited; their occupational choices are narrower and their earnings lower than those of men; and they must struggle to reconcile activities outside the home with their traditional roles⁶. While many men, particularly among the poor, also find themselves disenfranchised, it is a

far more common experience among women⁷. This experience is rooted in the failure of our society to value women for anything but their reproductive role. Illiteracy, low life expectancy, low rate of labour force participation, no ownership of land, higher rate of unemployment, high fertility, mortality and morbidity, form a vicious circle adversely affecting women in Bangladesh. Although Bangladesh “had been a pioneer in women emancipation and education, women are politically exploited, socially oppressed, legally ignored and technologically deprived”⁸. The need for empowerment of women in Bangladesh arises from this harsh social scenario.

Participation of women in local level institutions has been considered as the most effective instrument to remove the inequality, instability and powerlessness of women⁹. Women need preparation, need training both mentally and physically: such preparation can only be happen if the supportive environment is provided to women, at all stages, by all section of society, the home, school, religion, government and society¹⁰. Considering Union Parishad as institution of such supportive environment, in this study an attempt has been made to evaluate how the one-third reservation of seats in local bodies provides a supportive environment to the process of women empowerment in Bangladesh.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

It is well recognized that political empowerment of women in Bangladesh at various levels is not satisfactory enough and improvement is essential for the betterment of the women as well as the society as a whole. Women involvement in politics is small in numbers and relatively new in experiences. It is therefore considered by the experts, professionals and women organizations that women participation in institutional politics should be enhanced and encouraged to a large extent immediately.

Entry into political area by women should be initiated by local level participation. Local government bodies being a sub-system of national government women involvement and representation in such bodies are essential for political point of view¹¹. Local government generally provides services and facilities to the people of a specified area. Women being half of human resources should also be the contributors and beneficiaries of such service.

Local government at the union level was first introduced by the British in 1870 under Bengal Village Panchayet Act¹². It consisted of five persons nominated by the District Magistrate. About hundred and thirty five (1870-2005) years have passed since the creation of local government at the union level and its name, area, functions and financial powers have changed from time to time. During these periods the functionaries of local governments were always in the hands of males¹³. For a long time, right to vote in local bodies depend on educational qualification, possession of property and tax payment etc¹⁴. Women having been usually devoid of property and educational opportunities were automatically left out which amounted to discrimination. Women were not eligible to cast votes in elections to rural local bodies till 1956, when for the first time election was held on the basis of universal adult franchise¹⁵.

After liberation, in the last 34 years, seven local government elections were held in Bangladesh (1973, 1977, 1983-84, 1988, 1992, 1997 and 2003). It may be mentioned that it was for the first time in 1976 in the history of the land that statutory representation of women has been provided in the local government at the lower tier, the Union Parishad (UP)¹⁶.

The concept of women empowerment in the local government system got a new twist when the Union Parishad Ordinance, 1976 was promulgated and provisions were made for reservation of two seats for the women in each UP¹⁷. Then the Union Parishad Ordinance, 1983, was passed and provisions were also

made for reservation of three seats for women in each UP¹⁸. Women participation in local government institutions increased sharply, with the enactment of “The Local Government (Union Parishad)” Second Amendment Act, 1997¹⁹. In this act provisions were made that, the three reserved seats for the women in each UP be fulfilled by direct election²⁰.

Following this act women members (WMs) were elected in 1997 and 2003 elections. But the circumstance reveals that this mechanism is still far from meeting the growing demand of women empowerment, participation and leadership building. Naturally rural women are of soft minded and tend to depend on their male partners. As a result male members and chairman of the UP do the whole business of the parishad by their own and deprived the WMs. The financial or food allocations for development programme are largely distributed through the male members. Besides they interfere illegally to their women counterpart very often. It is also claimed that WMs are even become oppressed physically and mentally whenever they seek to access their right in the parishad²¹. The importance of this study lies in this perspective of gender inequality and disempowerment of women.

1.2 Significance of the Study

Women constitute half of the total population²². Development of any society is unattainable keeping women in the dark. Women participation in the development efforts is essential for the balanced socio-political development of the country. The inevitable duty of any democratic society is to ensure women participation, empowerment and their socio-economic well being. Because women are inseparable part of any society. This study, in this respect, is of great importance. The study, I believe, could help understand women position in the society, their socio-economic drawback, women views on their rights and

responsibilities etc. Since the study targets women at the grass root level- it could help to better understand the gender development issues from the roots.

Now a days women participation in the development efforts is widely recognized by the government and non-government organisations. As a result, rural women are now performing their due roles in various development initiatives. But women participation in the formal political process and their empowerment are still remained far from expectations²³. However, government has initiated direct election of WMs in the UPs expecting this as a formal basis for women empowerment at the grass root level. But fundamental researches about the role performances of the WMs at the UP levels and their empowerment are still scanty. This study, in this context, could serve as a beginning one and build a basis for further study to the future researchers.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The general purpose of this study is to evaluate the various processes by which the union parishad system has ensured the political empowerment of women in the grass root democracy in Bangladesh. The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

- i) To trace the historical background that led to the reservation of seats for women in local bodies.
- ii) To assess the socio-economic and political background of the WMs of the UP that influences the process of empowerment of women.
- iii) To assess the role performances of the WMs in UP activities that determines the process of empowerment of women.

- iv) To identify the problems of WMs in performing their responsibilities in UP activities.
- v) To suggest measures to enhance the capabilities of WMs to take active part and involvement in the decision-making process of the UP that would ensure real empowerment of women in political process.

1.4 Hypothesis

This study is based on the following assumptions:

- i) WMs of the UP are the new comers in politics.
- ii) Participation in the UP activities widens the scope for the political empowerment of women.
- iii) Education, interest in politics and patronage from family encourage WMs to take active part in the politics of UP.
- iv) WMs of UP are not provided ample scope of meeting the responsibilities assigned through 1997 Local Government (Union Parishad) Second Amendment Act.
- v) In a greater extent WMs take part in election and UP activities influenced by others.
- vi) WMs' dependency on husband or male members of the family while taking decision and bearing responsibility albeit being elected people's representative.

1.5 Literature Review

“Women Empowerment in the Local Government System” is a contemporary topic in Bangladesh and hence one of the less researched area. A few studies available on empowerment of women either focus on equality of women or economic empowerment. Further, only after the introduction of direct election of one third reserved seats for women in UP, the concept of women empowerment in the local government system gained wider attention among the researchers and social scientists. However a few studies available on women empowerment are mentioned here.

1. **Herbert H. Hyman (1959)**, in his book entitled “**Political Socialization - A Study in the Psychology of Political Behaviour**” has tried to explain human political behaviour from psychological perspectives. His study mainly deals with the United States. He examines three dimensions of political behaviour- participation, political orientation, and democratic and authoritarian tendencies. To illustrate these three dimensions, he has emphasized the role of different agencies (family, peer group, party etc.) on human political behaviour. In this study he has used the result of many other studies to analyze the process of political socialization. Although this study is a psychological one the findings of the study may help us to understand the effectiveness of socialization process of women participation in politics in Bangladesh²⁴.

2. **P. J. Bertocci (1970)**, in his book ‘**Elusive Village: Social Structure and Community Organization in Rural East Pakistan**’ studies social structure and community organization in two villages of Comilla district. He observes that the leaders and powers mostly come from the economically or numerically dominant families with prestigious titles. The leaders lineages being superior to other in respect of land ownership and numerical strength exercise dominance over the general people.

According to Bertocci, allocation of status and distribution of political influence in those villages generally correlate with difference in wealth. He further observes that the power and influence of the leader are extended to the formal and official organs of the local government institution namely the Union Parishad²⁵.

3. **Gunnar Myrdal (1970)**, has mentioned about discrimination against women in South Asian countries in his famous book "**Asian Drama**". He points out "The three Asian religions cared little for the education of the girls and generally placed women in an inferior position, though Buddhism was more egalitarian in this as in other respect²⁶."

4. A study on women politicians in Bangladesh conducted by **Khurshid Jalal (1975)**, entitled "**Women in Politics**" presented the socio-economic background of women in active politics, their attitude towards various social and political issues related to women. It has also focused on the problems women confront in having active political career. But this study does not show the changing patterns of women participation in politics²⁷.

5. **Bilquis A. Alam (1984)**, says in her article that women participation in all-important spheres is now strongly advocated, not only in national politics but also in local politics. But it is only since 1997 that women have been able to associate themselves with local government in fairly large number. It is however, apprehended that sometimes they may not get the required support and co-operation from the elected chairman and male members. Appropriate training programme should be designed for them in order to acquaint them not only with the problem and management of local government but also to make them conscious about the situation of women²⁸.

6. **Karen Oppenheim Mason (1985)**, has clarified in his book what is meant by the much used but ill-defined term, "Status of Women". While

attempting to define status of women Mason analyzes the terms and definitions of status of women given by Dixon (1975, 1978), Dyson and Moore (1983), Caine *et. al.* (1979), Safilios- Rothschild (1980), Cald Well (1981) and lines up a common thread, quoting three basic dimensions of gender inequality viz., (1) inequality in prestige (2) inequality in power (3) inequality in access to or control over resources. But, according to Mason, confusion still persists around the meaning of female status and gender inequality. However the main conceptual indicators about the status of women according to Mason are mainly based as on social, economic and political situation of the society²⁹.

7. **A. K. Nazmul Karim (1987)**, in his study in the village named Dhonon Johpasra and Gopalhati of Rajshahi district has observed that the real political power of rural elites is usually demonstrated in setting village disputes. This traditional function of the elites has been taken over by the village court established with Union Parishad and the Chairman as its Judge. Karim also observes that the educated youth originating from influential lineages are coming forward to take the formal leadership position in the local-bodies³⁰.

8. **Srilatha Batliwala (1993)** examines the concept of women empowerment and outlines some of its strategic implications in a study entitled “**Empowerment of Women in South Asia**”, which was presented in South Asian Workshop on Women Empowerment in Katmandu in 1993. According to her, “the goal of empowerment is to i) challenge subordination and subjugation, and ii) transform the structures, systems and institutions which have supported inequality.” She has critically analyzed different approaches used for women empowerment. The indicators and strategy of each approach includes empowerment through integrated rural development programmes, economic intervention, awareness building and organizing women, training, research and resource support. Batliwala has emphasized education for empowering women and viewed it within organizational structures. This paper appears very helpful in understanding the concept of women empowerment from different perspectives³¹.

9. In the article entitled “**Politics and Women’s Development: Options of Women MPs of the Fifth Parliament in Bangladesh,**” Farah D. Chowdhury (1994) has demonstrated the opinions of women parliamentarians on some political and women development issues. She has focused on their socio- economic and political backgrounds and discussed their views on state, religion, bureaucracy, women status and development, equal rights for men and women, competence of women as head of the government and women reserved seats. However, her study includes only the parliamentarians who belong to high socio- economic strata³².

10. Kirthi Kumar (1994), in his article, “**Strategies for Empowerment of Women in PRIs**” enumerates various strategies for empowerment of women through local level institutions. He outlines that awareness generations by the media, gender sensitization, political training for women representatives and the evident role of NGOs and supporting resource center for providing information to educate the WMs are the few important steps towards women empowerment³³.

11. In the article “**Women in Politics**”, Najma Chowdhury (a) (1994), has analyzed the importance and relevance of women political empowerment in the prevailing situation of Bangladesh. She has drawn attention to the themes and actions of different international strategies such as, FLS, PFA and CEDAW working for ensuring women empowerment. To manifest the situation of women political empowerment in Bangladesh some relevant issues (i. e. Constitutional parameters of women political participation, participation in different power bases) are taken into consideration. Mentioning the manifestoes of political parties, the effort has been made to show the extent to which political parties of our country are concerned with women issues. Political parties, women politicians and parliamentarians, women organizations, and government’s support are some of the agents identified by the author expected to play effective

role in increasing women political participation. In this paper women participation in politics is theoretically discussed and the author has completely relied on secondary sources³⁴.

12. Another article entitled **“Women’s Participation in Politics: Marginalization and Related Issues”** by Najma Chowdhury (b) (1994), shows the pattern of exercising women political rights, needs of women participation in politics, trends of their low participation in politics both in global and national context. But this study does not deal with women participation in local level politics and is also based on secondary sources³⁵.

13. G. Palanithurai (1994), **“Empowerment of Women: A Novel Exercise”** is an article, a result of a two-day Participatory Rural Appraisal Programme organized by the department of Politics and Public Administration, Gandhigram Rural Institute exclusively for the women in New Panchayati Raj Act. In this article, he concludes that the myths developed by the academics administrators, professionals, politicians and practitioners of rural development over the level of perception and performance of the rural people on self-rule have been torpedoed. They have their own system of governance. What is needed is the external support for their action, not external action for their development. Villagers will be developed only by their active participation, not by the participation of out side agencies.

Further, he observes that the village women know their problems, priorities, solutions and strategies but they do not know where from the resources are to be mobilized and how to initiate. They need a little orientation to make their participation more effective³⁶.

14. S. Rowshan Qadir (1994), in her article **“Participation of Women at the Local Level Politics: Problems and Prospects”** gives an idea about the factors of women political participation and its theoretical explanation, reasons

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of women low participation in politics and nature of their participation in rural local government organizations³⁷.

15. Bilquis A. Alam (1995) conducted a study entitled “**Women in Local Government: Profile of Six Chairmen of Union Parishads**”. Through case studies she has tried to collect background information about rural women participation in politics, their opportunities and problems. This study may be helpful for understanding the life histories of women participants in politics³⁸.

16. M. S. Swaminathan (1995), has observed that empowerment of women can be achieved only with the enlightenment and involvement of men. The grassroots level democratic structures, which have triggered off a silent social revolution, can play an effective role in achieving the twin goals of women empowerment and male enlightenment making gender equality a reality. Because a large proportion of the policymaking and implementation responsibilities is in the hands of men worldwide. Hence, there is need to consider concurrently policies for women empowerment and men gender sensitization³⁹.

17. Khalida Salahuddin (1995) in an article “**Women’s Political Participation: Bangladesh**”, has discussed the nature and extent of women participation in National Assembly and Local Government Organizations. In her article she mentions some of the main obstacles to women’s political participation such as: (1) lack of political socialization (2) women domestic responsibility, and (3) economic dependences. But she says women’s adequate political participation is a precondition for their gaining control over the community’s resources. With a view to increasing women’s political participation, she suggests some recommendations-

- a) To create greater awareness among women about their low status in society and the need to improve it.

- b) Specific programmes to impart political education to women that give them an access to the political decision making process and the allocation of resources.
- c) Women politicians should demand that women issues be incorporated in the programmes of the political parties.
- d) Higher representation of women should be ensured in the cabinet, parliament and local bodies⁴⁰.

18. **S. Rowshan Qadir (1995)**, in an article “**Women in Politics and Local bodies in Bangladesh**” has observed that women’s participation in the political process is of crucial importance from considerations of both equity and development. Although women have been partners and substantial contributors to the country’s economy they are still subject to neglect, devalued and exploited by the society. Such discriminatory attitudes towards half the population depress the overall capacity of the society for development.

In her article, she mentions three main factors of nonparticipation:

- i) Socio – economic factors
- ii) Socio – cultural factors
- iii) Political factors.

She suggests that for more women involvement in political activities they need to be organized, assisted economically and morally by political parties, women organizations, individuals and trade unions. Political awareness, consciousness and motivation should be inculcated among women at all levels-national and local⁴¹.

19. **Marina Pinto (1995)**, in his article “**Development through Empowerment of Women in India**” has observed women empowerment as a sine-qua- non-for creating a more egalitarian relationship between men and women. Empowerment is broadly viewed as transfer of power to the people. It is development of skills and abilities of people to enable them to manage better have a say in or negotiate with existing development delivery systems. Empowerment enables people to undertake their actions supported by economic independence. Hence, the empowerment process encompasses several mutually reinforcing components such as socio-political, economic and cultural variables⁴².

20. The book entitled “**Women and Empowerment- Participation and Decision Making**” by **Marilee Karl (1995)**, gives an outline about the factors affecting women participation and the concept of empowerment. This also deals with women position in electoral politics and public affairs. It also discusses the mechanisms and strategies for increasing women participation in politics and development. Though this study is based on secondary data, it shows different dimensions of women political empowerment⁴³.

21. **Zarina R. Khan and Mufazzalul Huq (1995)**, have highlighted the issue of women empowerment in relation to their participation in politics in a paper entitled “**Women and Politics: The Empowerment Issues**”. This paper discusses the reality of women situation and their participation in formal politics and administrative institutions. Some shortcomings of women reservation and nomination system in different legislative bodies are identified. According to the authors, women scanty participation in leadership position, male domination in party hierarchy and decision-making process are the main features of politics in our country. They have stated that communalism and fundamentalism hinder women smooth participation in politics⁴⁴.

22. Panda (1996), in his article “**Emerging Pattern of Leadership among Rural Women**” challenges the assumptions that women are unsuited for political offices due to domestic responsibilities and lack of awareness about the functioning of such Panchayati Raj Institutions. The author’s observation is based on a study conducted for exploring the background of the women representing the leadership among rural women in 16 Panchayats of Chatrapur block in the district of Ganjam, Orissa.

Important findings of this study are as follows:

- i) Traditional social structure and cultural milieu have influenced but little the perception of the rural people to choose women as panchayat representatives.
- ii) Personal merit contributed significantly with choice of women representatives.
- iii) Age, relative freedom from family responsibilities and communication skills are major determinants for their selections.
- iv) They have traits of leadership and capability to arrive at decision by choosing from several alternatives.
- v) Guidance from their male colleagues, family members and the villagers helped them in developing their participation skill. And,
- vi) Their nonparty background, responsibilities and above all the class from which they have come, indicate positive directions of change in rural leadership⁴⁵.

23. Barbara Southard (1996), in her book “**The Women’s Movement and Colonial Politics in Bengal**” has tried to explore the historical background of women movement regarding their political rights, educational reform and

social reform legislation during 1921 to 1936. She explains how the social, economic and cultural environment of the twenties and thirties in Bengal inspired the development of feminist ideology and the growth of effective feminist movement. But in this study, only historical evidences are used to illustrate this situation of women movement and it deals with the movement directed by the women of elite class. Yet, this study is useful in understanding the historical background of the political participation of women in Bangladesh⁴⁶.

24. **S. Rowshan Qadir (1997)** has examined the role of women leaders in development organizations and institutions in Bangladesh in the book **“Women Leaders in Development Organizations and Institutions”**. Using reputational approach, she has identified the women leaders both in rural and urban setting. Both formal and informal leaders of different institutions, groups and associations are considered as leaders in this study. Family background, involvement in different organizations and projects, factors that helped the women to become leaders, social categories of women leaders, leadership qualities, opinions on certain issues related to women involvement in outdoor and development activities- all these issues are comparatively discussed in Qadir’s study. This gives a comprehensive idea about women leadership in the context of our country⁴⁷.

25. **Lelithabhai (1998)**, in an article **“Empowering Women through Panchayati Raj”** has observed among the various measures for the empowerment of women, the reservation of seats to the legislative bodies has been considered to give sweeping changes. The reservation for women is to motivate them to share the responsibilities of the society and reap benefits or rights through that political participation in legislative bodies. Women participation in the village level politics can bring in sweeping changes at social, economic and political levels⁴⁸.

26. **Farah D. Chowdhury (1999)**, in her study has observed that women political participation is extremely limited and is not ensured in real sense. Because most of the women who came to politics are part time politicians. She says that women knowledge about political information is very limited in Bangladesh. This information gap is found not only among the illiterate women, but also to the female university graduates in Bangladesh. For that they do not consider the qualities of candidates, political programmes or political speeches. This trend cannot ensure the accountability of political leadership. But the increasing turn out among the women voters clearly gives us a picture that women interest in election and politics are being generated⁴⁹.

27. The work of **Thomas Costa (1999)** entitled “**Beyond Empowerment: Changing Power Relations in Rural Bangladesh**” basically is an empirical study on rural power structure of Bangladesh. In this study, he shows emerging trends of women leadership along with the total leadership pattern of two villages of northern Bangladesh. By analyzing women leader’s socio-economic characteristics, village people’s attitude towards employment, land ownership and leadership of the women, he has come to the conclusion that women are increasingly participating in local level power structure. He has also identified some factors, which may bring positive changes in the sphere of male as well as female leadership in rural context. In this study, the nature of rural women leadership is discussed only as a part of the whole leadership pattern⁵⁰.

28. **Haldar and Akhtar (1999)** in their anthropological study highlight the impact of the activities of some NGOs on some rural women in terms of empowerment. They assess women perception about empowerment in two dimensions-within household (which encompasses influence on decision making, right to spend money, receiving respect, land ownership etc) and outside the household (which includes awareness participation about certain issues, mobility etc). Their study findings show that participation of women in NGOs

activities empowered rural women in social, economic and cultural fields to some extent⁵¹.

29. Shawkat Ara Husains's (2000) article "Women's Participation in Electoral Politics" is an attempt to evaluate the nature of women participation in elections both in national and local levels. She tries to show whether true participation of women in electoral politics is increased. She also tries to identify the barriers and to suggest some remedies to raise their participation in politics. Women participation in different elections is discussed in this paper from two-aspects in parliamentary elections and elections of local government bodies. Emphasis is given on the role of political parties to increase women participation in politics. In this article she presents a brief account of the trends of women participation in both general as well as reserved seats in the national and local government elections in Bangladesh. This paper is based on secondary sources of data and participation of urban local government bodies is totally overlooked⁵².

30. The article "Models for Empowering Women" written by **R. R. Prasad and Sushama Sahay (2000)** deals with different models and strategies of defining, measuring and explaining the concept of empowerment. Different dimensions of empowerment are critically analyzed in this paper. In this article the authors consider "empowerment" as a gender as well as a development issue⁵³.

31. Rushidan I. Rahman (2000) has studied the impact of micro credit on the enhancement of women empowerment. In this study entitled "**Poverty Alleviation and Empowerment of Women through Micro Finance**", Rushidan has pointed out some methodological shortcomings of the measurement of empowerment and has suggested modified framework for studying women empowerment. The findings of this study shows some positive

impact of micro-credit on women life, especially in the field of involvement in income earning activities, awareness building in social, economic, health and family planning related issues, and positive attitude towards girl's education. Although this study is not related with women political participation, it appears helpful in formulating theoretical framework of women empowerment⁵⁴.

The foregoing review literature gives us a comprehensive idea about women position, empowerment, participation in politics etc. both in national and international context. These studies will definitely be useful for understanding political participation and empowerment of women. As it is found that empirical study in this field is insufficient, the present study makes an effort to investigate women participation in local government politics and their empowerment position.

1.6 Area of the Study

Thirty union parishads of three thanas namely Godagari, Durgapur and Bagmara of Rajshahi District is the study universe for this study. The three thanas are chosen in such that are located in different directions of the Rajshahi city and not such affected and influenced by the metropolitan life. However, every UP is constituted with 12 members of whom 3 is reserved for the women. So there are 360 members in 30 UPs in total and the number of the WM is 90 who are the respondents of this study.

1.7 Methodology

Methodology is one of the most important strategies of any social science research without which it is very difficult to conduct a research properly. Generally, methodology means a way of solving the research problems systematically. It is a system of rules, principles and procedures that helps to

conduct scientific investigation⁵⁵. It also helps to determine the ways of conducting a research by using appropriate method or methods. Methodology differs from one research to another depending on the nature of the research. However, it is necessary to apply suitable method or methods to carry out the research properly depending on the research problems.

In the present research, primarily survey method was applied for data collection. It may be mentioned that surveys are the systematic gathering of answers to standardized questions from a designed set of respondents⁵⁶. However, using this method of survey primary and necessary data were obtained. Observation was also one of the important methods used in this study. Moreover, informal discussion and group discussion with the respondents were the important sources for collecting data. Data were collected through interviews and informal discussions. For interviewing, both structured and un-structured questionnaire-cum-interview schedule was prepared. Both open-ended and close-ended questions were incorporated in the questionnaire. Moreover, published and un-published materials were also used as the secondary sources of data. The fieldwork started in early December 2004 and ended in late February 2005. Approximately 3 months time was spent for fieldwork.

1.8 Sources of Data

1.8 A. Primary Sources of Data

In this present research primary data were collected through interviews, observations and informal discussions. The interview schedule was divided into three parts. The first part of the schedule related to respondent's socio-economic and political backgrounds, and personal data such as; name, age and sex. The second part of the schedule elicited data relating to women member's participation in UP activities and their role performances. The last part of the

schedule focused on women representatives' experiences, their expectation, demand and suggestion to improve WMs participation and empowerment in the LGIs. Attempt was made to contact them personally either in their home or in their office and collect data through the interview-schedule. In addition to interviewing, I made keen observation on the respondents for additional information. The researcher also attended a few meetings to observe the behaviour of the women representatives in the union office. This enabled me to collect many in depth and interesting information about the respondents.

1.8 B. Secondary Sources

Published and/or unpublished sources such as books, papers, articles, dissertations, documents, district gazettes, and reports from union parishad offices were used as secondary sources of data in present research. These secondary sources were used to construct and explain the important concepts and ideas relevant to the issues of women empowerment in LGIs. The information incorporated from the secondary sources helped to strengthen the arguments and explanations in the present study.

1.9 Data Processing and Analysis

Information collected through questionnaire, observations and informal discussions with the respondents was processed after completing the fieldwork. The collected data were tabulated both manually and with the help of computer. Collected data were tabulated in Master table; and then under different subject headings table were prepared. Necessary statistical calculations were made at this stage. The qualitative data collected through observations and informal discussions with respondents in the field were systematized according to different subject headings.

After processing both quantitative and qualitative data, analysis was done. In this stage, presentation of data with critical analysis was made. And then different chapters of the dissertations were written on the basis of processed data of field research, observations and data collected from secondary sources.

1.10 Problems of Data Collection

Several problems had to be faced when collecting data from the field level. The problems faced were as follows:

- i) The first and biggest problem while enumerating primary data from field level was the reluctance of WMs of the UP. They hesitated to let enough time and cooperation at the very beginning presenting different excuses. Thereby one WM was to be approached several times consuming a much more time and energy.
- ii) The elected women members were not educated enough. They couldn't think and express systematically. They even couldn't understand the questionnaire very often.
- iii) WMs were not aware of politics, rights, liberty, leadership, empowerment and so on 'hard' terms of 'urban' life.
- iv) In rural Bangladesh it was also found that the male members of the family, i.e. husband, father, brother or son, conducted almost all of the economic activities keeping women aside. WMs, as a result, were found incapable of answering their economic status and well-being.
- v) Sometimes women members hesitated and worried whether their statement would be used politically. Sometimes they bypassed questions and informations relating their male counterparts and even their rights and responsibilities.

- vi) When interviewing women members were surrounded by their family members and even by their neighbors. These outsiders often intervened the answering process and influence the WMs.
- vii) The illiterate or semi-literate women members often raised question of their benefit from this sort of research or interview. They claimed that the researcher would earn a lot from the government in the name of the WMs yielding them nothing.

All these resulted the researcher to spend her long-length time to conquer the faith of the women members. Spending hours after hours, days after days and establishing a 'very' close personal relationship enabled the researcher to get sufficient information from them. It is important to note that rural women are still of soft-minded, sincere in personal relation and duely affectionate. Thereby building personal relation and spending hours with them made the researcher successful to have the primary data. And last but not least the researcher being women herself had a certain advantage to become very close with the women members relating their time, places and approaches of interview.

1.11 Limitations of the Study

It is true that the provision of reserving three seats for women in each union parishad has provided opportunities for empowerment of the women, but the fact remains that still they are submissive to their male counterparts. Elected women representatives are generally the new-comers, semi-literate and do not have exposure to the art of governance. Thus, the researcher has to face many difficulties to enumerate data from the women representatives.

Furthermore, about 14,000 women representatives are provided opportunities for political empowerment through Union Parishad in Bangladesh. But this study has attempted to study only 90 women members from three selected thanas of Rajshahi district.

However, as an empirical attempt, this study may provide a starting point to make a comparative study. Because both the process of political empowerment and direct participation of women in local bodies are recent area in academic interest. This study in this context would serve as a pioneer effort in understanding political empowerment of women through direct election at UPs.

1.12 Chapterization

The first chapter: **Introduction** describes the problems, aims and objectives of the study. Besides, the significance of this study, methodology, data collection, hypotheses, area of the study and chapterization has been discussed in this chapter.

The second chapter: **Conceptual Framework** (definition of key concept) discusses various key concepts related to this study e.g. women, empowerment, women empowerment, participation, local government, local self-government and decentralization.

The third chapter: **Local Government System in Bangladesh and its Gradual Evolution** analyzes the structure of the local government systems in Bangladesh, i.e., Union Parishad, Upazilla Parishad, Pourashava, and Zilla Parishad from historical perspective.

The fourth chapter: **The Profile of Women Members** analyzes the socio-economic and political background of the WMs of 30 UPs of Rajshahi District that influence the process of empowerment of UP.

The fifth chapter: **Political Empowerment of Women** discuss different stages of women political participation, which help investigate the nature of political empowerment and critically traces the attitude of WMs, their performance and participation in decision making process of UP that will determine the empowerment of women.

The sixth chapter: **Problems and Prospects of Women Empowerment in Local Government System in Bangladesh** outlines the women members' experiences, their expectation, demand and suggestions to improve WMs participation and empowerment in LGIs.

The seventh chapter provides **Conclusions and Recommendations** of the study. Apart from this, necessary abbreviation and glossary relevant for this study is given along with a bibliography.

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CHAPTER-TWO

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Over the last decade the concept of empowerment has emerged as the main paradigm of development throughout both the government and the non-governmental sector. However the notion of empowerment is not so easily defined. O’Gorman argues that empowerment signals a transition away from traditional development that confined people’s role to that of passive recipients, effectively rendering them dependent on handouts in the form of development aid. Instead, empowerment strategies aim to assign them as active role, to enable them to become active for their own, self-defined cause¹. Obviously, the concept of empowerment is closely linked to the notion of power. The Oxford English Dictionary explains empowerment as: “to give (someone) the authority or power to do something”². Power, in turn, is given for a purpose: to enable action³. Consequently, we can define empowerment as: to enable people to act on their own in order to reach their self-defined goals. However, in order to analyse empowerment strategies it is necessary to first clarify the concept of power.

Defining Power

At the core of the concept of empowerment is the idea of power. The possibility of empowerment depends on two things. First, empowerment requires that power can change. If power cannot change, if it is inherent in positions or people, then empowerment is not possible, nor is empowerment conceivable in any meaningful way. In other words, if power can change, then empowerment is possible. Second, the concept of empowerment depends upon the idea that power can expand. This second point reflects our common experiences of power⁴. To clarify these points, we first discuss what we mean by power.

Power is often related to our ability to make others do what we want regardless of their own wishes or interests⁵. Traditional social science emphasizes power as influence and control, often treating power as a commodity or structure divorced from human action⁶. Conceived in this way, power can be viewed as unchanging or unchangeable. Weber gives us a key word beyond this limitation by recognizing that power exists within the context of a relationship between people or things⁷. Power does not exist in isolation nor is it inherent in individuals. By implication, since power is created in relationships, power and power relationships can change. Empowerment as a process of change, then, becomes a meaningful concept.

The concept of empowerment also depends upon power that can expand; our second stated requirement. Understanding power as zero-sum, as something that one gets at another's expense, cuts most of us off from power. A zero-sum conception of power means that power will remain in the hands of the powerful unless they give it up⁸. Contemporary research on power has opened new perspectives that reflect aspects of power that are not zero-sum, but are shared. This aspect means that gaining power actually strengthens the power of others rather than diminishing it. Kreisberg has defined power as "the capacity to implement" is broad enough to allow power to mean domination, authority, influence, and shared power or "power with"⁹. It is this definition of power, a process that occurs in relationships, that gives us the possibility of empowerment.

Defining Empowerment

Since the 1980s an increased activism by women has been witnessed in "Third World" countries. The word that has been used to describe this phenomenon is "empowerment". In many aspects the word that came to be a concept is quite different from other concepts like "participation" or "gender".

In recent empowerment literature, the meaning of the term empowerment is often assumed rather than explained or defined. Rapport has noted that it is easy to define empowerment by its absence but difficult to define in action as it takes on different forms in different people and contexts¹⁰. Even defining the concept is subject to debate. Zimmerman has stated that asserting a single definition of empowerment may make attempts to achieve it formulaic or prescription-like, contradicting the very concept of empowerment¹¹.

As a general definition, it can be said that empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power (that is, the capacity to implement) in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important.

It is thus evident that there are three components that are basic to any understanding of empowerment. Empowerment is multi-dimensional, social, and a process. It is multi-dimensional in that it occurs within sociological, psychological, economic, and other dimensions. Empowerment also occurs at various levels, such as individual, group, and community. Empowerment, by definition, is a social process, since it occurs in relationship to others. Empowerment is a process that is similar to a path or journey, one that develops as we work through it. Other aspects of empowerment may vary according to the specific context and people involved, but these remain constant. In addition, one important implication of this definition of empowerment is that the individual and community are fundamentally connected.

The Dimensions of Empowerment

One of the most prominent attempts to conceptualize empowerment has been done by Lukes that is originated from the dimensions of power. Lukes distinguished three dimensions (or faces) of power:

1. The ability to effectively mobilise material and non-material resources in order to determine decision outcomes in one's favour.
2. The ability to confine the scope of decision-making processes in order to exclude issues from decision-making forums that are against one's interests (non-decision making), thereby effectively limiting the participation of others.
3. The attempt to shape people's perceptions, cognitions and preferences in order to legitimise one's own agenda¹².

Following Lukes' dimensions of power the dimensions of empowerment can be summarized as follows:

1. To develop the ability to access and control material and non-material resources and to effectively mobilize them in order to influence decision outcomes.
2. To develop the ability to access and influence decision-making processes on various levels (household, community, national, global) in order to ensure the proper representation of one's interests (also described as getting a "voice"). This usually requires the formation of local organizations to facilitate collective action.
3. To gain an awareness of dominant ideologies in order to discover one's identity, and ultimately to develop the ability to independently determine one's preferences and act upon them.

Moreover, empowerment has a fourth dimension, which is named personal or psychological empowerment also known as the concept of perceived self-efficacy.

Defining Women

Women encyclopedia Britannica defines women as:

Women are the plural form of noun woman. It is a common noun of the opposite sex of male, begetting issues (children). They extend their hand to the political activities of a family. They may be engaged in different social activities or profession but they play an important role of maintaining family affairs side by side with the head of the family. They are the second important opposite sex next to man. Though they are usually confined with household activities but they keep a close attachment with outside world. They also work as an agent of political activities¹³.

In the present research, by women, we mean the adult female population of the country, above 18 years old, having the right to vote and eligible to contest election. They are a large portion of the total population and usually deprived of political empowerment at the national as well as the local government institutions.

Defining Women Empowerment

Women Empowerment is central to the issues of equality, liberation and justice, with the concept of power being fundamental to its understanding. The concept of empowerment is used in many ways and in a wide range of contexts, and is applied by organisations of differing world-views and political persuasions. According to Rowlands women empowerment is described as a process whereby women become able to organise themselves to increase their own self-reliance, to assert their independent right to make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination¹⁴.

Women empowerment however has come to mean different things to different people. For some it means social mobilization around women concerns

such as divorce and property right. For other it means a change in women state of mind and for yet others it means gaining access to the bases of social power. The feminist notions of empowerment see women as acting agents and not as beneficiaries, clients, participants, etc and they deal with the question of power.

These views of empowerment are grounded within different concepts of power. These can broadly be organized into two categories of women empowerment, one is individual empowerment and the other is political empowerment.

Individual Empowerment

Individual empowerment is a process that is subjective to individual women, which leads to take account of the social and cultural factors in the individual women life contributing to such changes.

Moser (1993), Kabeer (1994), Batliwala (1994) and Rowlands (1997) defined empowerment categorically from the individual end. Accordingly, it is seen as involving the capacity and the right to act, termed as 'legitimate capacity'¹⁵. Based on this concept, empowerment can be achieved within the existing social order without any significant negative effects upon the power of the powerful. Once empowered, they can share in the fruits of development, become agents of their own development and in the process achieving self-reliance.

Moser defined it as "the capacity of women to increase their own self-reliance and internal strength. This is identified as the right to determine choices in life and to influence the direction of change, through the ability to gain control over material and non-material resources".¹⁶ This concept of empowerment is focused on the individual, with control over resources seen as the central means for redistribution of power.

For Kabeer empowerment is “the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such ability”.¹⁷ She argues that “for women to improve their ability to control resources, to determine agendas and make decisions, empowerment strategies must build as a necessary adjunct”¹⁸. Kabeer emphasizes the importance of self respect and a sense of agency in the empowerment process¹⁹. Empowerment is seen as more than just participating in decision making, it also includes the processes that lead women to perceive themselves as able and entitled to make decisions.

Empowerment strategies, according to Batliwala, should build on collective processes, which are crucial for personal empowerment. She describes empowerment “as the exercise of informed choice within an expanding framework of information, knowledge, analysis and process, which enables women to discover new possibilities and new options”²⁰. The empowerment process as propounded by her involves building awareness and raising critical consciousness through dialogue within organized women’s collectives. Through this process women become aware of their own interests and how these relate to the interests of others, which enables them to participate in and influence decision making processes.

Personal empowerment for Rowlands is key to the entire empowerment process, and involves fundamental psychological processes and changes. She views empowerment processes as dynamic, aimed at finding ‘more spaces for control’ and encompassing changes at the personal, relational and collective levels. At the personal level these processes involve developing confidence and abilities, while undoing the effects of internalized oppression²¹. It sees women as confronting gender conditioning and their own internalized oppression, and re-negotiating their roles within the household. With empowerment of women being a gender issue, there is a need to tackle the corresponding tasks with men that will open up the possibility of change in gender relations. This, according to

her is critical, as women may become personally empowered in many ways and still continues to take full responsibility for domestic duties, including child care. For Rowlands the transformatory process requires an appropriate methodology, and can only be promoted through an organizational structure and change agents.

Political Empowerment

In their respective conceptualizations of empowerment, Price (1992), Friedmann (1992), Johnson (1992) and Young (1993) can be categorised as leaning towards the political end of the continuum.

For Price empowerment goals go beyond personal change and growth to increasing awareness of political power and participation in political institutions. Influencing systems and structures at the macro level are seen as critical goals of the empowerment process²². This view shifts the emphasis from women economic independence through increased income and greater individual self-reliance to encouraging women in power and decision-making positions at the global, national and local levels.

Women empowerment according to Johnson involves “gaining voice, having mobility and establishing a public presence”²³. Although women can empower themselves by obtaining some control over different aspects of their daily lives, empowerment necessarily involves gaining some control over power structures and changing them. Johnson’s conceptualization emphasizes individual and political empowerment, with the former not necessarily seen as leading to the later. This makes concerted, planned and strategic effort to increase the effective participation of women in the political arena imperative.

For Young, empowerment allows women “to take control of their own lives, to set their own agendas, to organize to help each other and make demands on the state for support and on society itself for change”²⁴. It implies the radical alteration of the processes and structures which reproduce women subordinate

position as a gender. In other words, empowerment is premised on a 'transformatory potential' relating to the "need to transform women's position in such a way that the advance will be sustained"²⁵. Simultaneously "each step taken in the direction of gaining greater control over their lives, will throw up other needs, other contradictions to be resolved in turn"²⁶. Consequently, affecting significant changes in women power within society requires women to identify allies and forge alliances when needed. She thus takes the concept of empowerment beyond the individual to the broader political arena, while emphasizing the importance of collective action for individual empowerment.

Keeping all the existing definitions in mind, in this study, the term "Women Empowerment" means a process to establish women control over resources such as material, intellectual (knowledge, ideas), Political and ideological (control over ways of thinking). It also means to acquire women the ability and opportunity to participate in decision-making process and its implementation.

Defining Decentralization

Decentralization of administration is essential for the successful working of democracy. In general usage decentralization means the transfer of authority to plan, make decisions and manage public functions from national to sub-national level. According to Encyclopedia of Social Science, "The process of decentralization denotes the transference of authority, legislative, judicial or administrative from a higher level of government to lower levels"²⁷. Louis Allen opines that the transference of power from the central to the lower level of governmental unit is called decentralization²⁸. In this system the lower levels are allowed the discretion to decide most of the matters which come up, reserving comparatively a few bigger and more important problems for the levels at higher up. According to United Nation's *A Hand-book of Public Administration*,

decentralization is, “A plan of administration which will permit the greatest possible number of actions to be taken in the areas, provinces, districts, towns and villages where the people reside”²⁹. To White, “the process of transfer of authority, from a lower to a higher level of government is called centralization; the converse is decentralization”³⁰.

The major aims of decentralized administrative system usually are to increase popular participation in community life and incite opinions conducive to experimentation and progressive change³¹. The central ministries and departments are usually located in a capital city but the functions of the government are performed all around the country. Hence it becomes necessary to establish area or field offices of administration to take the government nearer to the people for efficient and effective execution of governmental functions³². The objective of local government or field administration is to see that the people at all levels of the country get the benefit of good governance. By this way the whole state is divided into several hierarchical administrative units and the governing power is delegated upon the local authorities for administrative convenience. These administrative units are called local governments. For the proper administration of the state functions, decentralization of administration is essential and the local government is the creation of the process of decentralization of administration³³.

Defining Local Government

Local Government (LG) is a government unit of the local areas. It is a public organization authorized to decide and administer a limited range of public policies within a relatively small territory, which is a subdivision of a regional or national government³⁴. By the term LG we mean a particular administrative unit of a defined area for the purpose of exercising the functions vested by the central government. The term implies two distinct things, i.e., it is local and secondly,

that it is a government. The word 'government' indicates that it is an authority. 'Local government' may be said to involve the concept of a territorial non-sovereign unit possessing the legal powers and the necessary organization to regulate its own affairs. According to W. Erick Jacson "local government is concerned with localities and not with country as a whole, it must for this reason be subordinate to the national government"³⁵.

Clarke has defined it as "that part of the government of a nation which deals mainly with such matters as concern the inhabitants of a particular district or place and are thought desirable to be administered by local level officials subordinate to the central government"³⁶.

While talking about the local government, A. Shafiqul Huque has defined it as the "administrative units, which have the authority to decide and implement certain limited types of public policies within a territory demarcated for these purposes by the central government"³⁷.

A. Muttalib (1988) gives the definition of Local Government from political viewpoint. He argues, "it is concerned with governance of a specific local area constituting a political subdivision of a nation, state or other political unit, in other words, acting as an integral part of the political mechanism for governance of a country"³⁸.

LG is simply the agent of the central government, whose powers are exercised by the government officials at the field level and performs only the delegated functions. Since it is local, it relates to the specific area of the country, defined as locality. The institutions of local government are thus governmental organs having jurisdiction not over the whole of a country, but over specific areas³⁹.

From the above discussion, the main characteristics of LG can be mentioned as follows:

- i) It is a system of hierarchical political units;
- ii) Under the system the institutions are set up for specified local areas;
- iii) Such institutions are operated by the government officials;
- iv) The units are vested with certain authorities and responsibilities; and
- v) Such units are subordinate to the central government and exercise only the delegated functions.

However, for the purpose of the present study, the term 'Local Government' means a representative body elected by the local people for a particular period of time in a specific territory entrusted with some delegated power. It may be mentioned here that Local Government is widely known as Local Self-government. The term Local Self-government was originated during British colonial era. Now, this is popularly used as Local government. Therefore, they are used interchangeably in the present study.

Local Self-Government

Local Self-Government (LSG) is the representative body, elected by the local electors for a particular period. It may be defined as the government of elected local bodies entrusted with administrative and executive duties in matters concerning the inhabitants of a particular district or locality and vested with powers to levy taxes and make-laws for their functioning⁴⁰. The definition as developed by the United Nations Organization is as follows:

“The term local self-government refers to a political subdivision of a nation or a state which is constituted by law and has substantial control over local affairs, including the powers to impose taxes or exact labour for prescribed purpose. The governing body of such an entity is elected or locally selected”⁴¹.

Indian Statutory Commission of 1930 opines that “Local Self-government is a representative organization, responsible to body of electors, enjoying the powers of taxation and the functioning both as a school of training responsibility and the vital link in the chain of organizations that make-up the government of the country”⁴².

LSG is the elected local body, its council members are elected by the people of an area and is answerable to those local electors. It is the government by its own citizen of a specific part of a state. It is a corporate body and possesses a collective legal personality of its own apart from the particular and separate personalities of the constituent citizens. Akpan said that it is local; it is a government and self-rule⁴³. It is not only the administrative unit of the government, as the local government is, but acts as the machinery through which the will of the local people is expressed and formulated. Unlike LG is not the subordinate unit of the central or provincial governments formed for mere administrative purposes, but an integral part of the government created for self-government within its competence. It is a government of the local people, by the local people and for the local people that is a democratic government in miniature⁴⁴.

From the above definitions the following salient features of LSG can be identified:

- i. It is a political organization of a territorially defined area.
- ii. It is a non-sovereign authority in the sense that it is subject to the authority of the central or provincial governments as the case may be.
- iii. To meet the cost of the services and amenities it provides, the inhabitants of the locality should largely contribute its funds.
- iv. As an autonomous body it enjoys freedom of actions in matters of internal administration though there are some provisions of final control by the superior government.

- v. It is a self-governing institution, as it is managed by the elected local people of the area for common welfare.
- vi. LSG is a corporate body and possesses a collective legal personality apart from the personalities of its constituent citizens.

Defining Participation

There are divergent opinions as to what participation means. Mumtaz Soysal defines participation as all forms of action by which citizens “take part” in the operation of administration. The ‘taking part’ refers to any level from macro-to micro region or it may be of any type e.g. advisory or in decision-making or in implementation etc., people can participate through public or private bodies or organisation. Soysal further states that participation offers the ordinary citizen a chance to show his willingness to carry out constructive public work and to demonstrate his willingness⁴⁵. R. C. Baetz states that participation in development means how community members can be assured the opportunity of contributing to the creation of the community’s goals and services⁴⁶. S. N. Mishra points out that participation means collective and continuous efforts by the people themselves in setting goals, pooling resources together and taking actions which aims at improving their living conditions⁴⁷. Human Development Report highlights the types of people’s participation in different levels mentioned above. According to the report, “since participation can take place in the economic, social and political arenas, each person necessarily participates in many ways, at many levels. In economic life as a producer or a consumer, an entrepreneur or an employee. In social life as a member of a family, or a community organization or ethnic group. And in political life as a voter or as a member of a political party or as perhaps a pressure group. All these roles overlap and interact, forming patterns of participation that interact with- and often reinforce each other⁴⁸”.

Thus participation has both a narrower and wider connotation. In a narrow sense participation would consist of specific action by which the citizen

participates for a limited purpose. In this case, the citizen does not limit himself to expressing an opinion on specific measures but directly participates in the achievement of objectives. In a wider sense the word participation refers to the role of members of the general public as distinguished from that of appointed officials, including civil servants, in influencing the activities of government or in providing directly for community needs⁴⁹.

For the present study, participation means the involvement of persons in the activities related to political as well as social arena through which they are trying to take part in decision-making process.

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CHAPTER-THREE

LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM IN BANGLADESH AND ITS GRADUAL EVOLUTION

Local Self Government (LSG) of Bangladesh has come to the present position through a gradual process of evolution. So it has a long history of its development and expansion. Now I want to discuss its development in brief.

Local Government in Ancient Bengal

There were three types of local government in ancient Bengal. Firstly, local government was the only form of government where no central authority existed. Secondly, in instances where central government was powerful, local government played a secondary role. Lastly, in some cases local government competed with the centre for power and authority¹.

Village governments in the sub-continent assumed different forms and functions in different times and places². In some areas, a minority of landlords ruled. Their position was mainly based on the Hindu caste system. Some villagers were controlled by the agents of a faraway landlord, others by a powerful headman³. These differences were a reflection of the great variations in the political and social organizations of the villages. However, Headmen and Panchayets (village councils) seem to have existed since early times, even if their functions, power and their place in the system of self-government vary considerably⁴.

Local Government in Medieval Bengal

For the medieval age, there are two diametrically opposite views on how the Bengal villages were governed⁵. According to the traditional view, administration of villages was left to the Panchayets under the over-all charge of the village headman⁶. Each village had its own council or Panchayet. It appointed or elected its own headman, who served as a link between the village and the central government. He collected revenue from the cultivators and forwarded the same to the treasury⁷. The Panchayets were generally entrusted with the task of looking after education, irrigation, religious practices and moral conduct of the villagers. Holding fairs and festivals, and maintenance of law and order were also their duties and responsibilities. The alternative view stated that there was no way a corporate village life with a well-defined self-government structure could have existed in Bengal during the middle ages⁸. Accordingly it is not clear whether the administrative units during the medieval period were the same as those in the ancient period, but it seems that revenue collection became more organized during the medieval period and local administration was more geared to that end⁹. Secondly, during the medieval period, there was no evidence of local consultation through the council system; it was quite simply a top-down administration consisting of the extension of central authority into the local areas¹⁰. These two characteristics undermined the authority of whatever self-government was prevailing at the village level.

British Period (1870-1947)

The administrative pattern of the local self-government in British Period was the legacy of colonial rule¹¹. In 1870, Lord Mayo issued a resolution on financial decentralisation. In that resolution it was observed that local interest, supervision and care were necessary to succeed in the management of funds allotted to education, sanitation, medical, relief and local public works¹². The

resolution, thus intended to extend opportunities for the development of local self-government. In response to Lord Mayo's resolution, the Bengal village *Choukidari* Act was passed in 1870, which marked the beginning of some form of local self-government in the village areas¹³. Under the provision of this act, a *Panchayat* was constituted for each union which consisted of five members, all of them, appointed by the District Magistrate (now called Deputy Commissioner)¹⁴. In 1882, Lord Ripon adopted the famous resolution on local self-government. The objectives contained in the resolution were three-fold: first, the policy of financial decentralization was carried to the level of local bodies; second, improvement of the administration of local bodies; third, the local bodies were developed as instrument of political and popular education¹⁵. Under this resolution, Local Self-Government Act of 1885 was passed which provided for a three-tier system of local government for rural areas¹⁶:

- a) District Board (DB) in each district.
- b) Local Board (LB) in a sub-division of a district.
- c) Union Committee (UC) for a group of villagers.

The District Board

The proposed District Board consisted of not less than nine members¹⁷. Usually, the number of members varied from 18 to 34 according to the size and population of the district¹⁸. If there were no Local Boards within a district, all Board members were appointed. When Local Boards were established in a district, they elected at least half the District Board members and the remaining half were salaried government servants¹⁹. The Act provided that the District Magistrate would act as chairman of the District Board²⁰. The tenure of office was five years. A voter for electing the member had to be a resident of the district. Under this Act, the District Board was formed in all districts of Bengal except Sylhet²¹.

The District Board was made the centrepiece in the local government system and entrusted with extensive powers and responsibilities. A District Board was thus to look after various matters of public interest and utility, such as schools, roads and communication, vaccination, hospitals, famine relief, census, holding of fairs and exhibitions, construction and maintenance of railways, tramways and waterways, repair and construction of public buildings, etc²².

Local Board

The Local Board consisted of less than six members, of whom two-thirds were elected and one-third was nominated by the government²³. Local Boards could either elect their own chairmen from among their members, subject to the approval of the Lieutenant Governor, or request the Lieutenant Governor to appoint them²⁴. A Local Board had no specific function except to receive reports from the Union Committees. The Board had no independent authority and source of income²⁵. It acted as an agent of the District Board and exercised only those powers delegated to it by the District Board. The Local Board acted as a supervising body of Union Committees and could delegate any responsibility to Union Committees²⁶.

Union Committee

The Act of 1885 provided for a Union Committee to administer, on an average, an area of twelve square miles in the villages. Union Committees consisted of not less than five or more than nine members. They were elected from among the residents of the Union²⁷. The Divisional Commissioner could appoint members if the full membership was not to be elected. In the original Act, there was no mention of any Union Committee Chairman. An amendment passed by the Government of Bengal in 1908, which was extended to East Bengal in 1914, provided that Union Committees could elect their own chairmen from amongst the members²⁸.

The responsibilities of UC were as follows:

1. Maintenance and repair of village roads and bridges.
2. Performance of responsibilities with regard to Pound as transferred under the Cattle Trespass Act, 1871.
3. Primary education.
4. Maintenance, management and visiting of dispensary within the Union.
5. Registration of births and death.
6. Sanitation, conservancy and drainage.
7. Cleaning of village.
8. Control of building construction and imposition of penalties for disobedience and
9. Water supply²⁹.

Besides the above, a UC performed other duties delegated by the Local Board (LB) or District Board (DB). The next change in the local government system occurred with the legislation of Bengal Village Self-government Act of 1919³⁰. The Act introduced two-tier rural local government bodies, namely, Union Board (UB) and District Board (DB). The UBs constituted at the union with a group of villages replacing the existing Chowkidary Panchayets (CP) and UCs³¹. UB was formed in every district except Sylhet and Chittagong Hill Tracts.

The UB was given combined duties of the CPs and UCs, Nine chartered functions of the Union Board were:

1. Supervision of Chowkidars.
2. Health, Sanitation, Conservancy and Drainage.
3. Cleansing of Unions.
4. Control of creation of building

5. Water supply
6. Control of all public roads, bridges and water ways.
7. Award or stipend to students.
8. Establishment and management of primary schools.
9. Supply of information as and when needed by the DB.
10. Settlement of minor offences or petty disputes³².

It may be noted that except judicial responsibility there was no major change between the civic functions of the Union Committees and the Union Boards. It was authorized to constitute Union Court for settlement of minor offences or petty disputes.

Pakistan Period (1947-1971)

There was a great change in the local government system when General Ayub Khan took over as the President and Chief Martial Law Administrator of the then Pakistan in 1958 by a military coup³³. He abrogated the Pakistan constitution of 1956 and dissolved the national and provincial assemblies (central and provincial legislatures). The Union Boards and District Boards were also dissolved in the process³⁴.

President Ayub Khan introduced a new political system in the country. The new structure of Local Self-Government was based on Basic Democracies introduced under the Basic Democracies Order (BDO) of the 27th October, 1959³⁵. Under this system, the Union Boards were replaced by the Union Council and the District Boards by the District Council. The Union Councils was the basic and lowest tier of Basic Democracies.

Union Council

The system of Basic Democracies consisted of four tiers. The first was Union Council. The Union Council was responsible mainly for village

administration³⁶. It had to maintain the village police. It was also responsible for petty agricultural and industrial developments, social welfare and national reconstruction. The construction of roads, bridges and canals were the main functions of the Union Council³⁷.

The members of the Union Councils were called basic democrats³⁸. President Ayub Khan presented the country a new constitution in 1962. The new constitution provided for forty thousand basic democrats from East Pakistan and forty thousand from West Pakistan³⁹. The total of eighty thousand basic democrats constituted the Electoral College for the election of the president and the National and Provincial Assemblies⁴⁰. The number of the basic democrats was later raised to sixty thousand in each province⁴¹. As the basic democrats elected the Chief Executive of the country and the member of the legislatures, they emerged as very powerful. The Ayub regime depended solely on the basic democrats for being in power. The Ayub government attempted to satisfy these people by all means. His administration gave them all concessions and, therefore, it was possible for the Ayub government to continue in power for ten years⁴².

The basic democrats were a new group of rural elite, which emerged under the direct patronage of the then government⁴³. Almost all of them had rural background. They replaced the old members of the Union Boards of the pre-Ayub era most of whom were rural *khandan* muslims (landed aristocrats). The new rural elites under the direct patronage of the Ayub government included only a small number of the old *khandans*⁴⁴.

An examination of the system of basic democracies clearly reveals that it was simply a replica of the earlier local government system introduced in British India. There were, however, some fundamental differences with regard to the organization and functions of the Union Councils and the previous Union

Boards⁴⁵. The spirit of democracy worked to some extent in case of both these bodies. The members of the Union Councils were elected directly on the basis of adult franchise. The chairmen of the Union Councils were elected indirectly from among the members of the Union Councils⁴⁶. The other fundamental difference between these two bodies was that unlike the members of the Union Board, the members of the Union Councils did actually form an electoral college for electing the President of Pakistan and well as the members of the National and Provincial Assemblies⁴⁷. They were thus more powerful and had more important functions to perform than the members of the former Union Boards.

Thana Council

The Thana Council was the second tier in the hierarchy of local bodies. Usually a Thana Council covered 8 to 15 Union Councils⁴⁸. A Thana Council consisted of representative as well as official members. Chairmen of the Union Councils and Town Committees within the Thana were the ex-officio representative of the Thana Council. The ex-officio official members of a Thana Council were the concerned Sub-Divisional Officers (S.D.O.), Circle Officers (Development) and such other Thana level officers representing Agriculture, Education, Health, Fishery and Co-operative Departments, etc. as were nominated by the Deputy Commissioner. The Sub-Divisional Officer was the ex-officio Chairman and the Circle Officer (Dev.) was its Vice-Chairman⁴⁹.

The main function of the Thana Council was co-ordination of activities of Union Councils under its jurisdiction⁵⁰. It was basically an association of the Union Councils without any revenue raising authority, rather than a local government in its own right, and therefore it was by itself of little benefit to the people⁵¹.

District Council

The District Council was the next tier of local government under the Basic Democracies Order. Under the Basic Democracies Order, 1959 it underwent a through change and the previous District Board was then called the District Council⁵². There was an obvious difference between the District Board and the District Council. The District Board was an elective body headed by an elected Chairman and was independent of bureaucracy at the District level⁵³. Under the Basic Democracies Order, the District Council was brought under the control of the bureaucracy⁵⁴. The Deputy Commissioner-cum-collector was the ex-officio Chairman of the District Council. All executive powers were vested in him⁵⁵.

The District Council comprised of official and representative members as determined by the government. The official members were the ex-officio members appointed by the government⁵⁶. Chairmen of Union Councils and Town Committees within the District elected the representative members. The District Council had a considerable number of functions, but taxation powers were, in practice, highly inadequate for its performance⁵⁷.

Divisional Council

Every Division had Divisional Council. It was the highest tier among the rural local bodies. A Divisional Council was formed by official and non-official members⁵⁸. The number of Divisional Council members differed from Council to Council and the government decided it. The total numbers of non-official members were elected from amongst an electoral college consisting of the members of the District Councils, falling within the Division. Its main function was to co-ordinate the activities of District Councils, Cantonment Boards and Municipal bodies within the Division⁵⁹.

Bangladesh Period

Sheikh Mujib Regime (1972-75)

Bangladesh emerged as an independent sovereign country on 16th December 1971 following a bloody war of liberation. Coming into being, the government directed its attention to the local government situation and found the local bodies in a moribund stage under official control that was instituted in 1969⁶⁰.

The new government of Sheikh Mujib abolished the old system, and declared the introduction of the Union Panchayet system throughout the country by an executive order. According to this order, all the local bodies from the union to the district level were formally dissolved, and administrators were appointed to each one of them⁶¹. This order also changes the name of local bodies like the following Table.

Pakistan Period	Change to	Mujib Period
Divisional Council (Commissioner)	→	Division (Commissioner)
District Council (Deputy Commissioner)	→	Zila Board (Deputy Commissioner)
Thana Council (Sub Divisional Officer)	→	Thana Development Committee (Sub-Divisional Officer)
Union Council (Elected by Members)	→	Union Panchayet (Circle Officer)

Source: Siddiqui- 1994: 64

The union panchayet was placed under the control of the Circle Officer (Development) while the Thana Development Committee and the Zila Board were placed under the control of the Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO) and the Deputy Commissioner (DC) respectively. This arrangement continued up to

1973⁶². In 1973 president's order No. 22 was promulgated⁶³. By this order, the name of union panchayet was changed to union parishad. But the functions and sources of income remained almost the same as in the basic democracies order of 1959. Under the changed arrangement a union was divided into three wards. Each union parishad was to consist of a chairman, a vice-chairman and 9 members' -three elected from each ward. All were directly elected by the voters of the union⁶⁴. The Thana Parishad and Zila Parishad continued to function as under the BDO 1959 with the SDO and the DC respectively as ex-officio chairman⁶⁵.

However, the government did nothing to establish elected local government bodies at all levels other than the union level, though the article 59 of Bangladesh constitution provided for elected local government institutions at all levels⁶⁶.

In 1975 in the face of serious crisis, the constitution was amended providing for presidential form of government and the Mujib government opted for one party rule. According to the Presidential Order of June 21, 1975, all subdivisions were upgraded into districts, and districts were to be governed by the district governors who were appointed by the government⁶⁷. But the August coup of 1975 prevented the implementation of the system.

Ziaur Rahman Regime (1976-81)

In 1976, government headed by Ziaur Rahman (then President of the Republic) promulgated a Local Government Ordinance for the first time in independent Bangladesh. Under the Ordinance, there were three types of local government, namely the Union Parishad at the union level, the Thana Parishad at the thana level and the Zila Parishad at the district level⁶⁸.

Union Parishad (UP)

Under Local Government Ordinance (LGO) 1976, major changes occurred in the composition of the Union Parishad. The post of Vice-Chairman was abolished to avoid fiction in the leadership of the Union Parishad. Each union was, as in the past, divided into three wards⁶⁹. A Union Parishad was consisted of a Chairman and nine elected members- three from each ward. The Chairman was directly elected by the voters of the entire union while the nine elected members were elected by the voters of the concerned wards on the basis of adult franchise. The Ordinance also provided for the nomination of two women members. They were nominated by the prescribed authority (Sub-Divisional Officer) from amongst the women of the entire union⁷⁰. On February 16, 1979, by an amendment of the Local Government Ordinance 1976, a provision was made for nomination of two peasant members by the prescribed authority from amongst the peasants of the entire union. The peasant members were to be genuine cultivators, owning at least one standard bigha of cultivable land and residing permanently in the concerned union⁷¹. But this provision was omitted in 1983. The Chairman was considered a member of the Parishad. Both Chairman and members were paid an honorarium by the government⁷². The term of the Union Parishad was five years⁷³. However, the old Parishad, even after expiry of its term, could continue to function until the first meeting of the succeeding Parishad. The succeeding Parishad had held its first meeting within thirty days from the date of publication of the names of the newly elected Chairman and members in the official gazette, and the exact date of the meeting was fixed by the prescribed authority⁷⁴.

Thana Parishad

According to the LGO 1976, each Thana Parishad consisted of representative members and official members⁷⁵. The Chairman of the Union Parishads in a Thana was the ex-officio member of the Thana Parishad. The Sub-

Division Officer (S.D.O) was the Chairman of the Parishad and the Circle Officer (Development) was its Vice-Chairman⁷⁶. All representative and official members had voting right. Thana Parishad coordinated all development activities of Union Parishads within its jurisdiction. It also prepared a Thana Development Plan on the basis of the Union Development Plans. It provided assistance whenever possible to the Union Parishads⁷⁷.

Zila Parishad (ZP)

The LGO 1976 also provided for a Zila Parishad in each district. A Zila Parishad was consisted of elected, official and women members whose numbers were determined by the government. However, the total number of elected members was not less than the total number of official and women members and the total number of women members was not exceeded one-tenth of the total number of elected and official members⁷⁸. The elected members were elected by direct election on the basis of adult franchise. The women members were nominated by the prescribed authority (Commissioner) from among the women of the concerned district⁷⁹.

A Zila Parishad elected one of its elected or women members as its Chairman and another as Vice-Chairman, and they were paid an honorarium by the Government⁸⁰. The term of office of the Zila Parishad was five years (commencing on the day of its first meeting) after its constitution. However, no election was held. The Deputy Commissioner (DC) and Assistant Director of Local Government (ADLG) continued to be respectively the ex-officio Chairman and Secretary of the Zila Parishad⁸¹.

The Zila Parishad was entrusted with 97 functional responsibilities classified under two categories- compulsory and optional⁸². It was also made responsible for coordinating the development activities of all local Parishads i.e. Union Parishads, Thana Parishads, Municipalities and Cantonment Boards within the district.

The Swanirvar Gram Sarker (SGS)

In April, 1980, by an amendment of the Local Government Ordinance 1976, the Swanirvar Gram Sarker (self-reliant village govt.) was introduced at the village level⁸³. It consisted of a Gram Proadhan (village chief) and 11 members including at least two women members⁸⁴. The Gram Proadhan selected one of its members as the Secretary. The members of the Swanirvar Gram Sarker were chosen in a manner ensuring representation of different functional/ interest groups. The SGS was assigned with the responsibility of increasing food production, eradicating illiteracy, reducing population growth, invigorating rural cooperatives and maintaining law and order in the village⁸⁵. But this tier was abolished by a Martial Law Order in July 1982.

The Thana Development Committee (TDC)

By a notification in May 1978, issued by the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives, a tier parallel to the Thana Parishad was created⁸⁶. This was called the Thana Development Committee (TDC). The Chairmen of Union Parishads within a Thana were the ex-officio representative members of the Thana Development Committee. The Committee was allowed to co-opt 3 to 8 leading non-officials as its members, but the number of co-opted members did not exceed the number of Union Parishad Chairmen within the Thana. The Thana Development Committee elected Chairman, a Secretary and Treasurer from amongst its ex-officio representative members bi-annually⁸⁷. The TDC was dissolved in November 1982, and its responsibility for development activities was transferred to the Upazila Parishad.

Ershad Regime (1982-1990)

In the March of 1982, General Ershad captured state power through a bloodless coup and Martial Law was clamped upon the country. Soon after

coming to power a massive program of devolution of power and decentralization of administration was initiated in the country by the military government. The government appointed the Committee for Administrative Reform/Reorganization (CARR) in the April of 1982, which suggested a three-tier representative local government system and elimination of sub-division⁸⁸. Proposed three tier local government were:

- i) Union Parishad for Union level
- ii) Upazila Parishad for Thana level
- iii) Zila Prishad for District Level

Shortly after the submission of the CARR report the government constituted the National Implementation Committee for Administrative Reform/Reorganization (NICARR), on the lines suggested by CARR. Among other things, the NICARR suggested more thanas for upgrading into upazilas and subdivision into districts. As a result 460 thanas of the country were upgraded and renamed as upazila (Sub-district) in 1983, by an amendment of The Local Government (Thana Parishad and Thana Administration Re-organization) ordinance 1982⁸⁹. By converting sub-division into district, the numbers of districts were raised to 64.

Union Parishad

According to LGO 1983, each union was divided into three wards. A Union Parishad consisted of a Chairman, nine elected members- three from each ward, and three nominated women members- each of whom to represented one ward⁹⁰. The Chairman was directly elected by the voters of the entire union and the nine elected members by the voters of the concerned ward on the basis of adult franchise. Women members were nominated by the Upazila Parishad from amongst the women of the entire union. In 1988, by an amendment of the LGO

1983, a provision was made to nominate the women members by the Deputy Commissioners instead of Upazila Parishad⁹¹. In 1989 such power of nomination was delegated to a person chosen by the government.

The functions of the Union Parishad, enumerated in the LGO 1983, were almost similar to those in the LGO 1976. The Ordinance provided thirty-eight civic functions for the Union Parishad, which included civic and public welfare, police and defence, revenue collection, general administration, development activities and judiciary⁹². Along with these formal functions mentioned in the Ordinance, the Union Parishads also performed some other additional functions to meet specific needs of the people and under instructions issued by different ministries/ agencies from time to time.

Upazila Parishad

According to the LGO, an Upazila Parishad consisted of (a) an elected Chairman, (b) representative members (all Chairmen of Union Parishads under the jurisdiction of the concerned Upazila), (c) three women members, nominated by the Government from amongst the residents of the Upazila, (d) official members (the holders of the offices of the Upazila as specified by the Government were the ex-officio official members without voting rights), (e) Chairman of the Upazila Central Co-operative Association (U.C.C.A) and (f) one nominated male member (eligible for election as Chairman of Upazila Parishad). All ex-officio representative members and the five nominated members were allowed to vote in the Upazila Parishad meeting⁹³. The Chairman of the Upazila was elected on the basis of adult franchise. The tenure of the chairman was five years from the date of assuming charge. Till election of the Chairman of Upazila Parishad, the Upazila Nirbahi officer (UNO) - the Chief Executive Officer of the Parishad deputed by the government was authorized to act as the Chairman.

The Upazilas became the focal point of administration following the government policy of decentralisation⁹⁴. Under the reorganised system, Upazilas replaced the old districts as the pivot of administration. The task and responsibilities given to the upazila parishad were massive as well as very important. All the responsibilities of development activities at the local were transferred to the upazila Parishad.

Zila Parishad

According to the Local Government (Zila Parishad) Act 1988, a Zila Parishad comprised of (a) Public representatives such as, Members of Parliament, Upazila Parishad Chairmen and Pourashava Chairmen of the concerned district, (b) nominated members, (c) nominated women members and (d) certain officials⁹⁵. The total number of nominated members and women members was not to exceed the total number of the representative members of the Parishad. The nominated members, both men and women were selected by the government from amongst residents of the concerned district.

The ex-officio official members included the Deputy Commissioner and other district level officers, specified by the government. All members, other than officials, had voting rights. The Zila Parishad Chairman was appointed by the government. His term was three years after its constitution. The government could, however, remove the Chairman without showing any reasons⁹⁶.

The Act of 1988 provided 12 compulsory and 69 optional functions to the Zila Parishad. The most important functions were planning, promotion and execution of development and welfare programmes within the district⁹⁷.

It may be mentioned that Zila Parishads worked upto December, 1990. With the downfall of the Ershad government, the Chairmen were removed (because most of them were Members of Parliament from Ershad's party) and Deputy Commissioners were temporarily appointed as ex-officio Chairmen of the Parishads.

Khaleda Zia Regime (1991-1996)

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) government headed by Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia abolished the Upazila Parishads by promulgating the Local Government (Upazila Parishad and Upazila Administration Reorganisation) (Repeal) Ordinance, 1991. The government formed a commission to review the Local Government structure. It recommended for the establishment of a two-tiered local government structure- the Zila Parishad and the Union Parishad. It further recommended for a *gram shova* at the grassroots level as complementary to the above two parishads⁹⁸. The underlying purpose was to ensure mass participation in administration and development. Especially participation of women through direct elections, the active role of public representatives in implementing development plans at the local level, mobilization of resources from the respective areas and to make the local government institutions accountable to the public were the motives of the government.

To achieving these goals, the commission recommended for the continuation of the Union Parishad at the village level and Zila Parishad at the Zila level⁹⁹. It provided each and every unit of the local institutions their own separate legal identity and entity. They worked within their specific jurisdiction and enforced their rights and authorities without interfering with the activities of another institution. Each unit had its own manpower/personnel to carry out its own activities. Their relationship was one of healthy co-ordination, not of stratified control. The Union Parishad was, however the focal point in the whole system of local government administration.

Sheikh Hasina Regime (1996-2001)

Assuming in power Sheikh Hasina government formed a 8 member "Local Government Reform Committee" headed by Advocate Rahmat Ali in 5th

September, 1996. This committee suggested a four tier local government system as:

1. Gram Parishad at village level.
2. Union Parishad at Union level.
3. Upazilla Parishad at Upazila level, and
4. Zilla Parishad at District level.

Gram Parishad (GP)

The 1997 Local Government Act (Gram Parishad) also made provision of forming the Gram Parishads at all the 9 wards of a union. GP would be headed by a chairman and 9 male and 3 female members. The elected chairman of the UP would be head of the GP. Other members would be elected by the villagers in a general meeting on the basis of consensus¹⁰⁰. It would be the lowest tier of the LGS. The term would be 5 years from the date of its formation. The Parishad would be vested with 14 types of responsibilities. Ultimately it was not formed due to hesitation of government in implementing it.

Union Parishad

Local Government (Union Parishad) Second Amendment Act, 1997 restructured the Union Parishad. Each union Parishad was divided into 9 wards instead of earlier 3. One member was elected from each ward. Three women members were elected from 3 greater ward¹⁰¹. The reservation of three seats for the women and their direct election as the members of the UP under this provision was a new era of women empowerment. Because it was first of its kind. The election was held in 4441 UPs and 13,323 women member were directly elected¹⁰². Moreover, a large number of women contested in the general seats and many of them were elected successfully as chairmen and members. The direct election of the women in the UP was of course a right step towards the women empowerment at the grass-roots governments. But in practice they

faced several problems. Sometimes they harassed by their male members, even by the family members etc. But functionally they were not authorized equally with the male members. To solve the problems the government later took several initiatives to empower the women members, such as:

1. The number of the committee of UP was raised to 12 from 7, so that all the members could head anyone of the committees
2. Taking development programme of 25 thousands taka in 8 numbers each and incorporating women members in each programme either as member or head of the programme.
3. Women members will head of the Tube-well establishment committee. They will be member of any food, flood and disaster management committee.

With these measures of the government the elected women members feel a big relief and found specific job in the parishad of their own. Although there were limitations in the attitude of their male counterpart and know how of the female members too that hindrance true role and empowerment of the women at the union level.

Upazila Parishad

The Government of Sheikh Hasina reconstituted the Upazila Parishad under the Upazila Parishad Act. 1998. It was 3rd tier of the local government. The act was passed on 25th November, 1998. According to the provision of the Act the chairman of the Upazila Parishad would be elected on the basis of adult franchise. The chairman of the UPs and Municipalities under the Upazila would be its ex-official members. Three seats were reserved for the women. They would be elected by the women members of the UPs and Municipalities. The member of the parliament (MP) would act as the adviser of the parishad¹⁰³. The

government declared the date of election of the UZP several times, but the opposition parties did not participate. That is why the Parishads were not constituted according to the provision of the Act during this regime.

Zila Parishad

The fourth tier of the Local Government, introduced by the Awami League Government, was the Zilla Parishad. Provisions of reserve seats for women were mentioned in it. Although, introduction of Zilla Parishad was emphasized by law, it was no longer come true in effect during the government tenure.

Khaleda Zia Regime (2001-Onward)

From the very beginning the BNP government of Khaleda Zia is in favour of introducing the LSG (Local Self Government) unit at the village level. Prior to the election the BNP in its election manifesto (No. 3-6) incorporated that after going to the state power, the VG (village Government) would be introduced.¹⁰⁴ As the figurehead of the BNP government, in his inaugural speech before the 8th parliament on October 28, 2001, the President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed said that the VG should be introduced in the country¹⁰⁵.

The present government proposed four tier of local government system in Bangladesh like before except village level. Instead of VP they proposed Gram Sarker at village level. The proposed four-tier local government are as follows;

- i) Gram Sarker at the village level
- ii) Union Parishad at the union level
- iii) Upazilla Parishad at the Upazila level
- iv) Zila Parishad at the district level.

Zila Parishad

At the district (Zila) level there is a Zila Parishad, which at this moment consists of an executive secretariat with no elected members, though the fourth tier recommended by the local government commission was a locally elected Zila Parishad¹⁰⁶. In fact, despite a series of legislation, no election has so far been held. The latest law on this subject is the Zila Parishad act. 2000. Under this law the tenure of Zila Parishad is five years. The law does not contemplate a public servant taken over the functions until a succeeding ZP is in place. The provision in this regard is similar to the law applicable to a UP. An elected ZP can continue to function until the succeeding ZP holds its first meeting¹⁰⁷.

Upazilla Parishad

Though the present government is committed to reintroduce the Upazilla Parishad in the country but is still undecided on the face of the stiff resistance especially from the members of parliament (MP). It has also been reported that the cabinet is also divided on the question of reintroducing Upazilla Parishad System in the country.

Union Parishad

Present government proposed Union Parishad system like same the former Awami League (Sheikh Hasina) government. Recently the 7th Union Parishad election was held in this context. The condition of UP's like administration, management, official and service delivery system are so poor even the people don't have any connection with local representatives, which will facilitate people to obtain better services. That's why union Parishad is not able to play very effective role in the country.

Gram Sarker (Village Government)

The Gram Sarkar Act, 2003 has been passed for the creation of Gram Sarkar instead of previous Gram Parishad. This body has been created at the ward levels. Each Gram Sarker represents 1-2 village comprising of about 3,000 people on an average, The UP member elected from the ward acts as the chairman of the GS which has other members, both males and females, elected in a general meeting of the voters of the ward under the supervision of a 'prescribed/ directing authority'¹⁰⁸. There are defined functions of the GS and other functions may be assigned to it as may be specified by the government from time to time. GSs have the right to constitute issue based standing committees as and when required and to determine the membership of such committees¹⁰⁹.

Local Government at the Union Parishad Level at a Glance (Pre-British, British, Pakistan and Bangladesh Period).

Period	Act / Ordinance	Local government	Composition	Functions	Source of income
1. pre-British	Originated at their own, thus did not have legal basis	Panchayet at village level	Consisted of 5 persons	- law and order -resolving social disputes -development activities -education -health	-taxes (in cash or kind) -voluntary contribution
2. British	i. Bengal Village chowkidary Act. 1870	Chowkidari Panchayet at Union level	Five member Chowkidari Panchayet appointed by the District Magistrate	Only one function -law and order	Only one source Chowkidary rate
-do-	ii. Begal Local Self-government Act, 1885	Union Committee . But chowkidari Panchayet existed side by side	Consisted of 5-9 members elected by residents of the Union. Union Committee would elect chairman from among the members. The Lieutenant Governor was vested with the authority to establish Union	9 functions namely, -Maintenance and repair of village roads and bridges -Performance of responsibilities with regard to Pound as transferred under the Cattle Tressapass Act, 1871 -Primary education - Maintenance, Management and visiting of dispensary within the Union	2. Sources -Local rate or tax on holdings and land -Grant from local and Zila Boards

Period	Act / Ordinance	Local government	Composition	Functions	Source of income
-do-	iii. Bengal village Self-government Act, 1919	Union Board replacing chowkidari Panchayet and Union Committee	Consisted of 6-9 members- two thirds were elected and one third nominated by the District Magistrate- The members elected a President and a Vice-President and a Vice-President from among themselves	10 functions: -Supervision of Chowkidars -Health, Sanitation, Conservancy and Drainage -Cleansing of Unions -Control of erection of building -Water supply -Control of public roads, bridges and water ways -Award of stipend to student -Establishment and management of primary schools -supply of information as and when needed by the DB -Settlement of minor disputes	
3. Pakistan	Basic Democracies Order, 1959	The name of Union Board was changed to Union Council	Consisted of 10-15 members directly elected by people through ballots. The chairman was elected by the members from among themselves	37 functions divided into 6 categories -civic -police and security -revenue and general administration -national reconstruction -agricultural development -judicial	23 sources -taxes -rates- -fees -government -grant
4. Bangladesh	i. President Order No. 7, 1972	Only the name was changed from Union Council to Union panchayet	The UP was not reconstituted	Unchanged and remained as under BDO stated above	Unchanged and remained as under BDO stated above
	ii. President's Order No. 22 of 1973	The name of Union Panchayet was changed to Union Parishad	Union Parishad consisted of elected chairman and vice-chairman and 9 members-3 from each ward	-do-	-do-
	iii. Local Government Ordinance 1976	Union Parishad	Comprised of one chairmans, 9 members(3 from each ward) directly elected by the voters; two women members and two peasant members nominated by the SDO	40 functions. Only 3 functions were added to BDO. The new functions are: -promotion of family planning -management of environment -cattle pounds	28 sources under a joint schedule for Union Parishad and Zila parishad. Taxes, rates fees

Period	Act / Ordinance	Local government	Composition	Functions	Source of income
	iv. Local government (Union Parishads) Ordinance, 1983	Union Parishad	Consisted of a chairman, 9 members (3 from each ward) and three nominated women members (each from one ward)	11 compulsory and 38 optional functions Compulsory functions are related to : -law and order -preventing crime disorder and smuggling -development activities -family planning	5 sources -taxes on buildings and land -rate for village police -fees on birth, marriage and boats -community tax -fees for specific service -development scheme -generation of local resource -review of dev. activities -sanitary latrine -registration of births, deaths, blind people, beggars and desititutes -conducting census of all kinds
	v. The local government (Union Parishads) Amendment) Act 1993	Union Parishad	consisted of one chairman,9 members (3 elected from each ward) and three women members from three reserved seats elected by the chairman and members of UP	Unchanged and remained as above	6 sources besides government grant -union rate -tax on professions, trades and callings -tax on cinema, dramatic, theatrical shows and amusements -fees for licence and permits -least money from hats, bazars and ferries -1% share of land transfer tax
	vi. The local government (Union Parishads (Second Amendment) Act, 1997	Union Parishad	Consists of elected chairman and 9 members (from 9 wards) and 3 women members from reserved seats (each from 3 wards)	Unchanged as above. In addition, some orderly functions have been assigned such as -Old age allowance -Rural Maintenance Component -Block grant to TDCC -VGD -Rural physical infrastructure maintenance programme -Rural physical infrastructure improvement programme	Same as above

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CHAPTER -FOUR

THE PROFILE OF WOMEN MEMBERS

The Socio-economic background of an individual plays a significant role in shaping her/ his actions, attitudes, perceptions, preferences and decisions¹. Before understanding the process of political empowerment of women through Local Government, it is important to know the respondents' socio-economic background. Because it represents the socio-economic condition of the family and environment they have come from. It will also allow us to understand the extent to which their family surroundings helped them participate in local government politics². The assessment of the socio-economic background may provide a scope to compare the findings of other studies conducted previously. To describe the socio-economic background of the women members, relevant variables such as age, education, marital status, land, occupation, household size and income were considered.

Age Structure of Women Members

According to the Local Government Amendment Act 1993, a candidate for the membership of the UP must be at least twenty-five years old³. By analyzing the age structure of the WMs, it is found that they belong to different age groups ranging from 25 years to 51 years and above. It is important to note that no woman member was below 25 years of age compatible with the age bar set by the election law.

Table-4.1
Age-Structure of the Women Members

Age group (in years)	No. Of Respondents	Percentage
25-30	16	17.78
31-35	32	35.56
36-40	28	31.11
41-45	8	8.89
46-50	4	4.44
51 & above	2	2.22
Total	90	100

The table shows that the highest number of respondents, 32 (35.56%) were from the age group of 31-35 years. It is also found that 28(31.11%) respondents were young and belonged to the age group of 36-40 years. Other 16(17.78%) respondents found in the age group of 25-30. Only 2 (2.2%) respondents were found in the age group of 51 and above.

A similar study conducted by Julia Moin revealed that in the rural areas highest number of WMs of UP came from the age group of 31-35. However, the same study mentioned that the (36-40) age group carried out the highest number in case of urban local government institution (Pourashava). It is thus evident that representatives of the rural UPs are younger than those of urban LGIs⁴. May be this is the reflection that rural women are the new comers in local politics and majority of them do not have previous experience in this field.

Marital Status of the Women Members

Marital status is one of the important factors for the women participating in LGIs⁵. In the patriarchal society like ours, the identity of woman is usually determined firstly by her father and secondly by her husband⁶. Particularly,

unmarried women have to face social constraint to participate in UP activities as members⁷. So marital status have a significant importance for the mental as well as material support in women participation in LGIs. However, table-4.2 demonstrates the marital status of the respondents.

The table shows that the majority of the respondents i.e 75(83.33%) were married. Other 8(8.88%) were widowed whereas only 4(4.44%) were found divorced. It was found interesting that 2(2.22%) respondents were found unmarried. In our tradition bound society, women other than married had to face social problems to participate in politics.

Table-4.2
Marital Status of the Women Members

Marital Status	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Married	75	83.33
Widowed	8	8.88
Divorced	4	4.44
Unmarried	2	2.22
Separated	1	1.11
Total	90	100.00

Apart from this, it was found that almost all widowed respondents participated in the Local Government politics in place of their late husbands as their successors. The respondents of 'divorced' and 'separated' category were small in number as traditionally they had less acceptability in the society for becoming leaders.

It is clear from the table that the number of women representatives other than married are of worth mentioning i.e.15 (16.66%). A very similar result was found by Sawkat Ara Hussain. In her study, she said that those women came forward inspired by their families to break the social constraint and became

successful⁸. Another study of Mozammel Haque and K.M. Mohiuddin found one WM of UP who is separated from her husband, contested against her husband in the same constituency in a general seat and was elected⁹. This also indicates the changing traditional attitude towards the divorced and separated women of our society.

Educational Qualification of the Women Members

Education is one of the important factors for women empowerment in LGIs. It is only through education one can achieve the upliftment and betterment for oneself. Especially, literacy among women tends to develop their self-awareness and improve their analytical faculties, which may help them participate in political activities. Education of women can also be powerful source of social change and economic development¹⁰. It is expected that education help the women members of UPs understand the rules and regulations of the Union Parishad and participate in UP activities efficiently. It also develops one's capability to participate in decision-making process. The educational background of the women members of the UPs are presented in following table.

Table-4.3

Respondents' Level of Education

Level of Education	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Illiterate	-	-
Primary (I-V)	10	11.11
Secondary (VI-X)	40	44.44
S.S.C	33	36.66
H.S.C	4	4.44
Graduate	3	3.33
Post-graduate	00	00
Total	90	100.00

In table-4.3 we see that there was not a single respondent without formal education. Although there was no limit of educational qualification for the participants fixed by the government, but this finding tends to indicate that presently education is one of the major factors for women to participate in the LGIs. In this study it was found that all of the WMs were educated ranging from primary level to graduate level. The table shows that maximum 40 (44.44%) respondents had education up to the secondary level. It shows that 10 (11.11%) and 33 (36.66%) respondents respectively had Primary and S.S.C level of education. Only 7 (7.77%) in total completed H.S.C (4.44%) and graduation degrees (3.33%). No respondents were, however, found to have post graduation degrees.

It is learnt that common people are less likely to vote for illiterate women than educated one. The results of the vote thus show verdict in favour of secondary education and above. The clear majority of secondary education of the WMs reflects the socio-economic scenario of rural Bangladesh, where graduate and tertiary educated women still possess a small proportion of the population. One thing, however, is very important to note that the earlier study like Provat Chandra Biswas found that 13% WMs of UP had their S.S.C and only 2% of them had H.S.C¹¹. The present study, in this context found 37% WMs of UP to have their S.S.C and 4.44% to have H.S.C. This clearly shows increasing participation of educated women to come forward in local level politics and could be considered a very significant sign in women empowerment.

Occupation of the Women Members

Occupation may be considered as a major indicator of a person's economic condition¹². To assess the economic condition of the respondents, it is

important to know the occupations they are involved. In this connection, it may be mentioned that according to the provision of Local Government Ordinance, a person should be disqualified for election as a member if he/she holds any full time profitable appointment of the Republic or any other local authority including the concerned UP¹³. However it was found that a very few women members of LGIs were associated with services with paid salary, and most of them were involved with private and BRAC schools and other NGO activities.

Table-4.4

Occupation of the Women Members

Occupational Category	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
House-wife	54	58.88
Small scale business	18	21.11
Service	12	13.33
Tailoring	6	6.66
Mid-wife	00	00
Total	90	100

Table-4.4 demonstrates that, 54 (58.88%) respondents were found as housewives. Twelve (13.33%) respondents were engaged in services. It is important to note that they were found involved in some specific types of private services such as, different NGOs and teachers in NGO (BRAC, ASA, Proshika) directed schools. The table also shows that 18 (21.11%) respondents were involved in small-scale business. Some of them reported that they were associated with different NGOs and with the help of loan from those NGOs they carried out small scale business like livestock and poultry raising, vegetable

gardening, work of handicrafts, fabric and dying etc. Apart from this, 6(6.66%) respondents were found involved in tailoring.

In this connection it can be noted that an earlier study of Minhaz Uddin found the main occupation of the respondents were housewife. They took membership of the UP as their secondary occupation. He also mentioned that some respondents were employed in various occupations before being elected, but after becoming the members of UPs they gave up those occupations due to the paucity of time¹⁴.

Education and Occupation of the Women Members' Fathers and Husbands

To know the socio-economic background of the women participants of the LGIs, education and occupation of their fathers and husbands are important. Socio-economic position of the father and husband often determines support, guidance and help their daughters and wives for participating in politics¹⁵. Generally participants of the well educated families become more conscious, particularly in political field, than those of less educated families. Moreover, if the father or husband of the woman participant is well educated, it is expected that she will enjoy greater freedom of movement and she also receives encouragement and co-operation to take part in outdoor activities like social-welfare and politics¹⁶. However, table-4.5 is presented here to demonstrate the educational and occupational backgrounds of respondents' husbands.

Table- 4.5

Education and Occupation of the Women Members' Husbands

Level of education	No. of respondents	Types of Occupation					
		Business	Agriculture	Service	Doctor without medical degree	Tailor	unemployed
No formal education	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Primary (I-V)	4 (5.2%)	4 (5.2%)	-	-	-	-	-
Secondary (VI-X)	24 (32%)	10(13.3%)	11 (14.6%)	-	-	1(1.3%)	2(2.6%)
S.S.C	24 (32%)	3(4%)	12(16%)	6(8%)	3(4%)	-	-
H.S.C	11 (14.3%)	2 (2.6%)	5 (6.5%)	4 (5.2%)		-	-
Graduate	8 (10.4%)	-	1 (1.3%)	6 (7.8%)	1 (1.3%)	-	-
Post Graduate	4 (5.2%)	-	-	4 (5.2%)	-	-	-
Total	75 (100%)	19 (25%)	29 (38.6%)	20 (26%)	4 (5.2%)	1 (1.3%)	2 (2.6%)

Note: 75 respondents out of 90 were found married.

Table- 4.5 shows that the highest number of the respondents' husbands i.e. 24 (32%) attended the Secondary and S.S.C. level education each. In the third highest category, we find 11 (14.3%) having H.S.C. degree. Out of the total respondents' husbands only 8 (10.4%) found as graduates and 4(5.2%) as post-graduates. It is found that only a small percentage, i.e. 4 (5.2 %) of the respondents' husbands had primary education. Whereas respondents' husbands without formal education was not found. It is evident from the table that most of the respondents came from the educated families. Data from the table also shows the occupational pattern of the respondents' husbands who were involved in various types of occupation. Of them 29 (38.6%) were engaged basically in agriculture. This is quite natural in our country where agriculture is the primary occupation of the people, especially in rural areas. Apart from this, 19 (25%) and 20 (26%) were engaged in business and services respectively. A small proportion of them 4(5.2%) were engaged in occupations like Doctor (without

formal medical degrees) and Tailoring (1.3%). On the basis of education, the husbands, out of total 75 married respondents, 10 (13.33%) found involved in business, 11 (14.6%) in agriculture and only 1 (1.3%) in Tailoring having secondary level of education. Having H.S.C, Graduate and Post-Graduate degrees only 6(7.8%) were involved in agriculture. Whereas with the same degrees more involvement were found in business 2(2.6%) and in services 14(18.2%) than the agriculture.

The rest 15 respondents other than married were to have their guardians with secondary to S.S.C level education and agriculture as the main occupation. Among these respondents two were widows of two ex-UP-members. One respondent was daughter of an ex-chairman of the respective UP. Others were found to come from large agricultural families or from the rural influential *Matbor* families.

Pattern of Land Ownership

Bangladesh is an agro-based country. Most of the people of our country depend on agriculture, and accordingly land ownership determines the economic condition of rural people. We know that in Bangladesh land property is not equally distributed. Usually, land ownership is considered a crucial factor in gaining status and prominence in the village. Moreover, early study by A.H.M. Zehadul Karim, revealed that landed property is one of the main sources of power in the rural power structure. The agriculture-based occupation provides wider scope for becoming leaders in the rural power structure like *samaj* and Union Parishad¹⁷. So, it can be said that there is a traditional relation between land ownership and achievement of power/leadership. Information in this regard are shown in table-4.6.

Table-4.6
Land Ownership of the Women Members

Land-holding Categories (in acres)	Only Homestead Land	Homestead Plus Cultivable land	No. of total Households
Landless	-	-	-
0.01-2.00	4 (4.44%)	42 (46.66%)	46 (51.11%)
2.01-4.0	-	28 (31.11%)	28 (31.11%)
4.01-6.0	-	10 (11.11%)	10 (11.11%)
6.01-8.0	-	3 (3.33%)	3 (3.33%)
8.01-10.0	-	1 (1.11%)	1 (1.11%)
10.01 and above	-	2 (2.22%)	2 (2.22%)
Total	4 (4.44%)	86 (95.55%)	90 (100%)

The table highlights that out of 90 respondents' households 4 (4.44%) had only homestead land and 86 (95.55%) were found to own both homestead and cultivable land. No respondents' households were found to be in the landless category (who did not have either homestead or cultivable land). However, the 2003 UP election result reveals that 62 landless women were elected in the reserved seats across the country in the district of Pabna, Natore, Faridpur and Rajbari¹⁸. The table also shows that in the small land holding category of 0.00-2.0 acres of land, there were 46 (51.11%) of the respondents' households. A majority of these respondents, however, mentioned agriculture as their secondary sources of income along with services or business of their households. In 2.01-4.0 acres category, we found 28(31.11%) respondents households. They reported agriculture as main occupation of the households. For the medium holding categories of 4.01-6.0 acres and 6.01-8.0 acres of land we found 13 (14.44%) respondents in total. Only 3 (3.33%) respondents' households were found to have the cultivable land of 8.01-10.0 acres and above. Thus the table

implies that most of the respondents were from small and medium land-ownership class with logical financial solvency of their households.

Similar results were found in the study of S. Kumar Kundu. In his study he stated that most of the rural respondents were small holders (43%) with less than 2 acres of land, followed by the medium farmers (20%) ranging 2 acres to 6 acres of land. Only a few were elected from the landless class (3.5%). For the urban areas, he mentioned that land holding is not only the principal symbol of economic conditions. And some of the respondents were found to have business or services by which they could be considered as rich households¹⁹.

Type and Size of Household of the Women Members

There are two types of households: single and joint. A household is considered as single if it is constituted by husband, wife and their children. On the other hand, a household with other members in addition to the members of a single household is considered as joint household²⁰. When data collected it was found that around three-fourths of the total households of the respondents were single and rests were joint households. It was observed that the participation of women members in UP activities from single household was higher than that of joint household. To know the household size of the Women Members, information were collected are presented in Table-4.7.

Table-4.7

Number of Household Members of the Women Members

Household Members	No. of Respondents	Percentages (%)
2-3	8	8.88
4-5	58	64.44
6-7	25	27.78
8 and above	1	1.11
Total	90	100

It is clear from the table that the highest number of the respondents, i.e., 58 (64.44%) was found to be in the category of 4-5 members. The table further shows that 25(27.78%) respondents had the household consisting of 6-7 members. It was found that a very small percentage of the respondents had a larger household size of 8 and above members. However, the average household size of the women participants was 5.75, which is slightly higher than the national average of 5.6. On the basis of the data presented in table-4.7, it may be said that the respondents generally came from medium size households.

A recent study conducted by Md. Abdul Quddus found that the household size of WMs was 4.74 on the average, which was to some extent lower than the national average²¹.

Women Members' Self Income

Income plays a vital role in determining the socio-economic status of a person. Especially for the women, it is expected that income earning enhances their status in the households as well as in the society. Income earning brings economic independence, which develops the ability of decision-making power among the women. Therefore, economic independence may be considered as one of the major components of empowerment²². But it is very difficult to collect accurate data on income of the women. Generally, women do not keep records about their income and do not want to disclose it publicly to others. Respondents furnished data on income from their memories, which were not free from errors. However, attempts were made to minimize the errors by asking different cross-questions. In this section, income from different sources of a household like agriculture, service, business, poultry, vegetable gardening, handicrafts, honorarium as UP member etc and the money value of the goods were considered. Data regarding the Women Members' self-income are presented here in table-4.8.

Table-4.8
Women Members' Self Income

Self-Income	Number of Respondents	Percentages
Yes	66	74.44 %
No	24	26.66 %
Total	90	100 %

With respect to self-income, table 4.8 shows that out of total 90 respondents, majority of them i.e. 66 (74.44%) were found to have self-income. They mentioned their sources of income as small business, agriculture, poultry and services. While 24 (26.66%) were found as non-earning members. They mentioned their honorarium as UP member as their only source of earning.

Now, let us see the monthly income of the respondents. Accordingly, collected data in this field are presented in table 4.9.

Table-4.9
Monthly income of the Women Members

Monthly Income (in Taka)	Number of Respondents	Percentages (%)
Up to 500.0	-	-
Tk 501-1000	42	63.63
Tk 1001-2000	12	18.18
Tk 2001-3000	8	12.12
Tk 3001-4000	4	6.6
Tk 4000 and above	-	-
Total	66	100

Note : Out of 90, 66 WMs had self-income earnings.

Table- 4.9 demonstrates that majority of the respondents, i.e. 42 (63.63%) earned between TK 501-1000. Most of them mentioned their source of income as vegetable gardening, chicken rearing and sewing. The second highest number of the respondents i.e. 12 (18.18%) belonged to the income category of TK 1001-2000. Cow fattening, poultry raising, small-scale business and handicrafts were their sources of income they mentioned. Twelve respondents in total (18.18%) who mentioned their source of income as services like school teaching and NGO activities fell in the income categories of 2001-3000 (12.12 %) and 3001-4000 (6.66%) respectively. It is evident in the table that no respondent was found in the upper range of income category (Tk 4001 and above).

Md. Alek Uddin Sheikh, in his study, mentioned that in terms of income earning respondents of the urban LGIs were more advanced as compared to the rural respondents. Accordingly 72% WMs of the UPs were found to have self-income compared to 91% of urban respondents. This was because, he mentioned, the scope and opportunity of income earning activities were wider in the urban areas than the rural areas and the urban respondents utilized the opportunity²³.

Political Affiliation of the Women Members

Political affiliation and involvement in party politics of the WMs widen their knowledge and scope for outdoor socio-economic activities, meetings, procession and of course for participation and empowerment in local level politics²⁴. Furthermore, party politics often help them in building organizing capability needed for the leadership in UP activities. Here in table-4.10 political affiliation of WMs are given in this context.

Table-4.10

Political Affiliation of the Women Members

Political Party	No. of Respondents	Percentages (%)
B.N.P	24	26.66
Awami League	21	23.33
Jatiyo Party (Ershad)	6	6.66
Jamat-E-Islami	4	4.44
Others	-	-
Not revealed	35	38.88
Total	90	100.00

Although the election of the UP is held on non partisan basis majority of the WMs were found to have involved with the major political parties of the country. Among them 24 (26.66%) were mentioned to be involved with ruling B.N.P and 21(23.33%) with Awami League. A few respondents were affiliated with Jatiyo Party (6.66%) and Jamat (4.44%). However a significant number of respondents, i.e., 35 (38.88%) were not affiliated with any political parties. One thing is important to note that the WMs who involved with the political parties almost all of them were influenced by and belonged to the same as their male guardians.

In a recent study Mozammel Haque and K.M. Mohiuddin observed that out of total 35 respondents 20 WMs were involved with Awami League, 8 with B.N.P and the rests revealed no political connection. Among the 28 WMs politically involved 17 were influenced by their husbands and 8 by their fathers. More interestingly these 28 WMs were all involved with the political parties as their husbands/ fathers did²⁵.

Women Members' Exposure to Mass Media

Access to mass media like Radio, Television, News Paper help enhance consciousness of the WMs in line with women participation and empowerment in local level politics²⁶. Women representatives' exposure to mass media plays an evident role in increasing the level of participation of WMs in development activities of the UPs. Table-4.11 is presented here to discuss the media exposure of the WMs.

Table-4.11

Women Members' Exposure to Mass Media

Type of Mass Media	No. of Respondents	Percentages (%)
Television	72	80.00
Radio	10	11.11
News Paper	8	8.88
Total	90	100.00

When collecting data it was observed that majority of respondents i.e, 72(80%) had the habit of watching television routinely. However no respondent was found to have cable network. Ten (11.11%) respondents were reported to listen Radio and only 8(8.88%) read newspapers regularly. The respondents, who read newspapers, were found involved in services and they read newspaper at their offices only. Again out of these only 2 were found to have access with national dailies and others read the local dailies and weeklies.

A very similar study by M. Abdul Aziz observed that most of WMs watched television regularly. But their exposure to newspaper and radio were very little. Moreover she mentioned that those WMs who watched television

used to watch movies, dramas and musical programmes and were reluctant of news, education, health or development programmes in general²⁷.

This chapter on Socio- economic Profile of the Women Members of UPs provides us the information about their personal as well as household background to develop a comprehensive idea about them. Moreover, an attempt is made to show comparison of different earlier studies in this line with the findings of the present study. It is observed that women members' education and occupation status, political affiliation and socio- economic condition of their household critically influence their attitude towards their participation, performance and empowerment in UP activities.

End Notes

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CHAPTER-FIVE

POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

In this chapter I have discussed the nature of “Political Empowerment of Women”. In this respect I like to present different stages of women political participation, which help investigate the nature of political empowerment of women, i.e.

- i. The present situation of women.
- ii. Constitutional parameters and women political participation.
- iii. Women movement and women empowerment.
- iv. Women political participation in the national level and their empowerment.
- v. Women in cabinet.
- vi. Women in political leadership.
- vii. Women in local government (Union Parishad) politics.
- viii. Role performances and empowerment of women representatives of Union Parishad.

The Situation of Women in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, the fact that both the leaders of the Treasury Bench and the Opposition party in Parliament are women may project the impression of a rather progressive, mainstream role and position of women in this society. This could also very easily mislead one to believe that women have to a large extent achieved political empowerment. The realities of the situation of women in our country, however, speak quite to the contrary.¹

In Bangladesh almost half of the human resources are women. About 85 percent of them live in rural areas. The rural social structure is plagued with many problems, such as, illiteracy, unemployment, malnutrition and poverty². Socially women are deprived of their rights, in spite of constitutional guarantees of equal rights with man. They are totally dependent on male guardians having a low literacy rate (48%), as against man (55.6%)³. In the rural areas, literacy rate of women is about 10-12%⁴. Development indicators show that in many respects: social, economic, political, cultural and psychological-women are at the lowest level of development. The patriarchal social system and institutions of 'purdah,' child marriage and religious bindings place them in unequal and disadvantaged positions⁵.

The negative attitude towards women by the society along with other socio-cultural factors leads them to a cyclical dependence and subjugation⁶. In the modern world politics and statecraft are important areas of human activity. But in all societies, developed and developing, women political participation is relatively limited⁷. Politics as a way of life touches every aspect of state, economy and society⁸. Women participation in the political process is essential for their empowerment; their voice has to be heard at the decision-making level. Otherwise they will not get the share they need in employment, health, services, education and access to supportive institutions and services.

Constitutional Parameters and Women Political Participation

The constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh enumerates equal rights for all citizens in articles 27, 28 and 29. Article 27 states that, all citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law. Article 28 states that: (1) the State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. (2) Women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the State and public life. (3) No citizen shall, on

grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth be subjected to any disability, liability, restoration or condition with regard to access to any place of public entertainment or resort, or admission to any educational institution. (4) Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making special provision in favor of women or citizen or for the advancement of any backward section of citizens. Article 29 states that: (1) There shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in respect of employment or office in the service of the republic. (2) No citizen shall, no grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect of any employment or office in the service of the Republic⁹.

Thus, women are entitled to the fundamental rights of freedom of speech and expression, association and assembly, which form the basic of political activity in a civil society. As for the political representation of women, the constitution provides for representation in terms of equality with men to political and public representative institutions, such as the parliament and the local government bodies¹⁰. At the same time, in order to ensure a minimum representation of women on these institutions, the constitution provides the protection of reservation of seats. Under article 65 of the constitution, the Parliament or Jatiyo Sangsad consists of 300 members, who are directly elected on the basis of territorial representation¹¹. In addition, 30 seats were reserved for women to be elected according to law by the directly elected members of the parliament. The reservation provision ceased to be operative in December 1987, but was reenacted into the constitution in June 1990 by the Tenth Amendment. At present the 14th amendment of the constitution (2004) provides scope for 45 reserved seats for women. The constitution under article 9 declares that special representation be given in local government institution¹².

Women are entitled to vote for public representatives and in view of the reservation provisions for parliament and local government bodies enjoy “dual”

right of representation¹³. The constitution under article 10 enjoins upon the state to take steps to ensure participation of women in all spheres of national life. Under the composite article 28, the constitution declares that women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the state and of public life, and further states that nothing under the article would prevent the state from making special provision in favor of women or children or for the backward section of children¹⁴. Constitutional provisions thus tend to a proactive interpretation of the role of the state in ensuring women equality, while the standards of equality are measured in terms of those enjoyed by men. However, the Eighth Amendment of the constitution was passed in 1988, which declares Islam as the state religion of Bangladesh is viewed by women organizations generally as potentially circumscribing women equality of status in all spheres including public life¹⁵.

Women Movement and Political Empowerment

Women movement is an important factor for the political empowerment of women. Because demonstrations, meetings, movements, protests and rallies are indicators for exercising power. Women movement in the Third World is not something of imposition, but it has its independent history. In this regard women movement in Bangladesh has its own history. Here the women movement took an organized form where sometimes individuals played an important role and on some occasions the individual and organization mingled together to spearhead the movement¹⁶.

The history of women movement in Bangladesh is long enough. It originated from the autobiographical writings of Ram Sundari Devi, so to say. In the initial stage of the movement the individual mattered a lot. On that score, all women including the ones from the Tagore family, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, Pritilata, Sufia Kamal, and others come into the limelight.

The history of Bengali women movement shows that they participated in three types of Anti-British Movements. **First, the Congress Movement**-some of the prominent women leaders of this movement were Swarojini Naidu, Kadambini Devi, Swarna Kumari Devi, Ashalata Sen, Jotimoyee Ganguli, and others. The name of Swarojini Naidu comes forefront in this connection. She was considered as a political asset to her fellow leaders for her political wisdom and her continuous participation in Nationalist Movement of India¹⁷. However, in 1920, women's voluntary group was formed in Congress. The activists of this group conducted campaign, collected contribution for the party, called strikes, and by doing those activities they broke the traditional image of Bengali women.

Secondly, Guerilla Movement- Pritilata Waddedar, Kalpana Dutta, Leela Roy were the devoted leaders of this movement. Pritilata led the attack on Chittagong European Club, Kalpana Dutta jumped bail and disappeared underground with Surya Sen's band of absconders and Bina fired on the Bengal Governor Lord Anderson. They all were the full-fledged comrade-in-arms who participated in many aggressive activities against the British rule¹⁸.

Thirdly, The Leftist or Communist Movement- the famous leaders of this movement were Kanak Mukharjee, Santosh Kumari Devi, Begum Sakina Faruque, Ela Mitra whose contributions to the improvement of the working class will be remembered with due respect forever. Apart from this, women of this region helped the national movement activists by providing them food, shelter, money or ornaments, even weapons and also participated in processions and meetings¹⁹. Women's conscious involvement in the Language-Movement of 1952, ratification of Muslim Family Law of 1961, Mass-movement of 1969 demonstrated their active political participation. In the same way, women of Bangladesh spontaneously participated in the Liberation War of 1971²⁰. The contribution of brave freedom fighters such as, Rowshen Ara (who sacrificed her life in freedom fighting,) Zinnat Ara, Shirin Banu Mital, Selina Banu, Aktar

Parvin (Journalists), Dr. Sitara Bigum, Taraman Bibi and Meherunnessa are remembered by all²¹. After the Liberation War of 1971, the government of Bangladesh awarded Sitara Begum and Taramon Bibi as *Beer Prateek* for their direct participation and contribution to freedom fighting. Apart from this, the women of our country indirectly helped the freedom fighters by giving them support and fulfilling their necessary requirements according to their capability. The Bangladeshi women's direct and indirect contributions to the war of independence bear the testimony of their patriotism²².

In the post independence era, the women of the country also played remarkable roles in crisis moment. The top two women leaders in 1990 toppled autocratic government headed by General Ershad through mass-upsurge and opened path for democratic venture of the country. Different women associations vowed strongly during this time in achieving women's socio-economic and political rights²³. Such active roles and participation of all walks of women in the democratic movements helped significantly in women empowerment later.

Women Political Participation in the National Level and their Empowerment

Traditional norms of our society put great emphasis on the gender division of labour and therefore women are confined with domestic life. As women in Bangladesh, with the exception of a small minority, are generally confined to the household their presence in politics, which is considered a masculine public activity, is considerably small²⁴.

However, in the recent years, the declaration of 1975 as the International Women Year and the period between 1976-1985 as the Decade of Women by the United Nations and the demand by various women organizations of Bangladesh since independence brought about discernible changes in the attitude

of the government towards this issue. Programmes for women development have been launched by various government and non-government organizations during the Decade of Women to supplement earlier efforts²⁵.

The Constitution of Bangladesh has granted equal rights to men and women both in matters relating to the state and public life. The constitutional provisions (Articles 9-10, 27-28, 37-39, 50, 66 and 122) clearly state that steps should be taken to ensure participation of women in all spheres of national life.

Taking into consideration the disadvantageous position of women in society, the constitution provides some safeguards to ensure women representation in the national parliament. In the first national parliament of Bangladesh (Jatiyo Sangsad), with 300 general seats directly elected on the basis of single territorial constituency, reservation of 15 seats (5 percent of the directly elected seats) was made for women as per constitutional provision (Article 65(3))²⁶. But the reservation of seats for women in the Jatiyo Sangsad placed no bar for women willing to contest for the general seats from territorial constituencies.

Initially, a period of 10 years was fixed for the continuation of the system of reservation. But in 1978, through a presidential proclamation, the period for reservation was extended to 15 years and the number of reserved seats for women was raised to 30 (10 percent of the directly elected seats in the national parliament). The system was, however, interrupted in December 1987. Consequently, there was no provision for reserved women seats in the 1988 parliamentary election. But pressed by the strident demands of some women organizations the system was reinstated through the Tenth Amendment in 1990 and 30 seats were reserved for 10 years from the date of the first meeting of the next Parliament. Accordingly the system was interrupted in 2001 and there were no provisions for reserved seats for women at the present 8th parliament. However, the 14th amendment of the constitution was passed on May 2004 and

the number of women reserved seat has been raised from 30 to 45²⁷. Although the election process of these reserved seats is yet to be settled and the seats still remain vacant with about 1.5 years left of the parliament tenure.

Table-5.1

Number of General Seats Won by Women and Reserved Seats (for which women were nominated by the majority party) (1973-2001)

Years of election	Number of general seats won by women candidate	% of general seats	Reserved seats for women	Overall %
1973	0	0	15	4.8
1979(A)	0	0	30	9.0
1979(B)	0+2	0.7	30	9.7
1986(A)	5	1.7	30	10.6
1986(B)	3+2	1.7	30	10.6
1988	4	1.3	-	-
1991(A)	8	2.7	30	11.5
1991(B)	4+1	1.7	30	10.6
1996 (A)	11	3.7	30	12.5
1996(B)	5+2	2.7	30	11.2
2001(A)	13	4.3	Nil	4.3
2001(B)	6.+1	2.3	Nil	2.3

Source : Nari 'O' Unnayan, Women for Women, March-1995: 131; The Daily Star, November 2001.

Note: 'A' and 'B' represent General and Bi-election respectively.

In the Parliamentary election of 1973 and 1979 (A) some women candidates contested but nobody came out successful but in the election of 1979 (B) only 2 women candidates were elected in bi-election. In the election of 1986 (B) women won three seats in direct election and 2 other (Awami League) candidates came out successfully through bi-election. In the election of 1988, 4 women candidates were elected through direct polls but the system of reserved seats was inactive in that election.

In the 5th parliamentary election of 1991 (A), 8 general seats were won by women candidates. In that election Begum Khaleda Zia contested from 5 constituencies and came out successful in all cases. As a result members from four seats were to be elected through bi-election. B.N.P nominated 4 male candidates for these seats and Awami League nominated one female candidate, and as she failed 4 male members came out the bi-election.

In the 7th parliamentary election of 1996 different political parties gave nomination to 36 women candidates of which 5 came out successful in 11 seats. The women candidates had to compete with male candidates. Sheikh Hasina from Awami League won three seats and Begum Khaleda Zia won five seats. Moreover Begum Rowsan Ershad from (JP Ershad), Begum Motya Chowdhury from AL and Khurshid Jahan Haque from BNP were also elected. In 2001 election 6 women candidates were elected in 13 seats in the direct election and 1 in the bi-election. Khaleda Zia won 5 seats and had to leave 4 seats, Sheikh Hasina won 4 seats leaving 3 vacant and all seats went to the male members once again.

Women argued that their number in the parliament being very few and the system well controlled they had been ignored both in parliament and in public service. Not only that, the mode of their selection and the controlled nature of the political process prevented them from playing a significant role²⁸. As representatives of women, they were expected to focus attention on women issues and as representatives of their territorial electoral zones, they occasionally raised issues relating to administrative and development needs of the areas comprising their electoral zones. As practiced in the Parliament, women MPs participated in the parliamentary sessions through questions and budget discussions. But they had never been a very vocal or effective group in the parliament. Except in the case of 'Dowry Bill' raised in the second Jatiyo Sangshad, they could not raise any fundamental issue relating to women socio-economic situation²⁹. And in the 7th parliament a member of the ruling party tried to introduce a bill against polygamy. But she was not able to do so because

Directly elected MPs performed the role of an electoral college for the reserved seats in the parliament. There had been no effective and meaningful contest for these seats because the majority party in the Parliament monopolies these seats. But, at times, there were instances of the majority party sharing two or three such seats with minority parties as a strategy linked to its political expedience (Table-5.2).

But these seats have been found to be of lesser significance in comparison with the direct women seats³¹. One explanation is that women MPs in the direct seats stand on their own political/electoral strength while those in the reserved ones are dependent on their nominating mentors. Again, women MPs from the reserved seats do not have any linkage to the constituencies they are supposed to represent. Because the reserved seats more or less cover the geographic area of 10 general constituencies, and hence almost no scope for performing the role as political leader. In reality therefore, these women MPs end up being representatives representing none³². Due to the mode of election the system thus turned out to be a "Vote Bank" for the majority parliamentary party. The existing system of election raised serious questions about the effectiveness of women representation in Parliament³³.

So we can say that the existing selection system in women reserved seat in parliament and their role could not contribute effectively in empowering women. In this context all conscious women, NGOs working for women and various women organizations have been demanding that reserved seats for women be increased from 30 to 64 (for 64 districts) or 100 or even 150. Again in order to create effectiveness of the women parliamentarians' direct election is also demanded. But the 14th constitution amendment bill which was passed on May 16, 2004, has raised the number of women reserved seat from 30 to 45. Distribution of reserved seats among political parties according to the proportion of getting votes in general election is argued. Thus the demand for direct election in these seats is ignored once again, which is the key point for women empowerment the women leaders consider.

Women in the Cabinet

In terms of numbers, women have low visibility in policy-making positions at the highest level. This is indicative of women's relative lack of political power. As for the profile of women at the highest policy making level, it appears that women are segregated to ministries that are considered 'befitting' the perceived role of women in society. A kind of 'consideration' exists and women tend to get responsibilities for ministries that are low profile. Women ministers have been traditionally assigned to women and child affairs, culture, cooperative, health and family planning and so on³⁴.

Such powerlessness of women politicians demonstrate a correlation between the weak status of women in the political party, electoral constituency or parliament and even more weak representation in the council of ministers. As a result women have really an extremely limited role to play at the higher level of political, governmental or executive leadership³⁵.

There is a provision of selecting some persons as ministers called "Technocrat ministers" in the constitution of Bangladesh. This provision provides ample scope for the women required in the council of ministers³⁶. This is very unfortunate since women participation at the highest level could be enhanced by taking advantage of this constitutional provision. The constitutional provision for technocrat quota in the cabinet was first introduced under the Fourth Amendment of the constitution³⁷. But unfortunately not a single woman from the time of Late president Ziaur Rahman to the Prime Ministership of Khaleda Zia in 1991 was appointed from this quota in spite of the fact that there were plenty of qualified women technocrats in the country. In those days only the male technocrats were taken in the Ministry. The cabinets headed by Sheikh Hasina (1996-2001) and Khaleda Zia (2001 onward) included one cabinet and one state minister respectively from the technocrat. This proves that women were generally avoided from having a place in the highest decision making body.

Table No- 5.3

Women in the Cabinet and Their Percentage

Administration/ Government	Number of total Minister	Number of Women Minister	Percentage
Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (1972-1975)	50	2	4
Ziaur Rahman (1979-1982)	101	6	6
Hussain Md. Earshad (1982-1990)	133	4	3
Khaleda Zia (1991-1996)	39	3	5
Sheikh Hasina (1996-2001)	25	4	16
Khaleda Zia (2001 onward)	62	3	5

Source: Nari O Unnayan, Women for Women, March-1995, P. 135; The Daily Star, November 2001.

Table-5.3 shows that during the time of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (1972 to 1975) only 2 out of 50 ministers were women and the rate of women minister was 4%. Under the presidentship of Ziaur Rahman (1979-1982) only 6 (6%) out of 101 ministers were women. During the time of HM Ershad (1982-1990) only 4 out of 133 ministers were women and the rate than fell to 3% During the Prime Ministership of Begum Khaleda Zia (1991-96) the number of minister was 39 and 3 of them were women. At the time of Prime Minister Sheikh Hassina (1996-2001) only 4 women were taken as ministers in her cabinet of 25 and the rate of female minister was 16%. The present cabinet headed by Khaleda Zia has only 3 ministers (5%) including herself out of a cabinet jumbo of 62.

The male members often cite the existence of women leadership in the government and in the opposition in order to camouflage the minimal women representation in the highest decision-making body of the country³⁸.

In recent years in Bangladesh we find two women as the heads of two main political parties of the government alternately. These two women along with some others have proved that women are not less efficient in conducting a government and in exercising highest executive powers than the male persons.

Women in Political Leadership

Women may be involved with a political party as (a) member (b) party worker and (c) party leader³⁹. As a result of the non-availability of records, statistics relating to the number of women members of the various political parties are hard to come by. But information with regard to the participation of women at other levels is relatively less scarce. Information however indicates that participation of women at all the three levels mentioned above is highly unsatisfactory⁴⁰. Although, the numbers of women members and even women party workers have been steadily increasing over the years since independence, very few women could hold leadership position in the party hierarchy⁴¹.

Table No- 5.4

Women Members in the Central Committee in Different Political Parties

Political Party	Committee of Political Parties	Total Member	Women Member
B.N.P	National Standing Committee	15	1
	National Working Committee	261	11
AL	Presidium and Secretariat	13	3
	Working Committee	65	6
JP	National Standing Committee	30	1
	National Working Committee	151	4
Jammat-e-Islami	Mojlish-e-Sura	141	-
	Mojlish-e-Alema	24	-

Source: Nari O Unnayan, Women for Women, March-1995, P. 136; The Daily Star, November 2001.

Table-5.4 shows the position of women leaders in their respective parties. Each and every party forms some committees within itself for smooth running of all the party works. In this table we have tried to show the number of women members in each committee of the different political parties such as BNP, AL, JP (Ershad) and Jamat-E-Islami Bangladesh. This survey reveals that inclusion of women as committee members is a very low rate. In the committees of Jamat-E-Islami Bangladesh female members are not acceptable according to their party convention. Hence in the party administration also women are lagging behind. Though in recent years two women are seen as the heads of two main political parties due to special circumstances⁴².

Among the two top women leaders, Begum Khaleda Zia who had been a housewife and had no political involvement before she made a lateral entry into the party to assume the top leadership role. Sheikh Hasina was also a housewife but had some experience as a student leader in her university life. Begum Khaleda Zia is the widow of a former president of Bangladesh who was killed in an abortive coup and the other (Sheikh Hasina) is the daughter of the founder president of Bangladesh (also killed in a military coup)⁴³. These two top women leaders are serving as 'rolling points' of their very large party (composed of diverse political elements in the case of Bangladesh Nationalist Party). Also these parties have to depend on them to a great extent as the agent to mobilize the public opinion in favor of the party programs⁴⁴.

Observation and study findings reveal that women generally cannot go up the party hierarchical ladder in a 'reutilized' manner as a man generally can. However unfortunate and unjust it may seem, this is the real situation of women in Bangladesh politics.

Participation of Women in Local Government (Union Parishad) Institution in Bangladesh

Local government is a system of providing services and facilities of central government to the local people. From its representative character it is expected that participation of people's representatives should remain equal in proportion to male-female population. Being a part of human resource, equal women participation is necessary from the political point of view⁴⁵. But it is noticed that from the creation of local government, the males mostly dominate it. Women of our country were not even allowed to cast vote in election till 1956 when election was held on the basis of universal adult franchise for the first time⁴⁶. Prior to that, women could cast their votes in Calcutta Municipal election in 1923⁴⁷.

After the emergence of Bangladesh several local government elections were held but women participation as the candidates remained feeble⁴⁸. Therefore government took the initiative to reserve seats for women for enhancing their empowerment and participation in decision-making process. First step was taken by the government to ensure women participation in local government in 1976⁴⁹. Accordingly, government introduced the provision of reservation of two seats for women in each Union Parishad. Later the number of reserved seats was increased from two to three through the Local Government Ordinance of 1983⁵⁰. At present, one-third direct representation of women is ensured in all the Union Parishads since 1997.

Under the provision of reserved seats at present, opportunity is created for 13,452 women to actively participate in UP activities in Bangladesh. Table-5.5 shows that 13,452 seats are reserved in 4484 Union Parishads.

Table-5.5

Distribution of Women Reserved Seats in Union Parishad

Local Government Unit	Number of Unit	No. of reserved seats	Total number of reserved seats
Union Parishad	4484	03	13452

Source: The Daily Star, 7 October, 2003, P. 7.

From the history of women participation in Union Parishad in Bangladesh we see that the trend of women participation in general seats is limited. But data also shows that this trend is gradually increasing. After the emergence of Bangladesh, Union Parishad elections were held in 1973, 1977, 1984, 1988, 1992, 1997 and recently in January 2003. Data shows that only one woman was elected as a chairperson out of 4352 unions in the election of 1973. Four women were elected chairperson in 1977 election of 4451 UP⁵¹. It is found that in the election of 1984 and 1988, seven women were elected as chairperson in total (6+1). In 1992 out of 115 candidates for chairpersonship, 13 became elected. In this election 1135 contested for membership⁵². In 1993, 11 women came to the Union Parishads as chairperson through bi-election. Therefore, the number of women chairperson became 24 in the year 1993. It may be mentioned that out of total 1,14,699 candidates, 863 women contested in the Union Parishad election of 1988 and 1135 contested out of total 1,69,643 contestants in 1992, which constitutes 7 percent in each year⁵³. Moreover, the UP election of 1997 brought 20 women as chairperson and 101 as member in general seats, while 31 women won chairmen position in the 2003 election. Table-5.6 is presented here to show the trend of women participation in Union Parishads as elected chairperson.

Table-5.6

Women Participation in Union Parishads As Elected Chairpersons

Year of Election	Number of Union Parishads	No. of Elected Chairpersons
1973	4352	01
1977	4352	04
1984	4400	4+2*
1988	4401	01
1992-1993*	4450	13+11*=24
1997-1999*	4479	20+03*=23
2003	4484	31

Note: * Bi-election, Source: Qadir, 1996:59; Sangbad, March 30, 2003, P. 16.

After introducing the provision of women representation in reserved seats through direct elections, 13,437 women were elected as members in total 4479 Union Parishads in 1997⁵⁴. The Introduction of direct election has brought advancement in the way of women empowerment in UP. It is felt that women participation and representation in Local Government are both necessary and important. Hence, the provision and practice of direct election in reserved seats added a new dimension to women political participation and empowerment.

Role Performances and Empowerment of WMs of Union Parishads

Now we discuss the role performances of the women representatives and how their role performances enhanced their empowerment position and the women of the locality in general.

The mandate for elected women members of UPs may be considered as an important and positive step to gender empowerment in Local Governance⁵⁵. The women representatives have to perform manifold responsibilities as they

represent their respective localities. While participating in UP activities, they develop some qualities to accomplish the responsibilities properly. Awareness and capacity building, participation and control, skill development, ability to take decision, capacity to organize etc. are important to carry out the activities successfully⁵⁶. However, these are accepted as the major components of empowerment. In light of the aforesaid components some indicators are used here to understand the empowerment situation of the women representatives in the present study. Some of the important indicators in this context are: awareness about different committees of UPs, membership in different committees, role performances in meetings and roles in overall development of women.

Awareness about Standing Committees of Union Parishads

Standing committees play a key role in executing and implementing different activities for the proper maintenance of institutional functions. So, it is necessary for women representatives to be much aware about standing committees. In this regard information are shown in Table-5.7.

Table-5.7

Degree of Awareness of the WMs about the Standing Committees of UPs

Awareness	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Fully aware	43	47.77
Moderately aware	21	23.33
Not at all	26	28.88
Total	90	100

Table shows that almost half of the total respondents, i.e. 43 (47.77%) were fully aware of the standing committees. They said that they had adequate knowledge about the name and functions of the committees. The table also

shows that 21(23.33%) women representatives were found to be moderately aware of the standing committees, whereas 26 (28.88%) did not have any clear idea about this. The respondents having moderate idea reported that they knew only about those committees in which they had the memberships. On the other hand, the respondents without having awareness opined that although they participated in some meetings of different committees, they did not know the details about those committees. A similar fact is revealed in the study of Muffazzalul Huq. In his study the author mentioned that WMs of UP were increasingly demonstrated their awareness about the standing committees⁵⁷.

Membership of the WMs in Different Standing Committees of UPs

✓ To execute the overall functions of Union Parishads, there is a provision to constitute specific subject-related standing committees⁵⁸. There are twelve-standing committees in Union Parishads. According to article 21 of Local Government (Union Parishad) Act (Amendment) 1993, the standing committees are: Finance and Establishment, Education, Health and Family Planning, Audit and Accounts, Agriculture and Agro-related Development, Social Welfare, Cottage Industry and Co-operative, Women and Children Affairs, Fishery and Husbandry, Tree Plantation, Union Maintenance Programme and Mass Education.

✓ Apart from this, National Government has the authority to order the UPs to constitute any additional standing committee. Accordingly, at present nine additional standing committees are operating in Union Parishads⁵⁹. These are as follows: Violence on Women Resistance, Black Marketing Resistance, Forestation, Water Supply and Sanitation, *Hatt* and *Bazaar* (market) Maintenance, Union Tender Committee, Natural Disaster Maintenance, VGD Project Implementation, and Social Development.

However, as per Government rule, each elected woman will be a member of at least three standing committees and each of them will be the chairperson of at least one standing committee⁶⁰. Through the membership in these committees women representatives can integrate themselves in the mainstream of development activities of UPs.

Table-5.8

Membership of Women Members' in Different Standing Committees

Committees	Respondents (N=90)	Percentages (%)
Education	78	86.66
Violence on women resistance	46	51.11
Tree plantation	18	20
Relief distribution	16	17.77
Social welfare	14	15.55
Mass education	12	14.5
Health & family planning	10	11.11
<i>Hat/Bazaar/Mosque</i> maintenance	06	6.66
Black marketing resistance	05	5.55
Finance	03	3.33
Drug Control	03	3.33
Cottage industry & co-operative	02	2.22
None	00	00.00

Note: Multiple responses were considered.

In Table 5.8, we see that most of the respondents, that is, 78(86.66%) were the members of education committees (school committees). They reported that they had to monitor the functional and infrastructure maintenance of primary education, distribution of books and stipends provided by the government, taking necessary steps to observe national days etc. They also

attended the meetings of school committees and tried to participate in the educational development programme of their respective localities. In violence on women resistance committees, we find, 46(51.11%) respondents, who usually took the initiatives for help in oppressed women and gave them advice for availing legal aids. Sometimes they took the victims to the proper authorities for ensuring justice. They also reported that they participated in the *shalish* related to violence against women.

Besides these the respondents had the memberships in other committees as well like Relief Distribution (17.7%), Mass Education (14.5%), Social Welfare (15.55%) and Tree Plantation (20%). On the other hand they are almost absent in the committees related to financial functions such as, Finance and Establishment, Audit and Accounts, Agricultural Development etc. It was also found that a few respondents were given memberships in more than one committee at a time. A very recent study conducted by Almas Ali mentioned that WMs of UP were mostly included in Education, Health, Family Planning and Social Welfare. They were ignored in Finance and Relief committees⁶¹.

Attendance of Women Members in Meetings

According to the Local Government (Union Parishad) Ordinance 1983, all the business of Union Parishads shall be disposed of at its meetings or at the meetings of its committees⁶². Therefore the meetings of UPs are very important for the discussion and implementation of all the activities concerned. The meetings of UPs are of two types- monthly (general) meeting and special (emergency) meeting. General meetings are usually held at least once in a month on a fixed date⁶³. In order to hold the meeting presence of at least half of the total members is necessary. So, women representatives' participation in meeting is the first step for them to be active in Local Government development

activities. To prove working capability and accountability to the people women representatives should need to attend these meetings⁶⁴.

Table-5.9

Attendance of Women Members in Meetings

Types of Participation	No. of Respondents	Percentages (%)
Regular	82	91.11%
Irregular	8	8.88
Never Participated	-	-
Total	90	100

Table 5.9 shows that 82(91.11%) women members attended the meetings regularly. They said that they attended every general meeting date of which was fixed earlier. And in case of special meetings they always tried to attend the meetings after receiving notices. On the other hand only 8(8.88%) said that they could not attend meetings regularly because of various reasons such as non-receiving notices in due time, distance and lack of proper transport facilities etc. The study of Ahmed and Jahan also revealed regular attendance of WMs of UP in the meetings. They also mentioned that their irregular attendance were largely due to short or late notices for which they couldn't attend the meeting⁶⁵.

Involvement of Women Members in Food Assistance Projects

The Union Parishads are associated with the responsibilities of the implementation of various food-assisted projects within its jurisdiction. The most frequently occurring schemes undertaken by the Union Parishads are VGF and VGD projects, RMP (Regular Maintenance Projects) and FWP (Food for Work Programmes) for generating employment and income for disadvantaged women.

Table-5.10

Involvement of Women Members in Food Assistance Projects

Name of the project	Respondents (N=90)	Percentages (%)
VGD	60	66.66
VGF	60	66.66
PIC (FWP)	34	37.77
PIC (TR)	34	37.77
RMP	12	13.33
None	05	5.55

Note: Multiple responses were considered.

Table-5.10 shows that most of the women members of Union Parishads were involved in VGD and VGF activities where the number of respondents in each category was 60(66.66%). Again we see 34(37.77%) respondents were involved in PIC (Project Implementation Committee) of FWP and 34(37.77%) respondents in the project of TR (Test Relief), which was also implemented through PIC programme. In the food-assisted programme of RMP, 12(13.33%) respondents were involved. It is important to note that according to Local Government manual, in each PIC of FWP and TR, at least one woman member of Union Parishad should be included⁶⁶. If we see the membership in these two committees, it becomes clear that this provision is followed in almost every Union Parishad. Through participating in these projects women representatives have played a role for the betterment of the poor and disadvantaged women of their respective localities. Study conducted by Dr. Rowshan Qadir found that at least one woman member was involved in different food assisted projects. But she found a different situation in urban local government where more than fifty-percent respondents did not involved themselves in such projects⁶⁷.

Performances and Roles by the Women Members in the Meetings of UPs

It is generally observed that women have little access to decision-making process ranging from household level to national level. As the local representative women members can voice the demands and requirements of their respective localities on the priority basis in these meetings. Moreover, it may also be expected that the respondents had undergone the election process, which required them to be vocal and persuasive, and felt the need to utilize this opportunity by playing active role in the meetings. In this connection we can move to analyze the role and performances of women representatives through their participation in meetings which is shown in Table-5.11.

Table-5.11

Performances and Roles by the Women Members in the Meetings of UPs

Roles	Yes (%) (N=90)	No (%) (N=90)
Local problems identify and discuss	82 (91.11)	8 (8.88)
Participating in Planning and implementing development project	70 (77.77)	20 (22.22)
Ability to argue and encounter in the decision making process	62 (68.88)	28 31.11
Raising gender and development issue	32 (35.55)	58 64.44)
Pursue in undertaking development projects	16 (17.77)	74 (82.22)

Note: Multiple responses were considered.

Table-5.11 implies that 82(91.11%) women members discussed different local problems in the meetings. They said that by visiting their areas and communicating with people, they identified problems and requirements of the localities. Accordingly, they raised those issues in the meetings. Out of 90 respondents, only 16(17.77%) opined that they could pursue on undertaking development projects. It was however found that a large number of women representatives, i.e. 70(77.77%) could participate in discussion on planning and implementation of development projects. Again we see, only 32(35.55%) respondents could raise the problems of women development issues in the meetings. Almas Ali found very similar results in his study. He observed that about half of the elected WMs of UP projected problems of their own areas; insisted on the need for development works, advocated on issues for preferential treatment of the destitute women, resisted moves to bypass the women members and female issues, and participated in discussions on project planning and implementation. Nearly one fourth of the elected women members felt that they could play a very little role in the UP meetings⁶⁸.

Roles Performed by the WMs in Health Services and Family Planning

Usually representatives of UPs have ample scopes to perform some roles in community development. As a part of this, they can participate in the development of health and family planning services. Opinions were sought from the respondents about their role performances in health services and family planning in their localities which is shown in Table-5.12.

Table-5.12

Roles Performed by the WMs in Health Services and Family Planning

Roles	No. of Respondents	Percentages
Only awareness development in health services and family planning	42	46.66
Cannot perform any role in health services and family planning	30	33.33
Both awareness development and motivate adopting health services and family planning	18	20.00
Total	90	100.00

Table 5.12 shows that 42(46.66%) respondents played only the role of developing awareness. They reported that by communicating with the people they spelt out the facilities and usefulness of health and family planning services in view of creating consciousness. Again we see that 18(20.00%) respondents could play the role both of awareness building and motivating the people, especially women, in adopting health and family planning services. They expressed their views that they met the women and motivated them to adopt family planning devices, to use pure drinking water and sanitary latrine. It was found that 30(33.33%) respondents could not perform any role in this regard. Julia Moin, in her study observed that by communicating with the people WMs spelt out the facilities and usefulness of health and family planning services raising consciousness of the people. She concluded that respondent of the rural LGIs (UPs) were more active in motivating people for adopting health and family planning services and awareness development than the respondents of urban LGIs (Pourashova)⁶⁹.

Roles Performed by the WMs on Violence against Women

Generally women are considered as the vulnerable members in our society. Still they are oppressed and they often become victims of violence. Women members of UPs are the representatives of women of the society. So, it is expected that they should come forward to protest against violence on women. Table 5.13 is presented here to show how far they could play some roles in the issue of violence against women.

Table-5.13

Roles Performed by the WMs on Violence against Women

Roles	No. of Respondents	Percentages
Both awareness development and resistance against violence on women	54	60.00
Only awareness development against violence on women	28	31.11
Cannot perform any role at all	8	8.88
Total	90	100.00

Table-5.13 reveals that a good number of respondents, i.e. 54(60.00%) performed as per their capability in regard to violence against women by creating awareness and raising resistance. They said that they usually participated in *shalish* related to violence on women. If any woman becomes the victim of violence, they were taken to the proper authority or court by the respondents for legal aid. Again 28(31.11%) respondents were found contributing only to the awareness development against violence on women. Only 8(8.88%) respondents said that they couldn't perform any role at all in this regard. Study findings of Dr. Rowshan Qadir also revealed that WMs had contributed significantly in social awareness building to resist violence against women specially in the family levels and for the working women⁷⁰.

Opinion of the Women Members about Election Promises

At the time of conducting election campaign, to get support, women representatives made some promises to the voters to get popular support. They also assured that after becoming elected they would try to fulfill those promises according to their ability. But it is learnt that they could not able to keep their words after being elected for various reasons. This is shown in the table-5.14.

Table-5.14

Opinions of the WMs about the Fulfillment of the Election Promises

Opinions	Respondents	Percentages
Could partially fulfil	44	48.88
Could not fulfil	29	32.22
Did not promise	15	16.66
Could fulfil	2	2.22
Total	90	100

Table 5.14 shows that most of the respondent i.e. 44(48.88%) could partially keep their election promises. They reported that they could manage to provide allowances to the widow and aged persons, distribute VGD & VGF cards, setting tube wells for drinking water and so on. But they could not meet the demand according to local needs. On the other hand, 29 (32.22%) respondent could not fulfill their promises and only 2(2.22%) women representatives could fulfill their election promises properly.

However, some reasons were found for not fulfilling or partial fulfillment of the promises which are presented in Table-5.15.

Table-5.15

Reasons for not fulfilling of Election Promises By the WMs

Reasons	Respondents	Percentages
Males' control and dominance over the resources	48	65.75
Non-cooperation from the chairman and male members in fulfilling promises	10	13.69
Lack of awareness about development projects	8	10.95
Lack of resources	7	9.58
Total	73	100

Note : Out of 90, 73 respondents made promises and fulfill partially.

The table shows that majority of the women representatives, i.e 48 (65.75%) thought that they could not fulfill their election promises because of the males' control and dominance over the resources. They reported that women members did not get the share of development projects and other activities in proportionate to their male counterparts. Beside this, 10(13.69%) said that they could not keep their promises because of non-cooperation from the chairman and male members. The respondent complained that they always ignored them and did not evaluate their capabilities. A significant number of respondents (21%) said that they could not keep their words due to lack of awareness about development projects (10.95%) and lack of resources (9.58%). They reported that they had to face many unfavorable situations for not fulfilling their election promises. These create a kind of negative impression among the voters.

Various studies conducted by Alek Uddin Sheikh and Julia Moin also found election promises of WMs as moderately fulfilled. Alek Sheikh mentioned that limited resources and non-inclusion of the WMs in the finance committees were responsible for not fulfilling their election pledges⁷¹. Julia Moin stated that

the direct opposition from the male members and often chairman as well as sometimes their lack of awareness was also responsible to significant extent for not fulfilling their election promises⁷².

Necessity of Receiving Training for the Women Members

Training is considered as one of the major pre-requisites for capacity building of the members of LGIs⁷³. It makes women members efficient and conscious about their duties, responsibilities and also women rights. However, the respondents were questioned about the necessity and receiving any training after becoming elected, which is shown in Table-5.16.

Table-5.16

Opinions of the Women Members about Receiving Training

Opinion	Necessity of Receiving Training		Received Training	
	Respondents	Percentages	Respondents	Percentages
Yes	90	100	90	100
No	0	0	0	0

Table 5.16 shows that all the women representatives of Union Parishads considered training as necessary and they received training on different subjects. All of them attended one or two days training programmes on empowerment of women, UP activities and other important issues arranged by the NGOs and local Thana/Upazila Parisahds.

It is important to mention that the areas in which the women representatives received training were: responsibilities of LGIs, mother and

childcare, violence against women, health and family planning, empowerment of women, community development etc.

Table-5.17

Opinion of the Women Members Regarding the Usefulness of Training

Indicators	No. of Respondent (N=90)	Percentage
Conceptualizing various issues and functions of LGI	72	80
Develops knowledge on the roles and responsibilities of the women representatives	69	76.66
Motivation in pro-people initiatives	58	64.44
Learning about the nature of women repression and deprivation	56	62.22
Encourage collective action against women repression and injustice	42	46.66
Develop skills to raise people's voice on their rights and responsibility	32	35.55
Total	90	100

Note: Multiple responses were considered.

The table shows that about fourth-fifths of the respondents 72(80%) believed that training could contribute in developing knowledge and concepts about the roles and functions of the union parishads and 69(76.66%) considered training to develop knowledge for themselves. More than sixty percent (64.44%) of the women representatives considered training to boost motivation to working for the people, whereas learning about women repression and deprivation was 56(62.22%). However one thing is not clear interestingly, the percentage consideration of the respondents regarding their collective voice raising against women repression and raising people's voice about their right were fewer: 42(46.66%) and 32(35.55%) respectively, much lower than that of their learning

about women repression or of their roles. Study conducted by Alek Uddin Sheikh stated that all of the respondents considered training to develop knowledge of the WMs about their institutional roles and responsibilities and also to develop courage to protest against injustice⁷⁴.

Women participation in political process in general and at the lowest level of rural local bodies (UPs) in particular has been discussed in this chapter. The constitution and ordinance have given woman the status and position of a citizen like a man. But in reality they have not been able to perform their responsibilities due to some socio-cultural and financial hindrances. In spite of the constraints women are found to be potential contributors to the organizational development in the local government bodies. If they are provided with adequate training opportunities and resources, and male members expand their hands of cooperation, they would be able to contribute to the development of socio-economic conditions of the community and at the same time be able to ensure their political empowerment.

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CHAPTER-SIX

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM IN BANGLADESH

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to discuss various problems and prospects of women empowerment in Local Government Institutions (LGIs). Women in our country, with the exception of a small minority, are generally confined to the household; their presence in politics is considerably small¹. Similarly, participation and empowerment of women in LGIs in the grass root level is a recent phenomenon in our country. It has already been mentioned that women have got the opportunity to participate in LGIs through direct election in reserved seats in the year 1997 for the first time. Consequently, some changes may have taken place in the pattern of the traditional participation in LGIs. The women, who had participated in Local Government electoral politics, experienced many new situations and challenges as they passed through the process of election. It is important to know different aspects of the situations they had confronted. Effort is made in this chapter to explore this issue along with the prospects of women empowerment in the local government political sphere.

Difficulties Faced by the WMs to Perform Union Parishad Activities

The elected women members of UPs faced different problems at the time of accomplishing the institutional responsibilities. The problems stated by the respondents are presented in Table-6.1.

Table-6.1**Difficulties Faced by the WMs to Perform Union Parishad Activities**

Difficulties Faced	No. of Respondents (N=90)	Percentage
Women representatives' opinions are neglected	82	91.11
Non co-operation from male members	75	83.33
Women representatives' are not included proportionately in development activities as compared to male members	74	82.22
Difficulties in understanding the nature of work	68	75.56
Lack of financial facilities	57	63.33
Lack of transport facilities	32	35.56

Note: Multiple responses were considered.

The Table shows that out of total 90, 82(91.11%) respondents said that their opinions were neglected by the male members and chairmen and often excluded from the developmental activities. According to them, as a result of this, they couldn't contribute to the development of their localities. Seventy five (83.33%) respondents reported that they faced difficulties because the male members did not co-operate with them. Women members mentioned that they were new-comers in the LGIs. They considered that the experienced male members could cooperate them more seriously. And this could help the WMs effectively perform in the UP activities. Apart from this 74 (82.22%) WMs complained that they were not included proportionately in development activities. Male members belonged in such important committees and they tried to include women members in other committees according to their will. Beside this, 68(75.56%) respondents mentioned that lack of specific instruction about women responsibilities in LGIs. Consequently, they did not understand the

nature of work or activities and for that they could not perform their duties properly. It is also seen in the table that 57(63.33%) and 32 (35.56%) respondents mentioned to face the problems of financial and transport facilities respectively. They opined that there were no transport facilities for the WMs and that is why they couldn't take part with the development activities in comparison with the male members. There were no provisions for TA and DA for attending these types of activities.

A similar result was found in the study by Abeda Sultana. She mentioned that lack of specific instruction about WM's responsibilities in LGIs created problems for them to participate in development activities. She also mentioned that the chairmen and male members showed the excuses that government did not allot any specific work for women members. So they included the women members in different committees according to their will. Moreover, the respondents of her study also reported that each of them was elected from three wards in reserved seats whereas from these three wards three other male members were elected in general seats, which created problem in allotting the project responsibilities².

Problems Faced by the Women Members for Participation in Politics

The constitution of Bangladesh provides equal rights to women like as men in all spheres of life. But political awareness, consciousness and participation had not inculcated among women both at national and local levels due to socio-cultural situation of the country. In fact, the problems of women participation are more of structural than organizational. These are widespread illiteracy, confinement in households' work, old tradition of subordinate role, religious and cultural factors and lack of training and motivational facilities³. Moreover unequal accesses to economic sphere along with educational and skill-training facilities keep women economically dependent on men, which limit

their free participation in politics⁴. Now we underscore the barriers for women to participate in politics as identified by the respondents. The information in this regard are presented in Table-6.2.

Table-6.2

Problems Faced by the Women Members for Participation in Politics

Problems Faced	No. of Respondents (N=90)	Percentage
Financial inability/ dependency	66	73.33
Lack of social security	61	67.78
Backwardness in education	58	64.44
Males' negative attitude towards women participation in politics	54	60
Religious and social restriction	43	47.78
Lack of experience	38	42.22
Lack of social acceptability	36	40
Lack of confidence by the local elites on women	34	37.78
Family restriction	30	33.33

Note: Multiple responses were considered.

According to the table 66 (73.33%) respondents reported that they had to face financial problems to participate in politics. Most of the women members were dependent on their husbands or household heads in respect to financial decisions or financial assistance. Lacking financial independence, WMs reported, they rarely had any say in the family decisions. They also suffered from outside mobility due to financial constraints, which they considered as a major problem for participation in politics. Sixty-one (67.78%) respondents opined that they faced security problems to involve themselves in politics. WMs mentioned that they had to spent a long time even at night at the UP activities,

specially in meetings, judicial trial, development works follow-up etc. They had to accompany with the male members of the family, otherwise had to leave these activities on security concerns. Apart from this 58(64.44%) respondents said backwardness in education as another important obstacle for participation in politics. Other important problems identified by them were lack of social acceptability 36(40%), religious and social restrictions 43(47.78%), lack of confidence by local elite on women 34(37.78%) and family restriction 30(33.33%) as the hindrances of women empowerment. In addition to that some respondents 38(42.22%) thought that lack of experience and 54(60%) mentioned males' negative attitude hampered women participation in politics.

A recent study conducted by Md. Abdul Quddus and others found similar results in their study. In their study they mentioned that the males' negative attitude towards women participation in politics appeared as an important obstacle. They also observed that lack of family support and experience hampered women participation in politics. Moreover the respondents of their study did not think that religious restriction created any major problem in women political participation⁵.

Problems Faced by the Women Members during Election Campaign

To participate in electoral politics, the respondents had to take part in election campaign. They also had to adopt different strategies in election campaigning for creating public opinion in their favour. As this task was almost new for them, it is important to know whether the respondents faced any problem at the time of conducting election campaign, which needs to be investigated. Respondent's opinion in this regard is presented in Table-6.3.

Table-6.3

Problems Faced by the Women Members during Election Campaign

Types of Problem	No. of Respondents (N=90)	Percentage
Large territorial constituency	68	75.55
Financial Problem	58	64.44
Lack of transport facilities	28	31.11
Problem of religious restriction	18	20.00
Lack of security	16	17.77
Did not face problem	-	-

Note: Multiple responses were considered.

Table-6.3 demonstrates that most respondents, i.e., 68(75.55%) faced problems in conducting election campaign of a large constituency. Each of them contested from three wards and accordingly, they had to cover a vast constituency thereby. In this case lack of adequate transport facilities created lot of difficulties for them. Twenty-eight (31.11%) respondents mentioned that transport was one of the major problems they faced. The second most problem the WMs, i.e. 58 (64.44%), mentioned was financial problem for election campaign. Most of the WMs had little self-income of their own. Thereby they had to depend on the income of their husbands or family members. We found 18(20%) respondents who mentioned that they faced the problem of religious restriction. This trend was observed within the rural social and family structure or family kinship of the respondents. Due to lack of security 16(17.77%) respondents felt problem at the time of participating election campaign, specialty at night. However no respondent was found to mention no problem in election campaign, she faced.

A similar study by Julia Moin revealed that 25% WMs reported to face the problem of transport facility during election campaign. Some of her respondents i.e. (22%), felt problem in covering vast territorial constituency within a limited time. A few respondent i.e. (15%) mentioned religious restrictions and beliefs that created obstacles in their election campaign⁶.

Male Representatives' Behaviour Patterns to the Women Members

As both male and female representatives of UPs are elected through universal adult franchise, they have the equal status and rights in the institutions. But in reality, women are always deprived of their rights. They cannot perform their duties equally due to interference of their male counterparts. An attempt is made to know the behaviour pattern of the male members towards the women members. For our better understanding following table may be considered.

Table-6.4

Male Representatives' Behaviour Patterns to the Women Members

Opinion	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Considered women representatives as incapable	48	53.33
Considered women representatives as ornamental members of Ups	18	20
Unpleasant behaviour	16	17.77
Respectful behaviour	8	8.88
Total	90	100

Table-6.4 depicts that out of total 90, only 8(8.88%) women members said that they received respectful behaviour from their male colleagues. They (males) also helped them in performing institutional duties. On the other hand

16(17.77%) respondents opined that the male members showed unpleasant behaviour to them. They reported that sometimes the male members created hasty situations when they protested against the violation of their rights. However it was found that more than half of the women representatives i.e. 48 (53.33%), expressed their views that the male members, who treated the female representatives as incapable members of the institutions, neglected them. The male members tend to feel that WMs were not fit enough for handling the responsibilities, especially in the development projects of LGIs. Moreover 18 (20%) respondents expressed that they were treated as only the ornamental members of the institutions.

Similar observations were made by Ahmed and Jahan regarding male members' non-cooperative behaviour. They observed that the male members were not mentally prepared to accept the WMs as their colleagues and share with them the responsibilities with respect⁷.

Discrimination Against WMs in Participation of UP Activities

Majority of Bangladeshi women are yet able to participate in politics and socio-cultural and development activities of the country. Discrimination against women remains in all spheres of activities. In this section attempt is made to analyze the extent and type of discrimination done against the WMs of UPs.

Table-6.5

Discrimination Against WMs in Participation of UP Activities

Opinion	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Felt discriminated	76	84.44
Did not feel discriminated	6	6.67
Can't comment	8	8.89
Total	90	100

Table-6.5 reveals that the majority of the respondents, i.e. 76(84.44%) felt that they were discriminated. The respondents viewed that as they had come through direct election, they had equal right to participate in performing institutional activities with the male members. But in reality, they did not get equal opportunity to shoulder the responsibilities of UPs and felt discriminated. On the other hand 6(6.67%) respondents said that they did not fell discriminated and 8(8.89%) respondents did not comment about this matter.

However, the types of discrimination mentioned by the respondents are shown in Table-6.6.

Table-6.6
Types of Gender Discrimination Faced by the Respondents

Types of Discrimination	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Responsibility was not given to the women members for distributing relief materials	73	96
They were neglected as women	72	94.74
Project responsibility was not given	71	93.42
Honorarium was not paid regularly	64	84.2
Excluded from discussion and decision making process	60	78.95
Notice about meeting was not given properly	38	50

Note: N= 76, Multiple responses were considered.

The table demonstrates that out of total 76 (84.44%) respondents who felt discriminated, 72(94.74%) found themselves discriminated in terms of unequal status as compared to their male counterparts. They reported that the male members did not value their opinions and always neglected them as women. Sixty-four (84.2%) respondents opined that they were discriminated in terms of

irregular payment of honorarium whereas their male counterparts got it regularly. They also reported that they did not receive their honorarium in due time and some time they got less than the sanctioned amount. Sixty (78.95%) respondents opined that they were excluded from the discussion and decision making process. Most of the important decisions were taken by the chairmen and elected male members and only signatures were taken from the WMs. Thirty-eight (50%) respondents also opined that they were not properly informed about the meetings. Besides this 71(93.42%) respondents mentioned about the unequal distribution of project responsibility of UP activities. They said that important project responsibility was given to the male members. Seventy three (96%) respondents said that WMs were not given the responsibility of relief distribution in most of the cases. As a result they couldn't help and stay aside with the local people in times of disaster and natural calamities. This ultimately undermined their position to the local people comparing their male counterparts.

Study conducted by Md. Abdul Quddus and others also found similar types of discrimination against WMs of UPs. In their study, they mentioned that around two-thirds of the total WMs were discriminated from male members of the UP. The women members of their study opined that they were excluded from the decision making process. Most of the important decisions were taken by the chairmen and elected male members. Only signatures were taken from the women members. The respondents also opined that they were not properly informed about the meetings. They mentioned about the unequal distribution of responsibility of UP activities. Important project responsibility was given to the male members. In most of the cases women members were not given the responsibility of relief distribution. The important causes of such type of discrimination were that the women members had lack of education, knowledge, skill and management expertise⁸.

Problems in Attending Meetings

Attendance in the meeting is not only an important indicator of active participation but also a forum to discuss on development activities and decision-making. However elected women members gave several reasons for non-attendance in the UP meetings. These are summarized in table-6.7.

Table-6.7

Problems in Attending Meetings

Indicators	No. of Respondents (N=90)	Percentage
Frustration as their views are ignored	44	48.88
Late or short notice	32	35.55
Distance & Security	18	20
Communication	12	13.33
No problem	6	6.66

Note: Multiple responses were considered.

Table-6.7 shows that the most common barrier the WMs mentioned, i.e. 44(48.88%) for non-attendance in meetings was their frustration as their views were ignored in the meetings. They responded that their male colleagues and chairmen seldom respect their views and opinions in the meetings. As a result they considered meetings as mere waste of time and felt discouraged in attending such meeting. Again 32(35.55%) WMs stated that they could not attend meetings regularly due to short or late notice of the meetings. They alleged that sometime they were deliberately being informed so late and couldn't attend meetings. Eighteen (20%) respondents considered distance and security while 12(13.33%) mentioned communication barrier in attending meetings. There was no TA or DA for attending meetings they mentioned. There were, however 6(6.66%) respondents who did not find any problem in attending meetings.

Study conducted by Almas Ali also underscored a very similar result. He mentioned that the most common barriers were the distance of the UP and insecurity during their travels. Because most of the meetings were held in the afternoon or in the evening. Furthermore no public transport was available and no financial remuneration was provided to support the transport cost. Some of the WMs reported that they were not notified in time and some voiced frustrations that no attention was paid to their comments anyway⁹.

Ability to Express Opinions in the Meetings of Women Members

Ability to express their own opinions may be considered as one of the important indicators of women empowerment¹⁰. The male members are elected from one ward but each of the women members are elected from three wards. Therefore logically they have more rights to express their opinions in the meetings as compared to male members of LGIs. But in reality, it is observed that women members' opinions were not generally taken into consideration by the male members. Women members of LGIs were nominated by the male members before 1997 and accordingly their status was dependent. As they are directly elected since 1997, they should overcome the dependent status and are supposed to have the right to exercise their freedom of expressing opinions. However, to what extent they were able to express their opinions in meetings is shown in Table-6.8.

Table-6.8

Ability to Express Opinions in the Meetings by Women Members

Opinion	No. of Respondent	Percentage
Can partially express	40	44.44
Can express	26	28.88
Cannot express at all	24	26.66
Total	90	100

Table-6.8 reveals that only 26(28.88%) respondents could express their opinions equally with the males in the meetings. It is also found that 40(44.44%) opined that they could not express their opinions equally. In most of the cases they confronted opposition from the male members. Their opinions were neglected but they tried their best to give opinions. On the other hand 24(26.66%) respondents opined that they could not express their opinions at all. They attended meetings and sat silently where they did not have any task except listening to other's discussion.

Study conducted by Sabina Aktar also presented that women representatives of her study areas did not have the ability to express their opinions equally in the meetings of LGIs as compared to their male counterparts, which she considered as the major constraint in women empowerment in the LGIs¹¹.

Women Members' Opinions in Meetings: Honoured or Not

Women members' opinions on different issues in the meetings bear the testimony to the reflection of majority people's opinions of their localities. In this section, attempt has been made to show the extent to which women representatives' opinions expressed in different meetings were honored by the male members of LGIs, which may indicate their empowerment position in the LGIs. Information regarding this issue are shown in Table-6.9.

Table-6.9

WMs' Opinions in Meetings: Honoured or Not

Opinion	No. of Respondent	Percentage
Regularly honoured	-	-
Some times honoured	14	21.21
Not at all	52	78.78
Total	66	100

Note: Out of 90, 66 respondents can express opinions equally or partially.

Table-6.9 indicates that out of 66 respondents, the majority, i.e. 52(78.78%) opined that their opinions were not honoured in the meetings. They reported that they expressed their opinions whenever needed but were always neglected. A very tiny portion, i.e. 14(21.21%) respondents reported that their opinions were sometimes honoured. The like as picture was sketched by Kshitish Chandra Kundu stating the negative attitude of the male counterparts in honouring WMs views and opinions in the meetings¹².

Suggested Recommendations by the WMs for Effective Participation in UP Activities:

In order to increase women participation in almost all spheres of public life, various initiatives should be taken to involve them into the decision making process from grass root level, which may be considered as the first and foremost step for women empowerment. To develop political awareness and consciousness women should be involved in social, economic and political activities in the local as well as national levels¹³. However, as the women representatives have already participated in LGIs and also have experiences about existing problems, it may be expected that they are in a position to identify the difficulties and to suggest remedies. Some suggestions given by the women representatives are presented in table 6.10.

Table-6.10

Suggested Recommendations by the WMs for Effective Participation in UP Activities.

Suggested Recommendations	No of Respondent (N=90)	Percentage
Training should be provided to women about functions and management of UP	78	86.67
Specific and written orders should be promulgated about the responsibilities of the women representatives	74	82.22
Chairman and male members of UP should be more co-operative with women members	71	78.89
Honorarium of the women representatives should be increased	69	76.67
Equal distribution of the projects to both male and female representatives	68	75.56
Women rights should be ensured through development of social awareness	66	73.33
Administrative assistance should be provided for women participation	62	68.89
Income generating programmes should be initiated for women	56	62.22
Initiatives should be taken for the upliftment of female education	54	60
Mass media education programmes to be adopted to enhance knowledge of women	46	51.11

Note: Multiple responses were considered.

Table shows that 78 (86.67%) respondents mentioned the need of training that could help women members to accumulate knowledge about the functions and management of UP. Majority of the WMs reported that they were first timers in the local level politics and had no previous experiences about the functions of LGIs. As a result they desperately needed training about the

functions and management of UPs. Sixty-eight (75.56%) respondents recommended equal distribution of project responsibilities to both male and female members and 74(82.22%) suggested the need of specific and written orders should be promulgated about the responsibilities of the women members. Women members complained that they were neglected and deprived from the projects like financial and development activities, relief works and disaster management by their male colleagues and chairmen. They were very often included in the low profit projects like primary and mass education, vaccination, tree plantation etc. However government has promulgated Local Government (Union Parishad) (Amendment) Act 1998. Accordingly, each elected WM will be a member of at least three standing committees and each of them will be the chairperson of at least one standing committee. Although WMs were included in different committees they reported that their voices were ignored by the male members and chairmen very often. They argued thereby to specify their functions and responsibilities with appropriate legal shield. Among the respondents 69(76.67%) recommended the enhancement of their honorarium for their effective participation in UP. Almost all of WMs considered their present honorarium as UP members insufficient to carry out responsibilities properly. Some of the respondents mentioned that they had to quit their previous jobs and business due to paucity of time, as the UP activities require active participation and involvement. This led to income pressure for their household for which they could not perform their duties in UP meaningfully. Women members recommended that their honorarium to be raised to as much as 3000 tk. per month. Majority of them argued for TA and DA in attending UP meetings. Seventy-one (78.89%) respondents mentioned that male members' cooperation was essential for them. They observed that each UP generally had 9 elected male members from 9 wards of the union and 3 WMs from three reserved seats. WMs thereby argued for better cooperation from the large

experienced male members for the comparatively newcomer WMs. The experiences however were not happy enough. Women members reported that male members were reluctant to share their experiences and expertise about UP activities with the WMs and they behaved such that WMs are ornamental show-piece of UP incapable of performing any responsible activities. Besides 46(51.11%) respondents suggested for mass media education programmes to enhance women knowledge. Women members suggested that media can play vital role in creating awareness among the WMs about UP activities. Since WMs are comparatively new-comer in electoral politics as well as LGIs- mass media can teach them about this delivering news, reports and informative discussions in such. Sixty-two (68.89%) respondents recommended for administrative assistance and 56(62.22%) for income generating programmes in this regard. Women members suggested to bring more income generating programmes. Some of them reported that self-income brings confidence, voice and freedom necessary for women empowerment at home and office. Apart from this, emphasis had been given by the respondents on enhanced social awareness 66(73.33%), upliftment of female education 54(60%) to ensure their effective participation in UP.

In this context Md. Abdul Quddus and others concluded in their study that in order to bring women in the mainstream national and local level politics, some more rules and regulations regarding electoral process and wider scope for participation were needed. Besides attitude towards political activities among females could be developed from childhood- for which mass media could play effective roles. Political parties and women organizations could also play important roles towards this end¹⁴.

Women Members' Suggestions on Women Political Empowerment

Political empowerment of women is a precondition for their gaining control over the community's resources. This is the route through which women can associate themselves with the decision making process at the national level and help shape public policies in such a way that may prove beneficial to the women of Bangladesh¹⁵.

The respondents sought participation in local level politics as a must for empowerment of the women. But performing their roles and responsibilities at the local level was not smooth. They had to face several difficulties associated with the socio-economic backgrounds they were from. They made some recommendations in light of their experiences to enhance the level of active participations of women at the local level political institutions for the betterment of the whole community and their empowerment. Suggestions sought from the respondent regarding this issue are presented in table-6.11.

Table-6.11

Women Members' Recommendations on Women Political Empowerment

Recommendations	No of Respondent (N=90)	Percentage
Level of education should be increased	78	86.67
Government should encourage and facilitate establishing women opportunities and rights	76	84.44
Financial independence through participating in income generating activities	70	77.78
Gain courage and means to compete with the males	66	73.33
Resist oppression and gain means to establish own rights	54	60
Involvement in political parties should be encouraged	29	32.22

Note: Multiple responses were considered.

Table shows that 78(86.67%) respondents suggested for the enhancement of the level of women education for their political empowerment. Education simply widens the scope for better know-how, socio-political duties and responsibilities of a citizen. Educated women are more likely to be learnt about the ways of women participation and empowerment at different stages of civil life as well as LGIs. However government has attempted to make education free of costs up to H.S.C. level. In addition stipends are given to the female student to help their studies and prevent their drop-outs. The recommendations came from other 76(84.44%) respondents that government facilities and encouragement should be provided for establishing women rights to empower them politically. Again 70(77.78%) respondents suggested that woman should participate in income-generating activities to bring economic independence. They thought economic independence ultimately develops women ability to integrate themselves in the mainstream of decision-making process in a broader sense. It is important to note that 29(32.22%) respondents recommended increasing political party involvement to enhance women political empowerment. They said that if they involved in any political parties rather than neutral one, they might be helped from that parties to express their opinions and could ensure empowerment. The other suggestions of the respondents were resist oppression and gain means to establish own rights 54(60%) and gain courage and means to compete with the males 66(73.33%). The WMs suggested that creating social awareness against women repression, dowry etc widen scope for the women to raise their voices and to work independently. These bring greater socio-economic freedom for the women that help them identify and establish their own status in the society. In the long run this leads to women participation and empowerment at the LGIs.

The study conducted by Julia Moin revealed that WMs gave emphasis on education and economic independence of women in addition to the government initiatives for the enhancement of women political empowerment. The respondents of her study also mentioned women's political party involvement a significant factor for women participation and empowerment in local level politics¹⁶.

WMs Opinions about the Most Important Factor for Empowerment of Women

For the development of womenfolk, the foremost need is to empower them. As we know that empowerment is a process related to various factors, it is important to know about these factors. An attempt is made to explore this issue. Information regarding this is presented in Table-6.12.

We see in Table-6.12, the majority of the respondents' i.e.73 (81.11%) thought that education is the most important and necessary factor for women empowerment. According to them without education, awareness, which is very much important for empowerment, cannot be developed. It was also found that 12(13.33%) opined that economic independence enable women to step forward towards empowerment. For social and economic empowerment, women need access to sustainable income sources, which bring their economic independence. They expressed that through participating in income-earning activities women can lessen their economic dependency on men and this help them to ensure largely the freedom of their participation in all spheres of public life.

Table-6.12

Most Important Factor as Considered by the WMs For Empowerment of Women

Factors	No. Of Respondents	Percentage
Education	73	81.11
Economic independence	12	13.33
Participation in politics	5	5.56
Total	90	100

However, Table-6.12 further shows that 5(5.56%) respondents identified women participation in politics as the most important factor for women empowerment. They opined that through participation in politics, women are

able to ensure their rights and integrate themselves into decision-making process.

Md. Alek Uddin Sheikh found a very similar result. In his study 69(80.23%) respondents opined that women education is the most important factor for women empowerment whereas 13% and 6% respondents respectively considered economic independence and participation in politics as important factors for women empowerment¹⁷.

Women Members' Opinion about Future Participation in Election

To assess the impact of the provision of direct election for women in LGIs, it is important to know the future plan of the women participants of LGIs. In this connection respondents' opinions regarding their future participation in electoral politics were obtained, which are presented in Table-6.13.

Table-6.13

Women Members' Opinion about Future Participation in Election

Future Participation in election			Post seek for future election (N=62)			Prospects of being re-elected (N=62)		
Will Participate	No interest	No response	General Seat	Reserved Seat for women	Chairman	Yes	No	No response
62 (68.88%)	18 (20%)	10 (11.11%)	6 (9.67%)	54 (87.7%)	2 (3.22%)	46 (74.2%)	-	16(25.8%)

The table shows that 62(68.88%) respondents had the interest to participate in the next Union Parishad election. According to them through their present participation in UP they had gathered experiences in this field which they hope, would help them take part in next election. On the other hand 18 (20%) respondents did not show any interest in participating in future election and 10(11.11%) respondents had no response.

The respondents unsure to participate in next election stated that they were not satisfied with their roles in UP activities. Lack of specific responsibilities, inexperience, male counterparts' non-cooperation, insufficient logistic supports and minimal honorarium made them unhappy about their roles and responsibilities. Some of them opined that they did not want to participate in next election lacking family support, huge involvement of election expenditures for the large constituency of 3 wards and scarcity of time that UP activities require out of family life.

Among the 62 respondents interested in next election, 54(87.7%) respondents said to compete for the reserved women seats, 6(9.67%) and 2(3.22%) for general seats and chairman post respectively. Respondents eager to compete for the general seats mentioned that the constituency of general seat is one-third area of the reserved seat. Therefore it is easy to communicate with the voters in the general seat before and after the election. Two respondents, however, mentioned that they were interested to vie for chairman post. One of these respondents mentioned her father as an ex-chairman and the other had her late husband an ex-chairman too.

Forty-six (74.2%) respondents out of the aspirant 62, believed that they could win in the next election as their success in fulfilling their election promises favours them. Others (25.8%) did not comment. They, however, mentioned that as a first timer in UP politics they had mixed experiences. They could not fulfill a significant of their election pledges due to their inexperience, insufficient resources, chairmen and male members' non-cooperation etc. As a result they were unable to predict any result.

Md. Alek Uddin Sheikh, in a similar study, found that a majority of the WMs considered their present participation and experiences to help them took part in further election. Comparing to rural respondents he also mentioned that

urban respondents were more interested to participate in future elections. Urban respondents were more optimistic about their increasing roles and responsibilities in LGIs and thereby were aspirant of greater women empowerment through LGIs in near future¹⁸.

In this chapter problems faced by the WMs in participating UP activities are discussed along with suggestions that WMs mentioned for ensuring their greater roles in the LGIs. The study reveals that in spite of the constraints women are found to be potential contributors to the organizational development and local government bodies if they were provided with supportive environment. The women representative in this study sample believe that if their suggestions are taken into consideration by the government and the others concerned, the involvement of women in the mainstream of development activities and decision making process through their effective participation in LGIs will be improved.

End Notes

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CHAPTER-SEVEN

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

At present, empowerment of women in Local Government Institutions (LGIs) is one of the most important and burning issues of our country. To ensure women right, their empowerment in this sphere bears great importance to all, especially to women, because without their equal participation in all spheres of life, it is very difficult to improve the condition of women¹. It is mentionable that as women of our country are lagging behind in respect of education, employment, politics etc., their empowerment and overall development are yet to get momentum. It is expected that women's greater participation in the decision-making process including politics to both national and grass-root level must have positive influence on establishing their equal rights and enhancing empowerment position. Expected results will come in this regard only when women will be able to express their needs, demands and expectations in the formulation of planning through participation in LGIs. Hence, to face the challenge of new millennium, it is necessary to ensure their empowerment in state affairs including politics. The government of Bangladesh has already introduced the provision of reserved seats for women in LGIs with the view to integrate them in decision-making process from grass-root level². Through Local Government Act of 1997 the system of direct election for women in the LGIs has been introduced for the first time. It is as well important to know the extent to which the system of women participation in LGI contributes to women development and also to what extent they are able to perform significant role in Local Governance. In this context, the present dissertation tries to investigate the issues related to women participation in union parishads (UPs) and their empowerment position in the total process of participation in such.

Most of the respondents of the present study were relatively young, i.e., between 31-35 (35.5%) years of age. This was followed by the age group 36-40 (31.11%) and 25-30 (17.8%) respectively. This was due to the fact that the provision of direct election made many freshers encouraged to take part in LGIs. Most of the respondents were married. It was found that women other than married had to face various social problems to participate in politics. Consequently, married women were found more interested in local level politics than women other than married. Information regarding respondents' education shows that they were more or less educated. The study also shows that with education women members were found to better understand the rules and regulations of the Union Parishads and participate in UP activities efficiently. So educated women can be considered a very significant prerequisite in women empowerment. The occupational pattern of the respondents represented that out of the total respondents of this study, 41.12 percent were engaged in various occupations such as, services in different NGOs, small-scale business, tailoring etc. As involvement in government services is considered disqualification for candidature, no respondents were found to be involved in government organizations. The scope of getting involved in income-generating activities is relatively low in rural areas. Approximately 66 percent respondents had their self-income (excluding receiving honorarium from UPs). Findings show that the respondents were generally more or less economically solvent. This tends to indicate their accessibility into the decision-making process at household level and the society at large. Because women becoming economically independent, gradually gain the decision-making power, which, ultimately pave the way for their empowerment.

Data regarding respondents' fathers' and husbands' education and occupation indicate that the majority came from educated and financially solvent families. It may be noted that 38.6% respondents of UPs had the agro-based

family background whereas the majority of the respondents' i.e., 51% family background was related to non-traditional occupation (such as, service, business etc.).

A majority of the respondents were found to get cooperation from their husbands and fathers in participating local level politics. Guardians who were educated and involved in services and business were found to be more conscious about women empowerment in LGIs. Hence their supports to the WMs were encouraging.

The present study presented the pattern of land ownership of women member's families. No respondents were found landless, and almost 96% respondents mentioned to have both homestead and cultivable land. Land ownership thus could be considered crucial factor in gaining status and leadership in the LGIs. However, the 2003 UP election result reveals that 62 landless women were elected in the reserved seats across the country in the district of Pabna, Natore, Faridpur and Rajbari³.

Data regarding size of household of the WMs indicate that majority of the respondents came from medium size single family. This shows a changing pattern of rural family and power structure shifting from dominance of agro based joint family to educated single family. Education and diverse sources of income might have played significant role in this context.

The respondents of this study considered exposure to mass media to play significant role in enhancing the level of participation of WMs in development activities. The study found that 80 percent of the respondents watch television regularly but their accesses with national newspaper were scanty. Women members opined that news, reports, movies and dramas in the television related to women issues helped them understand their status. And newspapers on different issues of UP activities, women and social development, agriculture and

fisheries, health and family planning etc. helped them significantly in performing their roles in the LGIs.

Usually, involvement in political parties is considered as one of the important factors for empowerment in LGIs. It was found that out of total respondents, 61.12 percent were involved in different political parties. It was observed that political party involvement influenced WMs to participate in local level politics. The WMs said that if they involve in any political parties rather than neutral one, they might be helped from that parties to express their opinions and could ensure empowerment. However nearly 40% respondents did not have any involvement with political party. Community people as well as their family support encouraged them to participate in LGIs.

In our country, generally women voters could not cast their votes according to their own will as their male relatives, especially their husbands influenced them⁴. However, the situation is quite different now. In Local Government (Union Parishad) elections of 1997 and 2003 a vast majority of female voters' presence was observed. About 82 percent women voters cast their vote in the 2003 UP election compared to 81 percent of 1997 election⁵. Another important feature of these elections was women candidates' self-participation in election campaign. The findings of the present study show that all the respondents emphasized election campaign in gaining electoral support. All of the respondents mentioned to have outdoor campaign during election. This tends to indicate the state of their mobility, exercise of self-decision, ability to approach female as well as male voters. The respondents had to spend long period of time to communicate with the voters as 90.35 percent respondents were found to spend 7-12 hours a day for this purpose.

•By analyzing the pattern of election campaign, it was found that 21.01 percent respondents used to conduct their election campaign even at night like their male counterparts and 17.65 percent did it in a limited range. In conducting

election campaign they used to take help from their relatives, followers, female workers or sometimes-party workers. They developed some mechanisms to maintain their security at night. They campaigned in the adjacent areas to their houses or in their relatives' houses during night. They reported that they faced various problems in doing election campaign. WMs considered large constituency as the major problem. Three fourth of the respondents opined that their constituency as three times greater than their male counterpart. They also mentioned transport and financial problem as two other major problems. Twenty percent respondents mentioned religious and family restrictions as a significant problem during election campaign. As the significant numbers of the respondents were newcomers in electoral politics, they had to struggle to overcome these sorts of problems, which they considered a major hurdle in women empowerment. However, the respondents with prior experiences in UP activities, political affiliation and strong family support mentioned to face very little problems. They considered their family support, prior experiences and party affiliation helped their election campaign a comparatively easy handle. Conducting election campaign however, requires freedom of expressing views and ability to take self-decision. These two achievements are very important for empowerment and integration of the women participants into decision making process.

It was found that in spite of many limitations, women representatives had the interest and sincerity to perform their roles properly for the betterment of the people, especially of women. Almost half of the women representatives were not fully aware of the functions of different standing committees of LGIs. They reported that as a result of not receiving proper training about the functions of LGIs and exclusion from different committees they could not have adequate knowledge about the committees. They expected that proper training could help them to function more efficiently in different committees of LGIs.

The findings of the study show that the women representatives of rural LGIs were found as the member of at least one standing committee. Most of them were found to have the membership in school committee, violence on women resistance committee, health and family planning committee, social welfare committee, relief distribution and tree plantation committee. It was noticeable that their involvement in finance related development committees was almost nil.

Information regarding women representatives' attendance in meetings show that the majority, i.e. 91.11% percent attended the meetings regularly if they received notices in time. Most of the respondents complained about the notification of the meetings. They complained that the chairmen and male members were not interested to see the women representatives attending the meetings. That is why chairmen and male members intentionally tried to avoid the women representatives by not informing them about the meetings. However, it was observed that women representatives tried to attend the meeting whenever they were informed although they resided at distant places. They were found very particular and interested to participate in meetings, as they wanted to take part in decision-making process.

The women representatives, through their involvement in various food-assisted development programmes (VGF, VGD, RMP, TR, FWP), performed important roles for the uplift-ment of the condition of disadvantaged women. Out of 90 women representatives of UPs, 94.45 percent were found to be involved in different food-assisted programmes. It is important to note here that the Union Parishads followed the provision of government regarding having at least one member's membership in any PIC committees. Although the involvement was satisfactory, the respondents opined that they did not get the project responsibility proportionately to the male members. The women representatives opined that if the project responsibilities were distributed in

proportion to the male members they would be able to contribute to women development as well as the development of the whole community.

• In regard to the roles played by the women representatives, findings show that they tried to perform effective roles but due to the male members' non-cooperative attitude they almost failed to do so. In the meetings, the majority of the women representatives raised problems of the locality, participated in the discussion of undertaking development projects and protested if their opinions were neglected. But male members' attitudes and dominance were so negative that they could hardly influence the decision making process. Male members were generally more experienced in UP activities but they seldom shared their experiences with the WMs.

• In health services and family planning 66.66 percent women representative performed the roles in awareness development, motivating to adopt family planning devices and other facilities. In respect to violence against women, 91.11 percent contributed to awareness development and taking measures for resistance. They tried to stand aside the oppressed women and to ensure justice providing legal aid. But due to lack of proper scope and opportunity, their contribution to overall development of women was not very significant. Through food-assisted programme and awareness development against violence on women they tried their best to improve women condition. It was observed that lack of proper distribution of development projects, the male members' control and dominance on resources, women's less accessibility to the resources made respondents unsuccessful in fulfilling expectations of the community people. About one-third of the respondents reported that they couldn't fulfill their election promises, which they made during their election campaign. Many of them expressed their concern in further election, which they considered a crucial hurdle in women empowerment. WMs reported that their poor performances in UP activities further discouraged the women at large to

come forward in UP politics creating backlog in women empowerment. However, 49 percent respondents reported to partially fulfill their election promises, while only 2.22% percent were found to satisfactorily fulfill it.

In the LGIs, women representatives have to cope with different types of problems. About 83.33 percent respondents reported that the behaviour pattern of the male members towards them was not satisfactory. According to them, lack of male members' co-operation and acceptance created a communication gap between them. Some of them complained that they were considered as only the ornamental members by the male members. Accordingly, the males did not give any importance to them. They always belonged in the financially important committees and tried to include WMs in other committees according to their will. It may be mentioned that 84.44 percent women representatives felt discriminated in terms of not receiving equal status, equal distribution of project responsibilities, inclusion in decision-making process and regular payment of honorarium. Another problem mentioned by the women representatives was that they could not express their opinions equally in the meetings. They viewed lack of opportunity to express their opinions created barrier to their equal rights in the local government institutions.

✦ Out of the total respondents, the majority, i.e. 77.31 percent respondents strongly opined that female education is important for their overall empowerment. Women representatives of UPs recommended that in addition to female education, financial independency, government facilities and encouragement are necessary for women political empowerment. Women representatives recommended different suggestions for women political empowerment in LGIs such as, equal distribution of development projects among the men and women members, specific and clarified responsibilities for the women representatives, enhancement of honorarium, upliftment of women education, male members' co-operation, social awareness for establishment of

women right, and government initiative and opportunity to participate in training programme of the WMs.

The WMs expressed their future plan of participation in different levels of electoral politics. Sixty two (68.88%) respondents had the interest to participate in the next Union Parishad election. According to them through their present participation in UP they could gather experiences in this field which they hope would help them take part in next election. Among them forty-six respondents believed that they could win in the next election as their success in fulfilling their election promises favours them. Others did not comment. They, however, mentioned that as a first timer in UP politics they had mixed experiences. The remaining respondents were unsure to participate in next election and stated that they were not satisfied with their roles in UP activities. Lack of specific responsibilities, inexperience, male counterparts' non-cooperation, insufficient logistic supports and minimal honorarium made them unhappy about their roles and responsibilities.

From the analysis of preceding chapters on women participation in UP and their role performances, it can be concluded that women participants are trying to acquire political consciousness and empowerment through the process of their participation in LGIs. As a result of their participation in direct election they are getting involved in election campaign where they have to maintain communication both with the male and female voters. This kind of public relation enables them to express their opinions freely, increase their participation in outdoor activities and also increase their level of awareness about women equal rights. They have got the opportunity to break the age-old traditional values of *purdah* system and utilize the chance of participating in outdoor political activities. By joining political arena women are trying to ensure their mobility as well.

Present dissertation has discussed and presented a number of pertinent issues regarding women empowerment in LGIs. It is quite evident from the discussions made in the preceding chapters that in previous time political empowerment of the women was very little or negligible. But with the passage of time and the changing attitude of the government policies, situation is quite different now. We observe very positive signs in terms of enthusiasm and especially in LGIs by the women. It can be assumed that, in future, increasing participation will enhance their socio-economic condition and strengthen the political power base in their respective communities and society at large. In order to achieve this goal, increasing mobilization and growing consciousness among women as well as in the whole community need to be accelerated.

However, in this study several problems in women participation and empowerment at the UP levels are identified. There are certain rooms for further improvement in women empowerment, the study finding reveals. We can now recommend some policy suggestions in light of these study findings here as follows:

1. Women members' opinions are often neglected by the male members and chairmen. They are often excluded from the development activities of the LGIs. Equal distribution of project responsibilities to both male and female members is needed thereby.
2. Women members are often given to the low profile committees like mass education, vaccination, tree plantation etc. Male members kept the key functionary committees like relief distribution, finance, audit and accounts etc. As a result WMs can't perform their due role in fulfilling their local needs that undermine their images further. Specific legal instructions specifying WMs functions and responsibilities are needed thereby to ensure due role of the WMs in UPs. Union Parishad Ordinance should incorporate necessary measures in this line.

3. Majority of women members are freshers in political activities. They are first timers in electoral politics as well as UP activities. Lacking experiences they cannot perform their roles and responsibilities assigned to them. Training, workshops, seminars are required in this context to guide WMs to perform their role meaningfully.
4. Honorariums of the WMs are not satisfactory enough. As the UP activities require active participation and involvement WMs have to quite their earlier jobs and businesses. Sufficient remuneration is essential to financially compensate the WMs to satisfactorily motivate them in UP activities. Provision of TA and DA in attending meetings can ensure greater participation of WMs in UP activities.
5. Male members' and chairmen's cooperation are essential for meaningful women participation in UP activities. As they are usually of worth experience, their cooperation can help WMs better understand the UP functions and work for the people.
6. Mass media can play vital role in women empowerment at the LGIs. Media can build consciousness among the WMs about the gender issues, UP activities, development initiatives and thus can work as the continuous guide for them. More importantly it can change the negative attitude of the male members, chairmen and all walks of the society towards women participation, empowerment and its importance. Building consciousness among the women it can attract the educated women to come forward, which is the key component for women empowerment to a large.
7. Raising the level of women education is very important in women participation and empowerment. Education simply widens the scope for better know-how, socio-political duties and responsibilities of a citizen. Educated women are more likely to be learnt about the ways

of women empowerment at different stages of civil life as well as in the LGIs. Furthermore it brings employment opportunity, raises earning options, wisdom and self-confidence that are very important for women empowerment both at home and offices.

8. Widening income-generating activities is important in women empowerment. Income and employment simply brings economic independence for the women. It is generally learnt that economic independence ultimately develops women ability to integrate themselves in the mainstream of decision-making process. It widens the scope and says for the women to choose their own way that leads to women empowerment at the roots.
9. Support from social and religious leaders are required in bringing women in the mainstream politics. Religions restrictions, and very often misinterpretation leads to forbid women from participating outdoor activities like politics, judicial trial, relief distribution and so on. Social and family restrictions often hamper free movement of women that is essential in women empowerment at the LGIs.
10. Participation in socio-cultural and political activities by the women can widen the scope for women empowerment. Political processions, meetings, demonstration help raise the voices against all sorts of repression and preserving civil rights. On the other hand socio-cultural activities bring social acceptance, popularity, personality and dedication which are all important for women empowerment as these activities bring the women in close touch of the people of their localities.

Bangladesh has achieved a praise worthy feat in a very recent study titled “Women’s Empowerment: Measuring the Global Gender Gap” by World Economic Forum Switzerland 2005⁶. Accordingly, Bangladesh ranks 39 out of 58 nations, much ahead of South Asian countries like India (53), Pakistan (56), and tops the Muslims countries, surpassing Malaysia at 40. The study reveals that Bangladesh’s achievements have been possible largely due to enhanced decision making capacity by women and participation in the democratic institutions at grass-roots level like Union Parishad. However, if the existing problems that WMs face in UP activities could be solved in light of the above recommendations mentioned, it would contribute in further women participation and empowerment at the LGIs of the country. ▶

End Notes

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ABBREVIATION

ACD	: Association for Community Development.
ADB	: Asian Development Bank.
ADC	: Additional Deputy Commissioner
ADP	: Annual Development Programme
AL	: Awami League
ASA	: Association for Social Advancement
ASED	: Association for Social and Environmental Development
AWSA	: American Women Suffrage Association
BARD	: Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development
BDO	: Basic Democracies Order.
BNP	: Bangladesh Nationalist Party.
BRAC	: Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
CEDAW	: Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.
DA	: Diet Allowance
DAW	: Division for the Advancement of Women.
DAWN	: Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era.
DC	: Deputy Commissioner
FLS	: Forward Looking Strategies
FWP	: Food for Work Programme
GOB	: Government of Bangladesh
GRF	: Gender Roles Framework.
HSC	: Higher Secondary Certificate
ICPD	: International Conference on Population and Development
IUP	: Inter Parliamentary Union
IWB	: International Women Bureau
LG	: Local Government

LGI	:	Local Government Institution
LGP	:	Local Government Politics
MMC	:	Mass Line Media Centre
MP	:	Member of Parliament
NFS	:	National Forward Looking Strategies
NGO	:	Non Government Organization
NILG	:	National Institute of Local Government
NWSA	:	National Women suffrage Association
PFA	:	Platform of Action
PIC	:	Project Implementation Committee
RMP	:	Regular Maintenance Programme
SDO	:	Sub Divisional Official
SRF	:	Social Relation Frame Work
SSC	:	Secondary School Certificate
TA	:	Transport Allowance
TNO	:	Thana Nirbahi Officer
TR	:	Test Relief
TRF	:	Triples Role Framework.
UN	:	United Nations.
UNO	:	United Nations Organization
UP	:	Union Parishad
USA	:	United States of America
VGD	:	Vulnerable Group Development.
VGF	:	Vulnerable Group Feeding
WDP	:	Women Development Programme
WFP	:	World Food Programme
WFW	:	Women For Women.
WM	:	Women Member

GLOSSARY

Bazar	:	Market
Beer Pratik	:	Award given by the government of Bangladesh to the freedom fighters who participated in liberation war of 1971, for their contribution in war.
Chowkidar	:	Village police
Chowkidari (System)	:	A system of appointing village police.
Dafadar	:	Messenger
Gram Police	:	Village police
Hat	:	Weekly / bi-weekly market in rural areas of Bangladesh
Imam	:	The religious chief of a mosque who conducts prayers
Jatiyo Sangshad	:	National Parliament of Bangladesh
Jiban Bima	:	Life insurance
Kaccha	:	Non-concrete road
Khandan	:	Landed aristocrats
Mahalla	:	Neighborhood
Matbar	:	Head of the village
Panchayat Raj	:	The lowest level of village local government in India.
Purdah	:	Seclusim
Sachib	:	Secretary
Samaj	:	Informal village social organization
Shahar	:	Town
Shalish	:	A kind of informal village judgement (village court)
Swarirvar Gram Sarkar	:	Self-reliant local government at the village level.
Talukdar	:	Small landlord
Zamindar	:	Big land lord

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