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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

## WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN BANGLADESH: A LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL ANALYSIS.

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#### Abstract

Women constitute half of the total population of Bangladesh but their presence in the political arena is very limited. Despite having female leadership at the top political level, at the local government level few women are participating in politics and elections. Comparing with other democratic countries, women's political participation has not reached the satisfactory level due to socio-economic settings, patriarchal values, lack of education, social mobilization, financial support and ideological barriers. The present study focuses on Chittagong City Corporation as the study area and tries to unearth reasons behind such low female representation at the local government level.

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#### Introduction:-

It has been a well-established fact that women's active political participation is crucial for good governance. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states that equal participation of both men and women in decision making process is fundamental for achieving transparent and accountable government as well as administration which ultimately help to cement democracy and human rights. The Constitution of Bangladesh also provides right to women to be elected in political and public representative institutions. But in reality, gender inequality is visible in every sphere of life including the political arena. Eleanor Roosevelt, have rightly argued that, too often the great decisions are originated and given form in bodies made up wholly of men, or so completely dominated by them that whatever of special value women have to offer is shunted aside without expression (Tickner, 1992). For last few decades Bangladesh has two women leaders at the top level for two main political parties, namely- Awami League (AL) and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). At present Bangladesh also has a female speaker, Dr. Shirin Sharmin, in the JatiyaSangsad (the Parliament of Bangladesh). Comparing with these top level female political leaders, Bangladesh dearth female leadership in the local level government. It is imperative to mention here that, local government bodies are often considered as the gateways for entering into politics in Bangladesh. Notwithstanding the quota system, female leadership has not been created in its true sense. Like other third world countries, in Bangladesh there has been great disparity between male and female in terms of political participation, public services and in almost every other sector of public life(Panday, 2013). Being a signatory state of multifarious conventions of the United Nations (UN), Bangladesh has been trying to ensure women's political participation since its inception as an independent state in 1971. Forty-eight years have been passed but women's influence in political decision-making process at the local government level is still very minimum.

With an increasing recognition among international community of women's historic exclusion from structures of power, a global commitment has been made to redress gender imbalance in politics. Women's enhanced participation in governance structures is viewed as the key to redress gender inequalities in societies. Women

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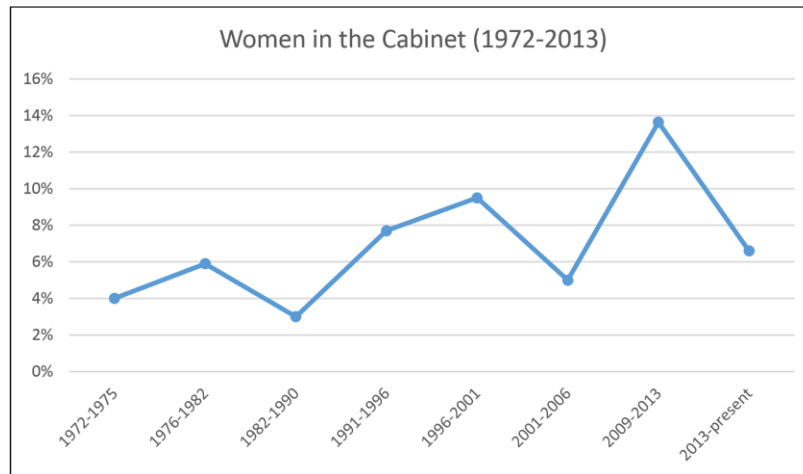
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constitute half of total population in Bangladesh and therefore, it is only fair that they should have equal participation and decision-making power in politics along with men. Bangladesh has a political culture built on public private dichotomy which has marginalized women from participating in active politics. In such an environment women are not encouraged to participate in politics and elections. But this does not necessarily mean that women cannot win elections. Strictly speaking, it is impossible to achieve the goals of equality, development and good governance without the active participation and incorporation of women in politics and decision-making process. Systematic integration of women augments the democratic basis, the efficiency and the quality of the activities of local government. If local government is to meet the needs of both women and men, it must build on the experiences at all levels and in all fields of decision-making, covering the wide range of responsibility of local governments (Khan & Ara, 2006). Not only the institutional constraints but also social and family obstacles are the major hindrances for women to participate in politics and elections. Under the situation of male domination and patriarchy, only a small number of women can come out of their cocoons and participate in politics. Family background and socio-economic status influence women's active political participation. The two top female leaders in Bangladesh have also used their family background as the determining factor to make early inroads in politics. In other words, such existing cultures actually discourage other women to stay away from politics. Other important issues that often create serious problems for female politicians or electoral candidates are money and muscle power. In fact, money and muscle power are the two indispensable characteristics of political cultures of the Asia-Pacific region. Most of the female members do not have sufficient financial and muscle support. As a consequence, they are often outnumbered by their male counterparts and find themselves in no man's land. Out of twelve city corporations in Bangladesh eleven have male mayors. Only Narayanganj City Corporation has a female mayor. This actually summarizes the overall condition of women's participation in local government politics in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has been adopted many instruments and plans from time to time to ensure the equal participation of women in politics. Reservation of quotas for women in elections has been adopted to ensure the presence of women in political leadership positions. The quota system also provides space for new women aspirants to get themselves ready for electoral participation. But the number of women in political recruitment pipe lines of different political parties is so limited that the quota system has not been able to increase women leadership to a satisfactory level, albeit the number of women politicians has been increasing over the years. The enactment of the Act of 1997, has introduced the system of direct election for women at the local government level for the first time, has created a sense of enthusiasm in many people, especially among the women politicians. But the participation of women is not near to the satisfactory level till date. So, it is time to look for some non-quota strategies along with the existing ones for a double-pronged approach.

#### **Women in politics in Bangladesh:-**

Although it is true that Bangladesh has been successful in establishing women's voting right long ago but women's political participation, both at local government level and national level, has not been increased. The two leading political parties in Bangladesh, AL and BNP, needed the decisive role from two female politicians, Sheikh Hasina of AL and Begum Khaleda Zia of BNP, to save their respective political parties from falling into pieces during many crisis periods. Even today, the two major political parties of Bangladesh have been revolving around these two female political figure's leadership. But such highest level of leadership of women in Bangladesh does not necessarily resemble the real scenario of women's political participation in political arena. Not only in the local level government but also in the national level women have been struggling for leadership, in some cases for political participation. The inception of the quota system in the electoral system as well as in the governmental bodies have contributed significantly to increase women's political participation. Indeed, women's political participation has been increased in Urban Municipal elections. A graph is presented below to show the gradual increase in women's active participation in the parliament.



**Figure 1:-**Women in the Cabinet (1972-2013) (Chowdhury, 2013)

This chart shows that from 1972 to 1975 women's participation was only 4% in the cabinet. This rate increased up to 5.90% during the 1976-1982 period. But between 1982 and 1990 the rate again decreased to 3%. Since 1991 to 2001 the rate of participation was in an increasing rate. But during 2001-2006 the rate again fell to 5%. After that government initiatives had taken to increase the rate and the rate was 19.83%. But in the general election of 2014 the rate again fell to 6.6% which is a very bad sign.

#### **Women in Local Government:-**

In 1976 'The Local Government Ordinance' was adopted by the government of Bangladesh, thus introduced a three-tier local government system. According to the Ordinance of 1976 the local government had been changed and reservations has been made for female politicians. But this act was very limited regarding the nomination of female politicians and work areas of the elected female members were not demarcated. The Ordinance did not provide enough space for women to participate in politics as the policy makers, at that time, were not considering huge number of women in decision making process. In 1983 the then government of Bangladesh passed the Local Government Ordinance of 1983 which changed the composition of the UP. Reserved seats for women had been increased from two to three but the system of selection of women members had not been changed. The ambiguous instructions regarding the duties and responsibilities of the female members were unchanged.

In 1993 the Local Government Amendment Act had been adopted by the government of Bangladesh which introduced indirect election system for women members. But the number of women members remained the same. To meet the increasing demand of women's active political participation the government introduced the Local Government (Second Amendment) Act of 1997. This Act has paved the way for direct election of one Chairman and 12 members to the UP with three seats reserved for women members. The provision of direct election for the selection of women members was introduced. This act has also introduced a serious disparity regarding the responsibilities and territories of the women members. A women member has to take the responsibility of three wards where as a male member has to take one. But the resource allocation remains the same for all members. Thus, it creates serious challenge for female members to carry out their responsibilities with limited resources and meet the general people's expectation. Many female members of UP or female Councilors of City Corporations fail to keep their electoral promises due to the unequal distribution of resource and responsibilities. As a result, they have to think twice before approaching for reelection campaign.

#### **Women's political participation in Chittagong City Corporation:-**

Chittagong City Corporation (CCC) descended from the name of Chittagong Municipality which was founded on June 22, 1863. Then on June 27, 1977 Chittagong Municipality was renamed as Chittagong Paurasava. Again, on September 16, 1982 Chittagong Paurasava was upgraded to Municipal Corporation. Later in July 31, 1990 it was renamed as Chittagong City Corporation. In 1994 Mr. A. B. M. Mohiuddin Chowdhury became the first democratically elected Mayor of Chittagong City Corporation. The current city Mayor is Abu Jahed Mohammed Nasir Uddin who was elected in the latest Chittagong City Corporation election held in 2015.

Chittagong City Corporation consists of a Mayor, Commissioners or Councilors in general seats, women councilors in the reserved seats. One women councilor has to perform duties in three different wards whereas a male councilor has one ward under his jurisdiction. There are also seven official commissioners, they are- the Chairman, Chittagong Development Authority (CDA); the Chairman, Chittagong Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA); the superintending Engineer, Department of Public Health Engineering, Chittagong circle; the superintending Engineer, Department of Roads and Highways, Chittagong; the Chief Engineer (Distribution), Chittagong Power and Development Board; the deputy Director, Health Service, Chittagong and Chairman, Chittagong Port Authority.

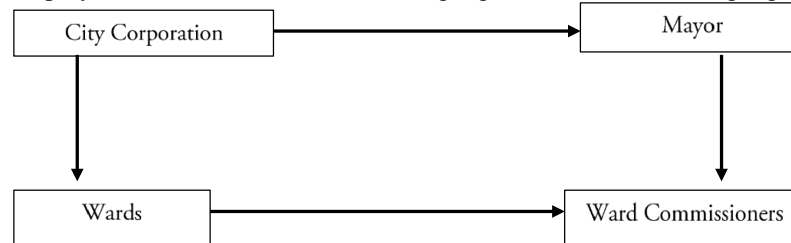


Figure 2: The organizational Structure of CCC.(Siddiqui, 2014)

Under the present City Corporation ruling authority there are 41 male councilors and only 14 female councilors. The percentage of female councilor is 34.15% comparing with male councilors and in the history of CCC there has been no female elected Mayor. Like other local government bodies, in CCC female councilors have to bear the responsibilities of three wards and some of these wards are too big to manage. According to the Local Government (City Corporation) Act 2009, one third of the councilor's seats are reserved for women but women can also contest for direct election for the general seats.

### **Obstacles to women's political participation:-**

There are many obstacles in political participation including political, social, economic, ideological, psychological and structural. These obstacles are analyzed below.

#### **Political Obstacles:**

The Constitution of Bangladesh provides women the right to vote and the right to participate or contest for election. In theory, right to vote refers the right to stand for election, to become a candidate and to get elected. Although women in Bangladesh have been practicing their voting right but only a few of them are contesting for election. Some political obstacles that women face- presence of masculinity, lack of party support, inadequate women's network, bitter experience of elected female councilors or members etc. are the major ones.

*Presence of masculinity:* As mentioned earlier the local level political arena is dominated by men despite top female leadership in the national politics. Along with the patriarchal nature of the society male politicians and rule makers often set those norms and values that are only beneficiary for them. They always believe in 'zero sum game' where male are the winners. This masculine mentality is not only present in the political parties but also in the governmental bodies, including the local government. Such situation actually provides only two choices for women politicians, either forfeit politics altogether or reject male's domination. The Organizational Secretary of JatiyatabadiMohila Dal, a wing of BNP, has expressed her deep frustration regarding male's domination in the political arena. She even blames her own party for not adopting gender equality practices within the party's organizational and operational structures. More often than not, female politicians are discouraged to compete for the President or Chairman or Secretary posts within the party. Election procedure within political parties tends to facilitate favoritism despite the presence of dedicated and qualified female candidates. She also feels that female activists are more effective and dedicated in political campaign or any movement than male activists. She has shared many experiences of her political career as she has been an active politician for last 18 years. In many occasions in the past women politicians showed more courage and enthusiasm than their male counterparts. In 2013 when the BNP office in Chittagong was attacked by AL activists, the female activists and politicians of Chittagong JatiyatabadiMohila Dal made the first line of defense and protested against the attack. While talking about the presence of masculinity in the politics of Bangladesh all respondents replied in affirmative that masculinity is prevailing. 83.04% of them believe that masculinity is very acute and 19.96% believe is at a tolerable level. The presence of masculinity can affect the content and priorities of decision making. Women generally prefer to give priority on health, social security, children's issues, and environment. Another important matter is that female

politicians are often harassed by their own party member and called them as ‘Dalal’ when they participate in political program along with other female supporters. Moreover, female politicians have to sacrifice their family responsibilities only for the sake of their parties’ interest but, in return, they receive uneven treatment and injustice from their respective parties.

*Lack of party support:* Although female politicians or political activists play important roles in campaigning and mobilizing support for their parties, but when some of these female politicians run their election campaign, they get very little support from their respective political parties. It is true that all political parties have allocated resources to conduct election campaign but the problem lies in the distribution of such resources. Due to the presence of severe masculinity in the decision-making bodies, most of these resources are allocated for male contestants. Previous researches show that sufficient support, mainly financial, from political parties can significantly increase the number of elected women in election. Among the respondents of this study 69.23% of respondents believe that male contestants or politicians get most of the resources, 7.69% believe that female contestants get enough resources whereas 23.08% believe that both male and female contestants get equal share of resources from political parties during election campaigns. In addition to this, women are often kept out of winnable positions on party lists. So, the existing quota system works as a shield for women to maintain their presence in political arena. It is true that a woman has to overcome many hurdles from her family to enter into politics. After such struggle a female politician has to start a new struggle against her male counterparts for survival.

*Inadequate networks:* Women’s organizations or networks help female politicians significantly during the election campaign. These organizations often work with government and other NGOs to create opportunities for women politicians to get nomination and being elected in the process. Albeit most of the leading political parties in Bangladesh do have at least one female wing or organization within their organizational structures to facilitate female politicians, but few of these organizations are active enough to help female politicians when it is needed the most. A female member of AwamiMohila League and a potential contestant in the upcoming City Corporation election has told us during the interview that the women wing of Awami League is very active throughout the country, especially in Chittagong. She believes that the support they have been receiving from the former City Mayor of Chittagong Alhaz ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury was one of the most important factors that help many women to take politics as a career and build leadership within themselves. Mrs. Mohiudddin also encourages the female members of MohanagarAwamiMohila League to participate in politics and election. Mr. and Mrs. Mohiuddin always tried to ensure equal participation of women in every sphere of political activity within Chittagong Awami League. Female ward councilors as well as other female politicians and activists have unanimously acknowledged the fact that support from high profile leaders within the party provide moral boost for female politicians and pave way for new female politicians to take leadership. A table has been presented below showing the number of women members in the hierarchies of major political parties in Bangladesh.

Name of Party	Committees’ Name	Total Members	Female Members
AL	Central Executive Member	72	9
	Advisory Committee	32	2
BNP	Advisory Committee	34	0
	National Executive Committee	116	6
JP	Presidium Member	41	1
	Central Executive Committee	91	3
JEB	Majlish-E-ShuraMajlish-E-Amla	141	0
JSD	Executive Committee	112	4

Source: From the websites of major political parties of Bangladesh. (Accessed on 10 October, 2014)

*Bitter experience of women councilors:* Female politicians elected from the reserved seats have not been in any state of comfort or satisfaction since their victory in the last Chittagong City Corporation election. Almost all female councilors, who have been interviewed for this study, have showed their frustration regarding their present condition. A female councilor told us that the female Councilors from the reserved seats are nothing but ‘KolorBolod’ meaning a person who undergoes extreme hardship for others but do not receive any benefit or profit in return. This claim is absolutely true because a female councilor from a reserved seat has to perform the duties of three wards whereas a male councilor has to take the responsibility of one ward only. But the resource allocation

from the government is uneven, or unequal to be more precise. All female councilors, 14 at present, receive 33% of total resources to manage 41 wards whereas 41 male councilors receive 67% of resource to manage 41 wards.

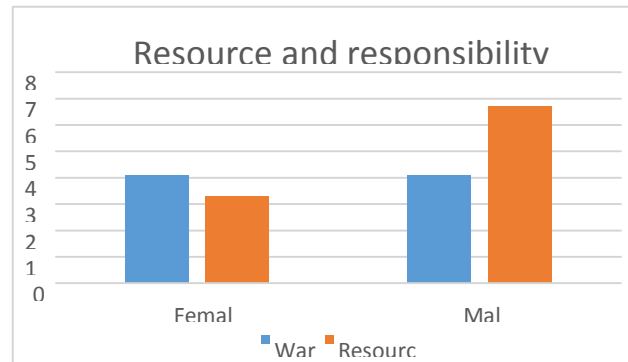


Figure 3: Resource and responsibility allocation among male and female councilors

So, it is practically impossible for a female councilor to meet the demands of all ward under her jurisdiction with such inadequate resources. When they go to visit their localities, general people pour the female councilors with unending complains and demands. But female councilors often unable to solve a few of these complains. So, general people become frustrated with the female councilors and threaten that they won't vote for the present female councilors in future elections. But female councilors have absolutely nothing to do about it and many of them believe that they are now experiencing their last tenure in the City Corporation as councilors. Some of them have already prepared themselves to say good bye to politics.

#### **Socio-Economic obstacles:**

Existing socio-economic conditions play a decisive role in the political participation of women as a whole. The family background or history and economic ability of a female politician play significant role in her political participation and election campaign. In addition to this, public-private dilemma, education and training are the major socioeconomic factors for a woman to enter into politics.

*Family obstacles:* In the existing socio-economic context of Bangladesh, family is a massive factor for women to start political career. Every female politician is someone's daughter or someone's wife. From traditional point of view, women have no scope to participate in politics due to their engagement in domestic activities. But many women have broken this traditional rule and enter into politics. These women have to manage their family members by convincing them. But not all families are positive towards such decisions. One of the respondents of this study, who is a female councilor of CCC, informed us that a woman has to bear dual burden when she chooses to take politics as career. Dual burden refers to the burden inside and outside of the home. Another respondent shared her personal life's experience with us. She believes that women have to maintain an equilibrium between the household works and other responsibilities. Although she is a political leader and has aspiration to participate in future election, but she has to maintain some sort of balance between her political life and her family life. More often than not, she becomes the victim of mental torture by other family members in her in-law's house when she fails to do something according to their likings. In addition to this, her family is creating on her to be victorious in the upcoming election which, she believes, is an unnecessary burden on her shoulder. End of the day, most of these female politicians remain deprived from both outside and inside their home.

*Education and training:* Women enter into political arena not only to lead the society but also to show and to improve the condition of women within the society. But it is very difficult for a woman to talk about their problem to argue with others. A woman may have a lot to say in the hut, but do all women have the courage and ability to speak about her condition in public? In most cases the answer would be a straight 'no'. Under the traditional patriarchal society, women have been discouraged to go in public and talk about their needs. In order to break down this long-standing barrier women need education and proper training. Although there is no consistent correlation between literacy rates and women's political participation but in Bangladesh a minimum level of literacy is required to contest in the election. But it is also a fact that education along with proper political training helps women to participate effectively in the political arena. Moreover, it is education as well as political training which helps women to increase their awareness, lobbying power and networking power. During the interview of the respondents

of this study a list of factors which contributed to women’s political participation was provided to each respondent. They were asked to rate those factors according to the importance. The result of which is given below.

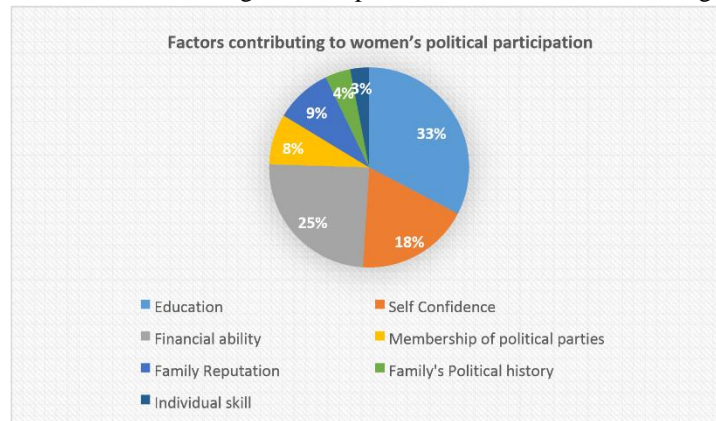


Figure 4: Factors contributing to women’s political participation

So, this figure suggests that education is one of the basic requirements, if not the main, for a woman to enter into political arena. Moreover, it is education which helps to create self-confidence and to remove wrong impression about politics.

*Economic factors:* Economic factor is one of the key factors for women which always works against them. Given the socio-economic setup in Bangladesh female children inherit very small amount of wealth from their father. Again, after getting married, women get a nominal share of wealth from their in-law’s house or in some cases get absolutely nothing. Under such circumstances, women are in a very vulnerable state from economic point of view. In Bangladesh, economic might is one the major criteria that a politician must have, otherwise he/she would be marginalized. The previous figure (f.4) shows the importance of economic strength. The organizational Secretary of JatiyatabadiMohila Dal, Chittagong, believes that it does not matter if a female member of a political party sacrifices the most for her party. She has to offer a significant amount of money in form of bribery for getting nomination or getting a position in decision making body. So, end of the day, it is their money which gets rewarded not their dedication or sacrifice. A figure is presented below which shows the sectors of spending that a female candidate has to spend during the election campaign.

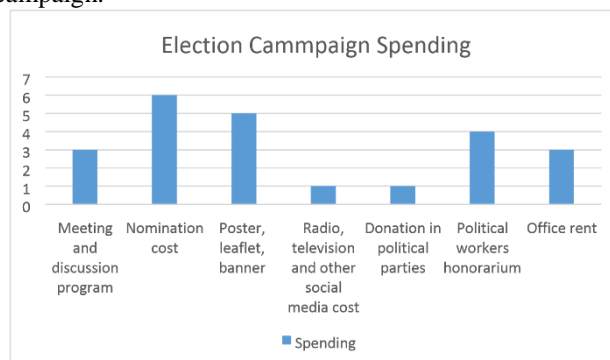


Figure 5:-Election campaign spending

Economic inferiority actually creates an overall inferiority complex among women. Due to insufficient financial resource, if a woman fails to win an election, she has to think over and over again before starting another election campaign. Because she may not win it again but she will certainly loose a significant amount of financial resource in the process which would be very difficult for her to make up. Economic inferiority compels female politicians or elected ward councilors to commit corruption. Again, the honorarium of female ward councilors is very insufficient. As mentioned earlier a women councilor has to carry more responsibilities than her actual capacity and resource, they have no other way bit to engage in corruption. In the process, the advancement of good governance gets seriously hampered.

**Ideological and psychological obstacles:**

Ideological and psychological are invisible hurdles for women's political participation but these obstacles have massive and long-term impact. These obstacles include lack of confidence in political participation, religious obstacles, inferiority complex, negative impression about politics etc.

*Religious Obstacles:* Although we are living in the realities of twenty first century, but our societies are not free from the activities of backward fundamentalists. These fundamentalists are creating impediments for women's political participation. Again, this part of the world is very sensitive towards religion and general people are easily manipulated through religion. Women are the worst victims of these fundamentalist politics as they are simply defenseless. 23.07% respondents of this study believe that religion is an impediment for women's political participation. Many evil aimed people often use religion as their weapon against women. Although Bangladesh is a moderate Muslim state, women here are not free to do whatever they want due to rigid social tradition and culture. Like other Muslim states of this region, fanatic fundamentalists often declare 'fatwa' forbidding women's political participation. General people are easily moved and influenced by such fatwas and turn their backs toward women. Again, female politicians have to maintain certain dress codes in their working places and their gathering with general people.

*Lack of confidence:* Adequate self-confidence is absolutely a fundamental requirement for women to participate in politics or election. Lack of self-confidence is one of the reasons behind women's under-representation in Bangladesh, especially at local government level. Lack of proper education and training also contribute in this regard. 31.23% of total respondents of this study believe that self-confidence is absolutely necessary for every woman to participate in politics or to contest in election. With the help of self-confidence women can establish themselves in the highest political positions. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, BNP leader Khaleda Zia and Speaker Dr. Shirin Sharmin are the prime examples of such leadership. Political arena is a place of struggle and without continuous struggle no one can be ever successful. Due to male's dominance in political arena women have to be full of confidence to prove their potentialities and eligibility. They have to believe that they can also lead men and they have the same potentials as men. In some cases, women are better campaigners, organizers and support mobilizer than men when they use their full ability and potentiality.

*Negative impression about politics:* Bangladesh people in general perceive politics as a 'dirty game', especially women. There are so many reasons to mention behind such firm perception. One of the reasons is corruption. Bangladesh is a safe haven for corruption and government is the resort of all sorts of mal practices. The politicians are often engaged in this evil practice. It is the general perception of mass people that all government bodies are home of corruption. Even the wall of a government building takes bribe- goes a common saying. In fact, people take corruption as a common affair in Bangladesh. Another important factor that contribute to the bad imaging of politics in Bangladesh is the practice of hypocrisy. Political leaders often make promises to get votes from the general people during election campaign. When these leaders overcome the electoral hurdle, they become reluctant to fulfil their promises. As a consequence, people lose their confidence and temper over the politicians.

**Quota System:**

The quota system was adopted by the government of Bangladesh to contribute women's political participation and autonomy. Although the quota system has created more opportunities for women to enter into politics and election, by the same vein it has accelerated their dependency in politics and has reinforced their marginality. The quota system has been designed to ensure certain presence of women in selected places. According to the Local Government Act 2009, one third of the councilors' seats are reserved for women candidates, but women can also contest in general seats. Prior to this act, 10-30 seats were reserved for women depending on the size of the Paurasavas/City Corporations. It is important to note here that quota system in national level and local level in Bangladesh is different. Being a global fast track strategy to ensure women's presence in formal structure of politics, it cannot be said that the quota system in Bangladesh has been a success story. No doubt that it has opened the door for women to enter into political arena but thus system, by no means, has accelerated women's empowerment. The main problem still remains with social and political structure. Political and social spheres are clearly dominated by men. So, the quota system cannot lead to an effective repetition of women. For example- in CCC there are 41 male councilors and 14 female councilors. The ratio is almost 3:1 (male: female). So numerically they are outnumbered here. These 14 female councilors have come through the quota system. As already mentioned above these female councilors do not get enough from the authority to manage their areas of jurisdiction. Without removing social and political dominance of men, the quota system would not be able to empower women.



**Way forward:-**

Without any doubt, women in Bangladesh are outnumbered in political arena. To ensure meaningful democratic polity and good governance women's active political participation is absolutely necessary. Surely, reserved system has been instrumental in increasing women's political participation but the system is not sufficient enough to empower women. So, the following policy recommendations may be taken into account to ensure women's political participation as well as empowerment.

**Social Changes:**

Awareness raising among the general mass regarding women's political participation is a powerful tool for creating gender equality in political as well as social sphere. Such awareness can remove traditional social barriers and can increase the number of women considering politics as career. Public media can play a massive role in creating social awareness for women's political participation. This will certainly result in changing voters and political parties view on female candidates. In addition to this, data generated from research work by different organizations can contribute significantly. Civil society can play their part for increasing women's political participation. Awareness raising program, training program can be launched by civil society groups to ensure suitable condition for eligible female politicians or activists. Like other countries around the earth, these groups can help female candidates in fundraising for election campaign. Women need proper education and political training to overcome the social and family barriers. Education also helps women to overthrow the traditional and religious hindrances. The issues of women's political participation should be incorporated in the textbooks so that students can learn about this issue from their early ages.

**Changes in political parties:**

From political recruitment to nomination almost all political parties give preference towards male candidates. As a result, women face all sorts of discrimination within political parties. To eliminate such discrimination women's sections within political parties can play a major role. Traditionally, women's sections remain busy in serving political parties' interests than for the parties to serve women's interest. But these female wings can contribute significantly in creating more rooms for women within political parties through policy development and coordinating activities. Only women's sections can address female members' issues and needs. Training programs can be arranged for female candidates and aspirants so that they can run the election campaign smoothly. Fostering, motivation, improving public speaking, consultations, assemblies etc. can increase a female candidate's ability to win an election. Political parties can provide financial help from their annual party budget to female candidates so that they can spend sufficiently during election campaigns.

**Changes in government bodies:**

The reserved system is good enough to continue but the duties and responsibilities of women councilors need be to be clearly defined. Resource should be distributed evenly among male and female councilors. Women leadership needs to be created gradually. The political hierarchy of major political parties still lacks female leadership. Therefore, it is imperative to create leadership at the grassroots level. To improve women social and economic status within society motivational programs along with programs for expanding opportunities for education, health care and employment should be launched. Electoral violence against women is one the main reasons for which women are not interested in taking politics as career. Electoral violence can be physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering which intends to decrease the number of women in political arena. Such violence can take place within political parties or governmental bodies of the state or within the family of female politicians. Therefore, law should be imposed against such persecution or harassment.

**Conclusion:-**

Unlike other progressing democratic countries, Bangladesh has not been successful in ensuring the participation of women in every level of political sphere. Although we see the presence of women leadership in the highest levels of government, but the local government level is still dominated by the male politicians. In many cases, women are working as active party members for years, but they don't get nomination from their respective parties to participate in the election. Such treatment from political parties creates frustration among women politicians and hinders the way for future women leadership. Lack of family support, social backwardness, inferior complexity, religious and social superstitions, financial insolvency, insufficient motivation and encouragement are the reasons behind the limited participation of women in politics in Bangladesh. Thus, its time to take initiative to increase women's political participation and leadership. Otherwise it would be too late to repair the damage. Political parties, civil

society, government, non-governmental organizations should work together to ensure better women empowerment in political arena.

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