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Obstacles of Women Representatives Functioning in Union Parishad in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

The union parishad works closely with the marginalized people in the local area. At an interval of five years, a chairperson is elected as the head of the council, a member is elected from each of the nine wards, and from each of the three wards three women members are selected respectively. The three special positions of the selected women members act as the empowerment of the women. This research aims to identify the obstacles of women representatives while functioning their work in union parishad. This research article also suggests identifying the factors which hinder the performance of women representatives. This paper also provides recommendations of how these obstacles will be removed by taking proper initiatives.

Keywords: Women's empowerment, Local government, Obstacles, and Women's representative.

INTRODUCTION:

Bangladesh has a long and traditional history of local government. The existence of local government in the subcontinent can be traced since the ancient time. Local government is an organization made up of local elected representatives to carry out local activities. To maintain law and order in the rural areas of the Indian subcontinent, the union parishad is originated from the village panchayat act in 1870. Still, it is considered as the only and the oldest participatory local government institution. A three-tier local government system in 1976 was promulgated by the government according to the local government ordinance. The Second Amendment Act 1997 of Bangladesh in the local government (union parishad) is considered as a milestone to ensure women's equal access in politics (Rahman, 2010).

In the election held in 1997, for the first time in our country nearly 14,000 women were directly elected as

a member of the union parishad. This was a great moment for the political and social empowerment of women in our country (Rashid, 2008). Equal participation of women in political life plays an important role for the advancement of women. Without the active involvement of women all levels the goals of equality, decision making and the development and peace cannot be fulfilled (KHAN & Ara, 2006). This research aims to examine whether the women representatives of UP (both women reserved seat & general seat) perform their functions properly or not. If they cannot function properly, what are the obstacles they face while functioning their activities?

Objectives of the study

The objective of this paper is to identify the obstacles of women representatives while functioning their work in Union Parishad. Especially, it seeks to identify the factors which create difficulties to perform the fun-

ction smoothly by the women representatives. This study also attempts to provide how these obstacles will be removed by taking proper initiatives.

METHODOLOGY:

The study shows the case study of Mymensingh, Kishorgonj, and Jamalpur districts. Data for this study have been collected from primary and secondary sources. The researcher has collected primary data from Dhaniakhola union Parishad, Trishal Upazila, Josodal union Parishad Kishorgonj Sadar and Nayanagor union Parishad, Melandah Upazila. Moreover, to collect secondary data, we use books, Journals, Newspapers, social media, and previous research work.

Respondent of the profile

We have taken three members from different unions of Mymensingh, Kishorgonj, and Jamalpur district.

Union Name	Ward No	Chairman & Members Name
Dhanikhola	-	Asaduzzaman Asad
Dhanikhola	7,8,9	Taslina (Member)
Josodal	1,2,3	Nasima Akter (Member)
Josodal	1,2,3	Hannan (Member)
Nayanagor	1,2,3	Amena Begum (Member)
Nayanagor	-	Shofiquil Islam

Limitations

- 1) Due to lockdown, we could not cover all districts to collect data for conducting this research. For this, we selected Mymensingh, Kishorgonj and Jamalpur districts as a sample area.
- 2) In addition, some representatives denied participating in the interview section.

Conceptual Framework

Local government generally refers to a mass organization that acts as part of a national government based on the territory of a country in a relatively small geographical area. In the local government structure union parishad is considered as an ancient unit of our country. This institution has passed more than 152 years. After the independence of Bangladesh, the second amendment act of the local government (Union Parishad) in 1997 was declared. In this act, three reserved seats for the women in the union parishad was introduced, where the women members from each of the three wards were directly elected. Thus, the status of women equalizes the total progress of nation, because in a political and social structure the women have to

play a vital role in building the country (Shamim, 2013). To perform women's representative role and responsibility at UP, they face different obstacles such as male domination, family problems, lack of training, social barriers, etc. As a result, they cannot perform their function correctly, hampers the overall activities.

RESULTS:

Male Domination

The dominance and discrimination of the president and male members over female representatives can be noticed in the allocation of the social security box and other development work in Union Parishad, such as cards. VGF, social security box program VGD card, etc. Even if three words are selected together, you will not receive the same card number as 1 Word member. In addition, in the case of projects allocated for government development such as ADB, LGSP, Project for Rural Women, Kabikha, etc., women representatives get less allocation than male representatives, and often, women members do not get any news that any government allocation is coming for Union Parishad. During discussion with the women members of Josodal union of Kishorgonj Sadar regarding the obstacles of women members while functioning their works in union parishad she said that

“We are the elected women members of the union parishad from three wards. However, we are given less importance to perform village courts. Moreover, the total number of VGF, VGD card, widow allowance card given to a male member is not equally same given to a female representative. In addition, women members also do not gate proper share of development expenditure”.

In our country, at the village level, the Union Parishad seeks to resolve various family problems, marital quarrels, problems with neighbors, and other social problems through village courts through arbitration. In most of the cases in our country, unmarried and married women in the rural areas are abused in various ways. Sometimes in school, college, university, sometimes on the street, sometimes in a family environment. To solve all these problems, the government is making arrangements to have women representatives at the UP level. However, in reality, UP women representatives are neglected. Women representatives are

not often called during village court trials, and even if they call again, their opinion or decision is not accepted. Another problem that does not reflect the views of women representatives of village courts is their illiteracy. Most of the women representatives in our country are less educated and less educated. So, they are right in arbitration and cannot give an opinion or correct decision. That is why women representatives are neglected in the village courts.

Maximum Women Representatives remain uneducated

In our country, the educational qualifications for Chairman, Male Member, and Female Representative of the Union Parishad are yet to be determined. Therefore, many less educated, less educated candidates are elected as chairmen, male members, and female repre-

sentatives in the UP elections. Less-educated UP women members cannot show their skills in different types of work of the council. During discission with the chairman of Dhanikhola union of Trishal upazila regarding the obstacles of women representatives while functioning their works in union level he said that:

“At present women representatives are elected directly through election to the reserved women seat to the in unio parishad. It denotes a good sign for a democratic country. However, there are no specific rules in our country regarding the work of women representatives according to the constitution. Hence, they have to face much difficulty to function their work smoothly.”

Social background of women representatives in UP

Background	GSMs	Reserved Seat Members
RSMs	N=175	N= 191
Level of Education		
Illiterate	2.624.18	-
Primary	27.33	59.22
Secondary	20.42	24.08
Higher Secondary	8.33	-
Graduate	-	-
Not Available		
Occupation		
Housewife	58.86	76.44
Teaching	10.85	2.62
NGO Workers	10.29	-
Business women	6.83	1.05
Others	13.17	19.89
Monthly Family Income		
Up to TK. 5000	73.7	92.49
Above TK. 5000	26.3	3.13
Not Available	-	4.38
Marital Status		
Married	74.86	83.77
Unmarried	5.14	1.57
Divorced	2.86	1.05
Widowed	12.00	8.38
Others	5.14	5.23
Not Available		
Political Affiliation		
Bangladesh Awami League	70.86	Not Available
Bangladesh Nationalist Party	22.85	Not Available

Jatiya Party	2.29	Not Available
Jamaat-i-Islam Bangladesh	4.00	Not Available

Source: Qadir and Islam, (1987)

Lack of adequate training

The only institution in our country to train local government representatives is the National Local Government Institute, and it is located in Dhaka. Under the NILG law, they establish local government district councils, Upazila councils, union councils, municipalities directly under the central government, and the civil servants, officers and employees of city corporations. Nevertheless, the institute did not provide any separate training for the elected women representatives at different local government levels. However, it did not provide separate training for women M.P.s. However, in reality, there was a need for separate training for women M.P.s as women in our country lag far behind men and are subjected to various forms of discrimination, so there was a need to provide separate training to ensure equality and equality in all spheres of society. There is no separate training system for women representatives at different levels of local government, and the current training for all types of representatives is fraught with problems such as untimely training. In other words, many members of the Union Parishad elected in 2016 have not yet received training. Only three days of training is given in NILG. This 3-day training is not enough according to the scope of work of local government. Moreover, training for more time is essential. Besides, the local government experts have raised many questions about those who give training in this institute. It is essential to provide separate training for women members in this organization (Yasmin and Husna, 2020).

Family barriers of women representatives

Most of the married girls in our country still work as housewives in their husband's family, and their husband earns income to run the household. Usually, the husband leads the family in making and implementing all kinds of decisions; that is, the husband, as the head of the family, has all kinds of authority. Women usually cook and raise children in the family. In this situation, when a woman becomes a candidate in the election and wins the election and assumes the responsibility of union member and Chairman, she has to take care of the family on the one hand and fulfill the responsibilities

and duties entrusted to her on the other. Many times, in the world, parents-in-law, mother-in-law may have small children, but UP can hardly fulfill its responsibilities in taking care of them. Again, many times, the husband of the female UP representative does not like all his wife's activities. Therefore, women UP representatives from such families cannot properly exercise their responsibilities and powers. Women representatives from families who do not get enough support from their families think that it would be better if they could somehow pass their five-year term. They try to be satisfied with what they get in their salary allowance development allocation. Women cannot correctly use the responsibilities, duties, and powers for all these difficulties. During discussion with the women representatives of Nayanagar union of Melandah upazila regarding the obstacles of women representatives while functioning their works in union parishad she said that;

“In our patriarchal society, women are not allowed to go into politics outside the family. Even though a few of the family permit but the opinion of the mass people is that women members are not able to play an important role for the development of the society and solving various social problems.”

Social views regarding women representatives at UP

In Bangladesh, 78.6% of the population lives in villages. The view of most people in villages is that women will do the housework; that is, they will cook, look after the children and take care of other household chores. Where women will do politics, work outside and mix with different types of people, it is still not acceptable to the people of our country. As a result, the representation of women in UP is not clearly perceived by most people in rural society. The people of rural society still do not want to believe that women can do any significant work of society, any big problem. So, people go to male members and chairpersons to solve their problems. Besides, those families are pious and a little conservative; they do not want to leave their female members amid politics. In addition, the elected female members also go to work and are subjected to various types of sexual harassment by men inside and outside UP. In this situation, women are afraid to come to the polls in all

types of local government, including UP, and do not feel comfortable working even if they win the election.

Lack of constitutional clarification

On the role of reserved seats for women representatives in local government bodies, there is no specific clarity in the constitution of our country. Eventually, there is no specification in the law regarding their roles and responsibilities.

Lack of good link with upper-level administrator

Only a few women members in both reserved and general seats have good links with actors outside of the locality, such as MP, UNO, or senior administrators. Most of the women members from both reserved and general seats remain disadvantaged visa is the chairman and UNO, and they thus often have to accept many unfavorable conditions or work under adverse circumstances.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

The initiation of women's reserved seat of union Parishad in our country is an excellent initiative to empower women, to ensure women's participation, and ensuring equal rights. However, reserved seat and general seat women representatives in union Parishad in our country face various types of obstacles in functioning their activities like Male Domination, Lack of constitutional clarification, social views regarding women representatives at UP, Family barriers of women representatives, Lack of adequate training, Lack of good link with upper-level administrator. However, some initiatives should be taken to reduce these obstacles such as the perception regarding participation of women in politics should be encouraged by everyone in our society, The guardian of female representatives should cooperate to perform their functions properly, they should be properly trained, male domination should be minimized, the government should publish gazette to clarify

the role & responsibilities of UP members. If our government, NGOs, Civil society, Media, Politicians, and other important key stakeholders in our country perform positive functions to empower women, then our desire will be fulfilled.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:

There is no conflict of interest from the authors' end.

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