

Problems of Participation of the Women Leaders in the Union Parishad in Bangladesh: Unheard Voices and Grim Realities

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Abstract

This paper discusses obstacles of participation of the women leaders (WLs) in the grassroots based local government in Bangladesh, i.e. Union Parishad (UP). Local government of Bangladesh has a history of 145 years but women's representation is ensured just only 2 decades ago. Within 2 decades time span, WLs fails to ensure their effective participation due to some built-in problems of the UP. Against such a context, the paper is aimed at unraveling the research question: What are the problems WLs facing in ensuring their participation? The paper is based on phenomenological approach which was supported by case study, content analysis and observation methods. The findings of the paper reveal that women leaders identified 3 major challenges towards playing their role and participation in the UP such as i) patriarchy or male domination, ii) corruption and iii) faulty legal provision imposed upon them. Solution might be changing the legal and structural arrangements in the UP. Prerogatives for women's education should be expanded in the society to promote pluralistic and participatory mechanisms so that women can take part in the sphere of local governance and such efforts should help modify patriarchal values system and other social ills around it.

Keywords: Problems of woman leaders; Local government; Union Parishad; Bangladesh

Statement of the Research Problem

The Union Parishad (thereafter UP) is the lowest unit of rural local government (LG) in Bangladesh that began functioning during the British colonial rule in this subcontinent. Since the colonial era until 1976 there was no provision for women representation in the UP in Bangladesh. In a real sense, women's representation in the UP was ensured in the LG Ordinance of 1997. During the prolonged 145 (1870 to 2015) years of LG history, important development concerning women's representation took place within the last 18 years that spanned from 1997 to 2015. However within these 2 decades women leaders (thereafter WLs) strived to ensure their participation in the UP. Against such a backdrop this paper aimed at unraveling the grassroots realities of the problems of participation of the WLs in the UP affairs in Bangladesh.

In essence, local government (LG) in this sub-continent has its deep roots in the past. The foundation of today's UP was laid down during the British rule with the *Village Chowkidary Act of 1870*. The ending of British rule in India gave birth of two different states such as India and Pakistan in 1947. Afterwards, Bangladesh achieved its independence from the internal colonialism¹ of Pakistan in 1971 and inherited LG systems from Pakistan with some modifications in its structure. Since 1870 the functionaries of local government² were always in the hands of males (Chowdhury et al., 1994: 6) and rights to vote in the local bodies were dependent on the educational qualification, possession of property and tax payment etc. (Smock, 1977:117; Women for Women, 1992). However, women's representation in the political community was allowed through the Government of India Act in 1935 (Forbes, 2002) but based on the universal adult franchise, women for the first time took part in the election to the rural local bodies in 1956 (Rashiduzzaman, 1968; Inter Parliamentary

¹ The term internal colonialism was used by Rawnak Jahan (1972) in her book *Pakistan: Failure in National Integration*. USA: Columbia University

² Here in this paper local government connotes rural local government, more specifically Union Parishad, the oldest rural local government body in Bangladesh. Till 1983, the only local government in Bangladesh was Union Parishad. In the last 144 years that spanned from 1870 till 2014, UP never loses its representative character and election was continued every 5 years alternate in UP unlike many ups and downs in Bangladesh society.

Union, 1987) and thereby only one female candidate was elected in the UP election of 1956 and 1969 during the Pakistan regime. In the first UP election of Bangladesh in 1973, out of 4352 UPs, only one woman from Rangpur district was elected as the UP Chairman (Alam and Begum, 1974: 38-51). Afterwards, women's representation to the UP was enshrined by two presidential ordinances namely through Local Government Ordinance of 1976 and Municipal Ordinance of 1977, which for the first time provided a provision of nomination of 2 women members in the UP. Remarkable development regarding women's representation in LG took place during the Ershad regime³ through the Local Government (Union Parishad) Ordinance of 1983 that made a provision of nomination of three women members in the UP (Haque, 2003; Khan, 2011; Khan and Ara, 2006). In 1993, three women members were elected by the 9 elected male members and the Chairman. A major breakthrough in the representation style of women in the UP was made in 1997, which provided a reservation of one-third of the total seat for women members. By the UP act of 1997, in each Union three seats are reserved for women and accordingly one woman is elected from three wards, whereas one male member is elected from one ward through direct election in the UP. In later days women representation in the UP has been expanded to different standing and project committees following an office order by the concerned ministry⁴.

Methodology Employed

Research Questions

The study aimed at unraveling the research question: what were the problems of participation of the woman leaders encountered in the Union Parishad of Bangladesh?

³ Hussain Muhammad Ershad was one of the military rulers in Bangladesh. While he was the Chief of Army Staff of the Bangladesh Army, he declared Martial Law following a bloodless coup and became Chief Martial Law Administrator in 1982. Afterwards he became the President of Bangladesh from 1983 to 1990. During Ershad regime, following the suggestions of National Executive Committee for Administrative Reform and Reorganization (NICARR), he undertook substantive reform measures in the sphere of civil administration and local government system in Bangladesh.

⁴ The Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives is responsible for regulating and controlling matters relating to the local governments in Bangladesh.

Research Methods

The significance to undertake this study lies with the basic premise that there was hardly any phenomenological study in Bangladesh dealing with the woman's participation. Therefore I adopted hermeneutical phenomenological approach, which was substantiated by case study and content analysis methods. I deemed that this qualitative methods could help me explore lived experiences, multiple realities, diverse dimensions and dynamics of perception, problems and benefits of participation of the woman leaders from their own perspectives and thus to help unearth the research questions properly, which I could not obtain otherwise. I tried my level best to incorporate my knowledge of observation gained through a prolonged (more or less about 200 hours) field work in this paper. To support primary data and to analyze the textual descriptions obtained from the participants, I adopted content analysis method using the relevant secondary data through a heuristic search from library materials and online both.

Data collection

For fructifying my goal, initially I tried to establish a contact with my research participants. As my principal participants were the woman leaders, so I needed to maintain pre-fixed time so that they could understand my sincerity and feel a sense of obligation to respond my queries. Then on meeting them I tried to establish a good rapport and trust with them so that they could mentally turn on to share their lived experience without hesitation. During rapport and trust building stage I collected some socio-economic and political profiles of the women leaders and thereafter I tried to engage them in sharing their experience relating to their participation in the UP affairs with me. As soon as I finished collecting the short checklist I then invited one by one to share their perceptions and experiences. In most cases I interviewed the participants in the UP Complex. I collected data during July-December 2013. Having experienced bizarre experiences based on a male-female group discussion, I mostly interviewed the WLs separately so that they could share their experiences and realities

properly, whereas in few cases I also interviewed some male members and community leaders for having their perspectives and better understanding the problematic. I recorded the whole discussion with the informed consent of the participants and afterwards I prepared transcription in English from Bengali.

Selection of Research Participants and the Settings

In order to uncover my research questions initially I planned to collect data from (3x7) 21 woman members of 7 UPs from 7 divisions of Bangladesh. But as soon as I started data collection in Comilla District I failed to move to other districts due to severe political unrest of Bangladesh. Then I decided to collect data from the women members of some UPs around Comilla district, where I work. The problem of participation of the woman members was so acute that by this time some of the themes started repeating. Thereafter I obtained a commendable insight about my research questions I then visited to a few UPs in Chittagong and Sylhet districts which are nearby districts of BARD, Comilla.

At some point of my data collecting period from the women members of the UP in Comilla, Sylhet and Chittagong Districts I noticed that there were 23 directly elected woman Chairpersons(WCs) in the UP (Table 1), which resulted altering my initial data collection plan. Thereafter, collecting the list of those woman Chairpersons I observed that most of the woman Chairpersons were elected from Dhaka (8) and Rajshahi (7) Divisions, whereas the number of woman Chairpersons elected in Khulna, Sylhet and Chittagong Divisions were 5, 2 and 1 respectively.

While I was collecting data from Comilla, Chittagong and sylhet district by that time political crisis of Bangladesh aggravated further and my approved leave period was about to terminate. Then I observed that if I plan to collect data during holidays I can overcome the political problem. The opposition started giving their *hartal* program on Mondays to Tuesday which made my trip to other district or division quite impossible. Then consulting the government websites I collected the mobile numbers of the UP Chairmen and Women Members. Contacting personally with them I completed my data collection in Bangladesh although I needed to

reschedule my return ticket by 2 weeks but when I was gathering the data I was quite happy to get rich data from a comprehensive plan despite huge repetition of the selected theme.

I prepared this paper from a broader research design. To be very frank, as this was my Ph.D. dissertation, so I tried to employ my sincere efforts for data collection. Therefore, as a student of qualitative stream, I conducted 10 in-depth case studies taking 5 cases on woman members and 5 cases on woman Chairpersons covering 5 Divisions of Bangladesh. Also for phenomenological analysis I needed to interview woman members and Chairpersons in such a way so that it could represent the population and it could cover most of the socio-cultural zones of Bangladesh. Moreover to cross-check a few issues I interviewed 8 male members and 6 male Chairpersons. For having better insights I also interviewed some general villagers and community leaders. Total sampled research participants were given in Table-2.

For collecting data from woman members I could not but to concentrate my efforts to gather data in Comilla, Chittagong and Sylhet Districts. Therefore I selected 2 WCs from Dhaka and Rajshahi Divisions each and 1 from Khulna Division proportionately. As I selected male Chairpersons from Sylhet and Chittagong Division, so I did not consider these Divisions for woman Chairpersons.

Data Reduction and Analysis

For phenomenological analysis I arranged data thematically. As soon as the same theme started repeating, I stopped data collection but for checking regional variation I finally collected data from 37 woman members, 8 male members, 5 woman chairpersons and 6 male chair persons from 9 UPs covering different socio-cultural zones⁵ of Bangladesh. In qualitative research, one of the major challenges is data reduction and make final conclusion from a huge data⁶. In such exercise I

⁵ There are 7 divisions, 64 districts, 507 Upazilas and 4498 Union Parishads in Bangladesh. The sampled 19 UPs were selected from covering 5 divisions and 7 districts of Bangladesh i.e. Chittagong, Comilla, Faridpur, Sylhet, Barisal, Bogra and Gaibandha districts.

⁶ Mills and Huberman (1984) commented that analysis methods were rarely reported enough detailed for the readers to follow how a researcher got from 3600 pages of field notes to the final conclusions. Again it was learnt that the data base they consulted in the preparation of the 1994 edition of

was ultimately able to deduct huge data synchronizing all those data into a holistic framework for analysis the study findings in order to answer my research questions properly. In line with the research questions, I then organized data into different thematic areas and thereafter reducing data from 21 themes, I finalized 4 themes through a rigorous process.

Literature Review

Bangladesh being predominantly Muslim and with a high degree of religiosity, is one of the world's most impoverished countries with more than half of its population living below the poverty line and more than a third (35%) living in extreme poverty (Chowdhury, 2005: 22). Rural women in Bangladesh, remain the poorest of the poor; faring worse than men on almost every measure (Alam and Karim, 2007; Mahtab, 2007; Naz, 2006; Hasmi, 2000). Empirical data across developing countries show that households below the poverty line are higher for female-headed families in Bangladesh (ADB, 2001a: x). Women wage earners in poor households consume on average of 1.3 meals a day as compared to 2.4 meals eaten by men (Mahtab, 2007). Women are less educated, having a 48% literacy rate compared with 59% for males (United Nations, 2007). Women's medical expenditure in the typical household is 45% compared with 55% of men (Stalker, 1995). Only 45% of women in Bangladesh own a second set of clothes, a pair of shoes or some warm clothing (Hamid, 1996: 86). Furthermore, Bangladesh is one of the few countries in the world where women on average die younger than men (Mahtab, 2007). Although half of the population in Bangladesh is women, on an average they do two-thirds of the total works including household works and received only one-tenth of the world income (Huq, 1995; Hussain, 2002). Education for girls is considered as an economically less useful investment (Islam, 1998). In general, girls are viewed as potential mothers and homemakers, thus priority is given to their training in domestic chores rather than their right to education (ADB, 2001a). Moreover, having same level of education,

Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook had more than tripled since publication of the first edition (Mills and Huberman, 1984, 1994).

women receive lower wage rate than men particularly in garments industry (UNDP, 1994).

The reason behind women's low representation in public office is that there are obstacles to women's full, equal participation in politics. Critics argue that women's non-participation in political space is a consequence of a number of factors, including women's responsibilities for family and children, the negative attitudes and discrimination of political parties, patriarchal structures and attitudes and its manifestation in the structures and agenda of political parties, unfair electoral voting systems, high costs of elections, and lack of access to training and education conservative religious and cultural doctrines, discriminatory socio-economic conditions, electoral systems, the nature of the regime and financial barriers (Rule, 1994a, 1994b; Liswood, 1999; Harris, 2001; Reyes, 2001). There are three reasons for non-participation of women in politics: i) difference in socialization; ii) less education; iii) low esteem resulting from traditional thought and superstition (Mukhopadhyay, 2005). Researchers pointed out that among political, socio-economic and cultural factors; cultural factor is playing the most inhibiting role for gender equality in political representation (Moore and Shackman, 1996; Paxton, 1997; Matland, 1998; Kenworthy and Malami, 1999). Bangladesh being a South Asian nation, where a patriarchal system reinforces women's dependency on men and men have strong reservations regarding women in leadership and management positions (Halder, 2004). Religion is well recognized as playing a major role in sanctioning many cultural norms and practices that underpin women's subordinate status, which includes the patrilineal organization of households, patrilineal inheritance systems, dowry and early marriage (Kabeer, 2002; Hamid, 1996; Mahtab, 2007).

Against such a backdrop, women's representation in the local government institutions (LGIs) is essential from a political point of view as from the considerations of both equity and production (Quadir, 1993: 25; Quader and Islam, 1987: 4). Women's involvement in the LGIs could help develop themselves as political resource persons and involvement of women in the LGIs creates a scope for familiarizing them with the

democratic system, which acts as a training ground for political education. To develop political awareness and consciousness women should be involved in social, economic and political activities and participation of women in higher decision making bodies will help them deal with women's issue more successfully (Siddiqui, 1995: 271-272). In fact, the LGI is the closest and most acceptable level of government to women because it traditionally provides various social services such as electricity, waste disposal, public transport, water, schools, health clinics and other programs relating to poverty reductions and rural development. The decisions of the LGIs therefore have a direct impact on the private lives of women and therefore, women must be fully part of the local democratic system and have full access to decision making structure. Until the interests of women have been represented at the local level, the system is not fully democratic (IULA, 1998). However women's participation in the political decision making process at local level is marginal. In fact, the problems of women's participation are more of structural than organizational. Such structural problems are embedded in wide-spread illiteracy, confinement in household work, old tradition of subordinate roles, religious and cultural factors and lack of training and motivational facilities (Ahmed and Quader, 1993). Women are given opportunity to participate in the LGI but their role is not clearly stated by the government (Khan, 2006). Women members are excluded from the UP activities but women's political participation results in tangible gains for democracy, including greater responsiveness to citizen needs, increased cooperation across party and ethnic lines and more sustainable peace (Wollack, 2010). It was evident that women's political participation has profound positive and democratic impacts on communities, legislatures, political parties and citizen's lives; therefore it is exigently essential to delve into the participatory politics of women in order to consolidate the grassroots democracy. Against the above backdrop, it is deemed through analysis of women's problems of participation in the sphere of grassroots-based local government in Bangladesh, this paper will help contribute to women's political participation in the UP, which in turn can strengthen

local democracy and economy of the country.

Some Major Socio-political Profiles of the Women Leaders in the Union Parishad

It might be interesting for the readers to know about some of the major socio-economic and political profiles of the women leaders of the Union Parishad. Based on data obtained from 83 woman members (including 10 in-depth case studies), these data were analyzed in the light of the available literature from other studies. The issues included in the socio-economic and political characteristics were age, education, income, marital status, land owned, family legacy, NGO involvement, political involvement, linkages with the MP, socio-economic background, and family support and training received by the women representatives.

Age: World Food Program (WFP, 1998) found that 42.78% and 25.56% of the women leaders belonged to the age group of 30-39 years and 20-29 years respectively. Quddus et al. (2001: 8) found almost similar findings, where 46.27% and 38.70% of the women leaders belonged to the 25-34 and 35-44 age groups respectively. Rahman and Sultana (2005) found 46.15 % and 21.80% of the women leaders in the age group of 26-30 years and 31-35 years respectively. Rahman (2013)⁷ found that 72% of the women members belonged to the 30-39 age group, and 19% of the women were from the 40-49 age group and only 14% belonged to the 50-plus age group. Most of the studies found a lower number of women leaders belonged to below the age group under 25 years and the age group above 50 years.

Education: WFP (1998) study revealed that 56.11% of the women had a secondary level of education. It also showed that 15.00% and 6.94% of the women leaders had an SSC and HSC level of education. Only 5.28% of the women members had a bachelor level of education. Quddus et al. (2001) pointed out that 44.00% of the women had read up to the secondary level. In the same study it was found that 15.10% and 3.90%

⁷ In addition to my sampled population, as part of the present study some data containing major socio-economic and political profiles of the 73 woman leaders were collected by the researcher during his field trip using a short checklist.

of the women had achieved SSC and HSC level of education respectively and only 2.90% obtained bachelor and master level of education. Rahman and Sultana (2005) found that 41.03% of the women leaders had an education up to the secondary level. It was also found that 24.36%, 8.97%, and 3.85% of the women leaders had an SSC, HSC, and bachelor level of education respectively. Rahman (2013) found that 39% of the women members had an education below the SSC level whereas only 19% of them had an HSC, and 8% of the women members had a bachelor level of education. The above findings show that the women members in the UP were moderately educated. From the cases it was found that education had an insignificant role in terms of the women leaders being successful. This finding was corroborated by the findings of Siddiquee (2008), who found that compared to the women UP members with relatively higher levels of education, women having relatively lower level education were significantly more likely to have knowledge about their roles and responsibilities in the UP, and also those women were found more to be involved in the social welfare affairs in their communities.

Income: A WFP (1998) study revealed that 74.44% women members did not earn any money, while 15% of them had an annual income ranging from Tk. 6000.00 (77 US\$) to Tk. 20,000.00 (257 US\$). Only 9% of the women leaders had an annual income of Tk. 21,000.00 (270 US\$) and above. Quddus et al. (2001) exhibited that 16.82% of the women leaders had an annual income of Tk. 25,000.00 (322 US\$) whereas 17.77% and 15.14% of the women leaders belonged to the earning income group of Tk. 45,000-55,000 (579-707 US\$) and Tk. 85,000 (1093 US\$) per annum respectively.

Marital Status: In different studies it was revealed that most of the women leaders in the UPs were married. The WFP (1998), Quddus et al. (2001), and Rahman and Roy (2005) found that 84.72%, 85.8%, and 83.33% of the women leaders were married respectively. Rahman (2013) found that 95% of the women members in the UP were married.

Land Ownership by Women Leaders: A WFP (1998) study found that 53% of the elected women's families owned more than five acres of land

and none of the elected woman was totally landless. This was supported by the study findings of Rahman and Sultana (2005), where no woman leaders belonged to the landless category. However, in a study conducted by Quddus et al. (2001) it was found that 2.73% belonged to the landless group. It was also revealed that 60.88% and 28.50% of the women leaders belonged to the small and medium farmer's group having land size of 0.05-2.45 and 2.50-7.49 acres respectively. Only 7.89% of the women leaders had 7.50 acres or more land. This differed however from the findings of Rahman and Roy (2005), which revealed that 61.74% of the women leaders had more than 7.50 acres of land. It was also revealed that 51.51% of the leaders had 0.5-4.99 acres of land. In the present study, it was found from the case studies that the women Chairpersons belonged to the relatively upper landed class because most of them had more than 5 acres of land (average 8.3 acres), but in case of the women members they belonged to the 0.5-4.99 acres of land group.

Family Legacy: In the present study it was found that out of the 10 cases, 6 women leaders (4 Chairpersons and 2 members) directly come to politics using their family legacy. This corroborates the findings of other studies. Quddus et al. (2001) found that 61% of the women leaders' relatives were actively involved in political activities. Among these, around 50% of the husbands of the women leaders were actively involved with different political parties. Rahman and Sultana (2005) found that 17.95% of the women member's relatives were previously involved in the UP, followed by 54.84% in 2006 and 65% in 2013, which implies that over a long period the number of women members coming to the UP leadership position using their family network and family political legacy was increasing gradually (Rahman, 2006a, 2013). In a traditional society like Bangladesh where the women's role is highly confined to the household and reproductive activities and they are subjugated and differentiated everywhere due to myriad socio-cultural, economic, and political problems, this might have happened so. From the South Asian perspective, evidence shows that many national-level women leaders entered into political office using their legacy or political dynasty being

surrogates of their husbands or fathers. Jalalzai (2004) found that South Asia has a strong legacy of family politics where women in leadership positions would be least expected. Historical evidence revealed that the first women Prime Minister of the world, Sirimavo Bandaranaike (1960-1965, 1970-1977, 1994-2000), and her daughter Chandrika Kumaratunga (1993, 1994) from Sri Lanka; Indira Ghanadhi (1966-1977, 1980-1984), Sonia Ghandhi (wife of Rajiv Ghandhi and daughter-in-law of Indira Ghandhi) and Rabri Devi (1997) from India; Benazir Bhutto (1988-1990, 1993-1996) from Pakistan; Corazon Aquino (1986) from the Philippines; Yingluck Shinawatra (2011 to 2014); Khaleda Zia (1991-1996, 2001-2006) and Sheikh Hasina (1996-2001, 2009-2014, 2014 to date) from Bangladesh—all became leaders using their family legacy or political dynasty (Paxton and Hughes, 2007; Anderson, 1993:52; Boudreaux, 1991 as quoted in Saint-Germain, 1993; Moraes, 1980:127 as quoted in Everett, 1993; Wikipedia, 2014). Scholars opine that the surrogate route to power may be most common where the attitude towards women is especially traditional (D' Amico, 1995:18; Burn, 2005: 234). Analyzing the surrogate path to power, it was found that comparing the daughters, widows often had little political experience before standing in as a surrogate for their fathers and husband (Genovese, 1993: 212-3). Another important phenomenon is interesting here—that in most cases the sons, daughters or relatives of those surrogate women leaders also followed their footsteps to come to the political sphere. India and Bangladesh are special cases in point.

Linkage with Political Parties: In Bangladesh the political identity of women leadership remains clandestine because elections are not held on a party basis. However, it was found that among the 10 cases, 5 women leaders (2 Chairpersons and 3 members) had political affiliations from their student life. Quddus et al. (2001) revealed that 39% of the women members were actively involved in politics but a few of them held positions in the political party. Gani and Satter (2004) found that 16.80% of the women members had a political linkage in the UP. Rahman and Roy (2005, 2006) found that 80% of women members were involved

in political parties, and this was followed by 53% in 2013 (Rahman, 2013).

NGO Background: Most of the women Chairpersons and members in the UP were found to be involved with NGOs. It was evident that out of the 10 cases, 8 were (4 Chairpersons, 4 members) were directly involved in different NGOs before they were elected to the UP. Rahman (2006a) found that 64.52% of the women leaders had a linkage with various NGOs and socio-economic development organizations⁸, 39% and 72% in 2007 and 2013 respectively (Rahman, 2007). Gani and Sattar (2004) found that 50% of the women leaders were involved in NGOs.

Linkage with the local MP: It was found that among the 5 UP Chairpersons, all had a linkage with the MP. Undoubtedly, in terms of playing an important role in a political institution, the linkage with the MP is extremely essential, as the MP has a direct role in local development, so it is quite natural to maintain a good relationship with the MP. Rahman (2013) found that 61% of the women members in the UP had a linkage with the MP.

Summary and Analysis

Empirical evidence showed that in the UP some women leaders (WLs) were the product of the family legacy, while some WLs emerged as leaders using social capital gained through NGO involvement. Most of the WLs were moderately educated; all were married and received the required family support. The socio-economic condition of the women Chairpersons was relatively better compared to the women members in the UP.

Problems of Participation of the Women Leaders in the Union Parishad

⁸ The UP women members were found to be involved in various NGOs which included BRAC, Grammen Bank, Social Welfare Sangstha, CDA, NFP, FPAB, Nari Punarbashan Kendra, BRDB, KARITAS, CCDB, VARD, Nari Uddog, Palli Bikash, Manabik Unnan Seba Sanstha, CARE, Jatiya Mohila Sangstha, World Vision, CICI, Women's Affairs Samity Member, Bureau Bangladesh, SDC, ASA, Protigga Parishad, Nari Kollayan, Legal Aid, Vission, Proshikha, Podokhep, Satota Samity, Prime, CVDP, WEINIP, Uddogh, FIVDP and various socio-economic development organizations including Ansar VDP, educational institutes, some insurance companies such as Delta Life Insurance, Progati life Insurance, Meghna Life Insurance, Alico Life Insurance, National Life Insurance, and Islami life Insurance.

Women members identified three major problems towards participation such as male domination, corruption and faulty legal provision that imposed on women in the UP. Due to these problems in the systemic arrangements of the UP, women members are to encounter serious impediments that blocked their participation in the UP, which are elucidated beneath sequentially incorporating relevant evidences from other studies.

Women Members Encountering Extremely Male Domination in the UP

The major bottleneck, more specifically the number one problem regarding women's participation in the UP, is male domination, which can be called in terms of "patriarchy" and described in many different ways, but common terms include "gender stratification, gender inequality, female disadvantage, sexism, and patriarchy" (Chafetz, 1990). Patriarchal societies are characterized by male control of economic resources, male domination of political processes and positions of authority, and male entitlement of sexual services. According to Paxton and Hughes (2007:24) some societies are more patriarchal than others but all modern societies have a patriarchal structure. Male members never accept women as their colleagues but are rather obsessed with patriarchal beliefs and tenets; they always judge women and perpetually subjugate them to their wishes and demands, which is vividly reflected in the words of a male member. During discussion with the women members of the South Durgapur UP, an old male member, being seriously annoyed with the present author, observing that the entire discussion was going on with women members, and stated the following at the top of his voice:

"It is the male members who brought you in the UP and gave rights to you. He warned the women members not to claim with their rights and said that if they further bother for their rights, we would take away it from you again" (Male Member, South Durgapur UP, 26 August 2013).

The above quotation is an extreme opinion enunciated by an old male member. He viewed that instead of discussing with him, the whole discussion was going on with women members, who were talking about some important problems of the UP and at one point he made such a sweeping but bold utterance, which in fact was a true reflection of the attitude of male towards female members. Wilcox, Stark, and Thomas (2003) observed that across the region, older, less educated, politically conservative, and Muslim citizens were less supportive of women in politics than their younger, more educated, more liberal, and Christian counterparts. Male members never accept women as their colleagues rather being obsessed with the patriarchal beliefs and tenet; they always judge women perpetually subjugated to males' wishes and demand, which is vividly reflected in the words of the above male member.

It was evident that "the patriarchal ideology prevailing in the society is the biggest stumbling block towards participation of women" (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2000: 61). The same is the case in the UP in Bangladesh. This is evident from the following example of a woman member in Bethkapa UP, where having a female Chairperson in that Union, their Chairperson tried to distribute projects to women members there equally with the male members but the male members did not accept that and therefore the male members tried to impose their domination using unjust, cruel, and illogical means, which was vividly reflected in the following quotations from a female member, who stated that "*when the male members could not defeat or deprive us of our rights, then they tried to suit fake cases against us so that they could dominate over us*" (Female Member, Bethkapa UP, 7 November 2013).

When male members cannot win in depriving women of their due rights in the UP, they try to create problems using different means. Being very much obsessed and brought up with patriarchal norms and values, the male members' mental make-up is entirely textured by the domination over females, and these male members are never ready to relinquish an iota of power and or authority to the female members, a stance that they have enjoyed from the primitive colonial days to date, which

began even before state formation, and the domination of males over female has been continuing without having any change in its forms or styles.

In another case it was found that by struggling with huge male domination the women members were questioning the affirmative action of the government. During the author's discussion with the women members of the Garidaha UP, a female member, mentioned that some male members thought that there was no need of woman members in the UP and she stated the following: *"Government had created a problem for us by incorporating us in the parishad rather it was much better if government did not bring us here"* (Female Member, Garidaha UP, 8 November 2013).

Being frustrated with her rights in the UP, she made the above utterance as she was not able to judge whether the government has blessed her with an opportunity or not. However, bereft of women's minimum rights and shares in the UP, she judged her existence in the UP as a "problem."

All over Bangladesh, there is perhaps no UP where such male domination is non-existent; rather, it is ubiquitous, which has been explicitly reflected through the utterance of a woman member from Suvapur UP, who noted the following:

"Always problems occurred particularly with the male members. In Bangladesh there were hardly any UP where such problems were not prevailed. We want our shares and we will never give up our due shares" (Woman Member, Suvapur UP, 9 September 2013).

All over Bangladesh women leaders are excluded from their rights and privileges. Bangladesh in general is still considered as one of the countries with the highest level of gender discrimination and patriarchal structures, embedded at all levels of society. Women suffer from gender-specific discrimination, such as early marriage practices, gender-based violence, biased inheritance and property laws, restriction of

mobility and access to services, participation in public spaces, etc. (Sikder et al., 2011).

The problem of male domination in the UP cannot be exaggerated. One woman member from Gunabati UP added the following:

“In fact, the root cause of all problems in the UP is the male members, the Chairman did not create much problem but the main culprits are the male members. We are 3 female members but they are 9 male members, so here lay the problem”.

(Woman Member, Gunabati UP, Chuddagram Uazila, Comilla District, 9 September 2013).

In a highly-traditional socio-cultural structure and belief system, women's public political participation are not encouraged instead, women are encouraged to assist in the domestic activities and to be docile, tame and submissive. Evidence show that in most cases the elected women members are systematically discriminated by males, verbally abused, always assigned to a specific development committee, excluded from arbitration committee, etc. (ADB, 2001b; as quoted in Gani and Sattar, 2004). According to Khan (2008), use of monopolized power by the Chairman prevents UP members from playing their effective and rightful role in UP development and such despotism also creates problems in decision-making, project formulation, and financial management.

Male members think that women members have nothing to do with the development of the UP, which can be observed from the utterance of a woman member from Chadpur UP, who opined the following *“the male members deemed that in the UP the women members do not have any rights and obligations to do anything as they are only reserved members in UP”*. (Woman Member, Chadpur UP, 31 October 2013).

During interview with a woman member of Bijoypur Moddham UP, she opined the following: *“Women members were not given big projects rather they were provided with small projects and all the big projects were given to the male members, these were the general trends in most of the*

UP”. (Woman Member, Bijoypur Moddham UP, 22 August 2013).

The above quotation represents that women are not considered capable like male members in the UP. Begum (2007: 263-64) also found that in performing UP functions women members were not considered credible and capable political actors and reserved seats ‘were not seen as having same value as general ones’. In Bangladesh, the average person has a negative attitude towards women: from the birth to death, a male is born and brought up in those patriarchal values, which no one can easily change, and this male domination is perpetuated dynasty after dynasty, generation after generation without undergoing any change in it.

Sharing her grim reality and experience, one woman member from the Wahedpur UP stated the following:

“The women members need to be elected in the husband’s residential area, so most of the women members dare to protest any wrongdoings of the male members due to their prestige concern and for avoiding criticism and for saving their due respect in the bridegroom’s family”. (Woman Member, Wahedpur UP, 30 August 2013).

Obviously, no one ever thinks the above reality like the woman member of Wahedpur UP. Most of the women members in Bangladesh are married. In consonance with Bangladeshi values, norms, and cultural standards, it is considered bad when a woman is bold and courageous in establishing her rights and privileges in the family and society. On the other hand, the women that consume or subsume everything and just avoid all odds, injustice, violence, oppressions and tyranny without noticing the males, especially their husband, are deemed as an “ideal” woman in the society of Bangladesh. Again, its roots are deep in the patriarchy and paternalistic social structure. The whole social structure, the power relations and mechanisms through which society is governed are entirely male biased and ruled by patriarchal values and ethos. Therefore women members position themselves in such a manner that

they are simply innocent consumers and receivers of unjust oppression, wrongdoings, and massive tyranny towards them. They find no messiah to save them from such a draconian and devastating social enemy, which has been profoundly engrained and engulfed by patriarchy and which is deemed quite insurmountable by the women members. There are evidence that due to male domination women leaders are excluded from important areas of participation in UP which include infrastructure, budget decisions, planning exercise, different Standing Committees and Project Committees on the UP i.e. social and child development, immunization and nutrition projects, education, health, agriculture, salish⁹, maintenance of law and order and their involvement is mostly titular and women opinions are not heard during decision-making (Gani and Sattar, 2004; Khan, 2008; Khan, 2009: 9, Begum, 2005; BARC, 2007; Khan and Mohsin, 2008; Shamim and Nasreen, 2002: 52; UNDP, 2003). Panday (2008) and Begum (2007) found that the male's disrespectful approach and intense disregard for women members' governance roles undermined the objectives of reservation and effectively neutralized the political empowerment envisaged by the legislation.

Summary and Analysis

Male domination is perpetuating in UP governance due to structural bottleneck and diverse socio-cultural factors in the UP that are inhibiting the women's role and participation in the UP.

- The UP is structured in such a way that the entire UP structure is composed of 9 male and 3 women members and a Chairman, who being a male promotes the cause of male hegemony in the UP. At the initial stage, the existence of women members was never accepted by the male members and still they are to face a constant male domination in every UP in Bangladesh. In the decision making process the Chairman enjoys supreme authority and most of the time takes decisions in conjunction with a small circle of associates, from which female members, in particular, are likely to be excluded (Khan, 2008; Aminuzzaman, 2011: 200). Such despotic

⁹ Salish refers to informal local arbitration council for resolution of petty disputes conducted by the UP representatives.

role of the Chairmen hinders participation of woman members in the UP.

- In Bangladesh male domination is omnipresent in the family, society, and states where women have traditionally lower positions in all spheres. In the family, the husband or father occupies the leading role. In the society it is an entirely male paradigm, and the state, the highest organ, has the right to create all policies and programs that protect the rights of men whereas the women's role is acknowledged with some affirmative action only. Women's participation in the local government in Bangladesh has interlinked with cultural values of rural life where traditional values and rituals prevail and dominates the outlook and aspirations of the villagers and tend to inhibit social mobility (Amin and Akhter, 2005; Solaiman, 1998). Mohammed (2010) also opined that the culture of effective participation in formal community activities is still non-existent because of cultural values that function as social structure (Jahangir, 1982) and provide a background to social integration by cherishing values as an instrument of social cohesion, preventing social disorder from growing (Mashreque and Amin, 1994a). Moreover, the social order of the backward rural community in Bangladesh is characterized by kinship, factionalism, and elitism (Mashreque and Amin, 1992a, 1992b, 1993a, 1993b, 1994b). With such patrimonial social characteristics, the culture of women's participation cannot be thought of. There is no denying the fact that women's participation in local government has far-reaching ramifications for social mobility, acting on caste, occupation, sect, kinship and factionalism, which are responsible for the process of segregation and exclusiveness. Patriarchal values are structured to sustain male superiority and female subordination position where women are bonded with lower status and unequal sex relationship (Amin and Akhter, 2005: 2), which are creating hindrance to women's role and participation in the UP.

- In fact, the domination of male members is taken for granted in the public world of politics. In UP governance, the male members use their patronage networks to influence the decision-making process. According to Asaduzzaman (2008) patron-client relationship, a product of

the undemocratic political culture of Bangladesh; is a major threat to participatory governance in the local development programs. The findings of the study reveal that a powerful network termed *dalal chokra* (mediators) plays an intermediary role between the villagers and the ruling party leaders and the civil servants. The study revealed that three categories of mediators¹⁰ are the dominant actors in the realm of local development process and UP governance, which are causing inhibiting factors towards participation in the UP representatives, let alone woman members' role can be thought of. To strengthen women's role in local government NGOs strived to develop some client-based community groups (some form of social capital), still they are more concerned with their own group interest than visible community involvement (Sharmin and Aminuzzaman, 2006 as quoted in Aminuzzaman, 2011: 201) and therefore women's participation is still lacking at the UP level.

- In Bangladesh women's role in public life is constrained with religious norms although members of the village community have now accepted woman members' role in the UP. However, women's vulnerability is aggravated by the practice of early and arranged marriage, polygamy, veiling or purdah¹¹, and the seclusion of women, which restrict their mobility, public exposure and opportunity to improve their condition (Shamim, 2001; Shamim and Nasreen, 2002).

- In summary from the textual narratives, supported by evidences obtained through relevant literatures, it can be easily understood that how male members considered the emergence of women members in the UP. Male members are yet to ready to share an iota of rights, benefits, resources and shares with the female members although legally government has made provisions for giving thirty per cent project responsibilities to the women members in the UP. The male members

¹⁰ Findings of the study reveal that a powerful network termed as dal chokra (mediators) play important role at the local governance in Bangladesh. They play intermediary role between the villagers and the ruling party leaders and the civil servants. The study confirmed three categories of mediators. The first category includes the leaders of the ruling party and dominant opposition, student leaders and the UP chairman. The second category comprises local contactors, trade union (see Asaduzzaman, 2008).

¹¹ *Purdah* is a Bengali word that stands for veil. Muslim women use it for performing their religious values and sanctity.

think that women members have come here to create problem for them, especially for taking away their shares. It appears that in the UP women members have emerged as a threat for the male members as they have been well accepted by the community and the general villagers through their better performance and good behaviours. It was observed that in some cases female members succeeded in obtaining some rights and shares from the UP Chairman after a serious bargaining and struggling with their rights but being defeated to stop their rights, some male members still bear the grudge of imposing such hegemony over women members by filing false cases against them and adopting various means of enmity with their female colleagues in the UP. More concretely the substantive fact is that women members are encountering serious male domination everywhere in Bangladesh. In a male dominated society, man never wants to accept equal rights and share for women. Women's subjugated rights are accepted by them but they never accept equal rights for women. The major cause of such a mindset lies with the concept of patriarchy and paternalistic social systems, which has been continuing since time immemorial without having any change in its form, nature and structure.

Extreme Corruption Plaguing Women's Role in the UP

The second obstacle women leaders identified in the UP is corruption. The full verbatim of the prevalence of corruption in the UP are portrayed below with the textual narratives obtained from the women leaders in Bangladesh. Corruption is highly prevalent in most of the third world countries and Bangladesh is no exception to this case. Due to massive corruption these women leaders have miserably failed to adjust themselves in the UP. There are evidences that corruptions are galore in the spheres of the UP in Bangladesh. In the following section how corruption takes place in the UP has been explained elaborately. In reply to a question whether women members need to pay money when they bring or get a project from the Chairman, one woman member stated that:

“You know that in Bangladesh everywhere there is an established system that we have to bring project fulfilling all the shares of Ministers, MPs, DC, UNO, Upazila Engineers and Upazila Chairman, because all have their respective shares in it which is the conventional system and Union Parishad has no exception to this”. (Woman Member, Khadimpara UP, Sylhet Sadar, Sylhet District, 28 September 2013).

Through the above quotation, the prevalence of corruption in the sphere of the UP has been reflected well. The underlying meaning reveals that the whole Bangladesh is unfortunately involved in such a social evil that destroys country's development to a considerable level. The above women included the entire state machinery in the realm of corruption. The legislators, the administration and the public representatives all are epitomized as the influential parties involved in corruption in Bangladesh. It is very interesting to note here that being the chief executive of the UP, Chairman also demands bribe from the members, which can be seen from the statement made by the women member of Khadimpara UP, who mentioned that *“when we finished our projects, sometimes we share profits through mutual understandings with the Chairman”*. (Woman Member, Khadimpara UP, Sylhet Sadar, Sylhet District, 28 September 2013).

In order to have an in-depth understanding about the magnitude of corruption at the community level, the manager of a cooperative society was also interviewed where in wake of the discussion he opined that *“no one could do work for the whole budget in UP. In most cases, 20-30% money is leaked out”*. (Manager, Hatigara Comprehensive Village Development Cooperative Society, Comilla, 31 August 2013).

Furthermore, when I asked who were involved in such corruption, he answered that:

“I did not know who were involved with it but the UP functionaries must have this answer to them. If the members could do work with the full amount, the quality of the work would be much better because having less amount these members(meaning both male and female members) used very low quality materials when they conducted a project”. (Manager, Hatigara Comprehensive Village Development Cooperative Society, 31 August 2013).

Corruption is one of the most draconian enemies towards the development of Bangladesh society. Due to massive corruption, lion's shares of the public resources invested for development of Bangladesh are drained out otherwise. The worst victim of corruption is the poor people of Bangladesh. This was quite evident from the above utterance that due to corrupt practices, women members cannot deliver the best work for the local people and they are to suffer a lot because women tend to be honest in their activities but being compelled with the ground realities these women leaders have learnt to compromise with the practical situation. Corruption is endemic in Bangladesh. According to TIB (2008), it was found the local government was the second most corrupt sector in Bangladesh, which corroborates the findings with the present study. Corruption takes place at the local government level due the existence of patron-client relationship in the rural milieu. The UP Chairperson and some dominant members tend to maintain strong patron-client relations with a section of rural community. Unfortunately such clients are not necessarily the weaker or poorer section of the rural community. UP therefore tend to take some of its development management and distributive decision on the basis of such patron-client dependency syndrome (Aminuzzaman, 2011: 204). Corruption is prevalent in distribution of social safety net benefits also. Most of the safety net programs and some development activities are managed by the political workers/leaders of the ruling party(Aminuzzaman, 2011: 206) and

sometimes VGD¹² cards are often distributed to the families or relatives of those councils or committees or are used for political purpose (Asian Human Rights Commission-Hunger Alert Program Bangladesh, 2011).

Empirical Evidence of Corruption

Here 2 cases of corruption in Chiora UP, Comilla was illustrated briefly with a view to denoting an idea of the forms and nature of corruption practiced in UP. During data collection by the author from the women members in the Chiora UP, a woman member shared a case of corruption of the Chairman of Chiora UP which she experienced very recently. That woman member experienced this case of corruption when she came to know that she had given a project of one lack taka (1286 US\$)¹³ which was obtained from 1% land transfer tax from Upazila Parishad. After getting the project Chairman advised her to sign a check and thereafter the check was cashed. As soon as the check was cashed Chairman took away the whole taka from her giving 5000 taka (64 US\$) in her hand. Another woman member shared a case of corruption of the Chairman of Chiora UP with the author. She told that once the Chairman tried to pass few projects by the UNO office using fake signatures of woman members and having doubt about its authenticity UNO immediately probed it and he was caught red handed because it was completely concocted and fake. At that time UNO warned the Chairman that he would be suspended from his Chairmanship but anyhow now he has managed everything by obtaining a stay order from the high court.

¹² Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) is a multi-dimensional food based Social Safety Net Programs in Bangladesh, sponsored by World Food Program. The target group of the program is mainly destitute women covering landless and asset less women who are widowed, divorced, abandoned, having under-nourished children, lactating mothers and women with handicapped husband etc. In recent times, the program has moved from its role of relief provider to larger development role like providing training on life skills and income generating skills to women beneficiaries. The aim of the program is to enhance food and nutrition security of women and children through improved food consumption, education, skills development, livelihood diversification and risk mitigation. To achieve objective of VGD program, currently about 3.75 million beneficiaries from ultra-poor households are provided with the provision of monthly food ration of 30 kg of wheat or 25 kg of fortified wheat flour (atta, in Bangla) for a period of 24 months, and a package of development services for human capital development.

¹³ One US\$=77.78 taka as of 22 March 2014. The figure is calculated more or less full digit deducting the fraction amount.

Summary and Analysis

Women members have become the worst victim of corruption in the UP because women are deemed relatively less corrupt and when they experienced corruption of the Chairman and male members in the UP, WLs find helpless to coexist with malpractices. In true sense, corruption has plagued potentiality for smooth functioning of local governance, which is directly affecting the participation of women leaders in the UP. The whole society is engulfed with corruption, a draconian enemy for efficacious development of Bangladesh. Ground realities revealed the whole gamut of how corrupt practices are perpetuating in the scene of local governance through a conglomerate of patron-client relationship among the UP Chairman, local administration, contractors, suppliers, local political parties and concerned MPs. The above 2 cases unravel the nature and magnitude of corruption in the UP. These are just 2 symbolic presentations of corruption where it was evidently shown that how the UP Chairman practiced corruption and neglected the rights of women members. This is how UP Chairman manipulated public resources exploiting women's trust and rights in the UP. However, the most striking phenomenon here was that, given the structural challenges imposed by those established mechanisms coupled with cultural bottlenecks for misgovernance, women leaders were striving to bring a desirable tomorrow for Bangladesh.

Faulty Legal Provision Imposed on Women Leaders in the UP

The women members identified the reservation system as one of the formidable challenges towards ensuring their participation in UP. However, in developing women leadership some sorts of affirmative actions are needed from the government. Evidence shows that many countries adopted reservation quota for women that include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Eritrea, Jordan, Morocco, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, Taiwan, Tanzania, and Uganda (Dahlerup and Nordlund, 2004). It is observed that where reservation system has been implemented, the popular political culture has gradually become more accepting of women taking part in politics. In fact, enhanced political representation of women depends more

on the political will of the government than on a nation's world economic standing or any other economic factor (Tripp, n.d.: 7). Considering the importance of women's participation in decision-making, the government of Bangladesh has made provision of 33% reservation quota for women member in the UP through the local government (UP) ordinance in 1997. In fact a strong network of women's organizations and NGOs, coupled with global women's movement and active role played by the donor agencies have helped develop the discourse of gender equality, mobilizing women at the local level, and funding their support and training (Goetz, 1996, 1997; Kabeer, 1994). Scholars opine that rather than national level, women's political participation at the local level is more important for the development of rural women. Evidence shows that women in Asia have achieved better representation at local level than that of national level¹⁴. In Bangladesh, Union Parishad Act of 1997 have helped ensure women's equal access in political power structures (Khan and Ara, 2006) but being directly elected in the UP, women members found helpless as there was lack of legal provision and guideline about their roles and responsibilities. During preliminary stage, women members were not involved in any activities of the UP. Thereafter, in a bid to strengthen women's role and participation in the UP the concerned Ministry made a legal provision in 2002 that empowered women members to enjoy few specific rights in the UP. Still there are lack of clarity and vagueness in the legal provision regarding the roles and responsibilities of the women member in UP. In my analysis, the cardinal problem towards enjoying women's rights in UP is not the reservation quota rather it is due to the attitude of the male member, women are being deprived of their rights in UP. Labeling women members as the reserved seat member, male members propagates that as women are elected in the reserved seats so they have nothing to do with the development process in the UP. A woman member from Chadpur UP commented that *"the male members deemed that in the UP the women*

¹⁴ For details see Drage (2001) who found that in 2001, the Philippines had 16.5% women; Thailand 18.1%; China 22.1%; Nepal 24.1%; Vietnam 26.6%; India 33%; and Bangladesh 33.3% women in their respective local governments and on the other hand Sri Lanka had 2% and Japan had only 6.2% women in local government.

members do not have any rights and obligations to do anything as they are only reserved members in UP”(Woman Memembr, Chadpur UP, Boalmari, Faridpur, 31 October 2013).

Another woman member from Alkora UP stated that:

“In fact the reservation system is problematic, if government changed this system, it would be better. That’s why I wanted to contest election in the general ward. Without any bargaining we could not bring any project in UP” (Woman Member, Alkora UP, Chuddagram UP, Comilla, 9 September 2013).

The underlying assumption of the above utterance is that women are to struggle immensely for establishing their due rights in the Parishad but being occupied absolute power and authority by the male Chairman, women are time and again neglected and denied their enshrined rights and share in the UP. Based on the above facts it would be easy to grasp the meaning of it. Due to the provision of direct election, both women candidates and voters in the UP election of 1997 increased (Islam, 2000; Begum, 2002: 101). But being deprived of their rights in UP, in the consequent elections number of women contested for quota seats, reduced (Karmaker, 2006; Steps towards Development, 2003: 7)¹⁵.

The reserved seats female members virtually have no power in the decision making process compared to the general seat members as they failed to obtain sufficient institutional status and support and also are denied access to mainstream activities. Khan (2009: 9) found that women are excluded from all important activities in the UP due to being elected as the “reserve seat members”. It was found that Out of 4498 UPs, there are only 23 directly elected woman Chairpersons and the rest 4474 UPs are run by the male Chairmen and the UP structure is structured in such a way

¹⁵ In the 1997 UP election, 44,969 women contested in quota seats reserved for them, and of them, 13,437 women were elected. In the same year among 13,437 women members, 592 were elected unopposed and uncontested. In the 2003 UP election, 39,419 rural women contested in 12,669 quota seats in UP (see Islam, 2000: 112-13; Begum, 2002; Karmaker, 2006; Pandey, 2008; Islam and Islam, 2012).

that it has become a one man parishad as all powers and authority is vested on the Chairman. This Chairman is the bearer of important symbol of the male domination and patriarchy supported by other 9 male members in UP. Therefore, female members are deprived of their due rights and share in UP. However, after getting the legal provision of assigning one-thirds of the total projects, amidst fighting to establish their legal rights, a few women have become successful to get few projects. But anyhow while they implement projects, the male members of that ward sometimes creates obstacle for her. Therefore, all women members have skeptical view about the reservation system in UP.

Summary and Analysis

- *Reservation has opened doors for the WLs:* Reservation is no doubt paves the way towards positive discrimination in favour of women's cause and interest. In a highly hierarchical patrimonial social structure women's political participation should be properly guided, patronized and sponsored with the axiom of some sorts of positive discriminations. In a nascent democracy reservation system is quite sinequanon to bolster the cause of women's development having the fact that a fifty per cent population belongs to women.

- *Need to correct the shortcomings but not to through it out:* There are valid reasons why women leaders have identified an affirmative action provided by the policy framework of the government as a "problem" instead of viewing it as an "opportunity" because the Chairmen and male members being obsessed with patriarchal values are constantly imposing insurmountable barriers labeling them as "reserved seat members". Being extremely prejudiced with the primordial social structure coupled with other cultural barriers imposed by religious ideology, kingship, factionalism and patron-clientele syndrome that governed the rural society, the whole male elected functionaries are depriving and denying of women's due rights in almost all spheres of the UP governance, which led the women members to identify the reservation system as a "problem".

- *Wrong and faulty perception of the WLs' rights should be withdrawn:* The reservation system in UP is designed in such a way that women members have found themselves marginalized in the UP. Holding the membership for 3 times wider jurisdiction than that of men, they were enjoying just only one thirds facilities in the UP, which is tantamount to doing mockery with the rights of women in Bangladesh. This system reflects the true intension of public policy towards women in Bangladesh. This again refers to patriarchy and paternalistic attitudes in case of policy making of the government machinery in Bangladesh. Therefore, the mismatch between women's enshrined rights and their entitlement should be withdrawn without no delay.

Conclusion

Based on the available evidences, case studies and phenomenological analysis of the participation of the women leaders in the UP it was paradoxically evident that the problems towards ensuring women leaders' efficacious role and participation are male domination or patriarchy, corruption and faulty legal provision practiced for the WLs in the UP. Unfortunately all these major problems are in fact the problems of governance of Bangladesh society as well. To redress male domination and corruption, the UP structure should be rationalized and women's reservation quota should be upgraded to 50% from 33.33%. In Bangladesh, women's role in the society is conditioned by various socio-cultural impositions such as patriarchy, purdah, religious superstitions, etc., so education facilities can be expanded, which can help in the transformation of traditional restrictive attitudes and modification of cultural norms and practices embedded in the social milieu. Orthodox cultural beliefs create problems for women in terms of taking part in political space, whereas liberal values facilitate women's political participation and education is perhaps the only mechanism through which value change occurs and society develops. Therefore, progressive and liberal thinking should be promoted through expansion of education facilities and democratic governance to strengthen women leadership in the UP and Bangladesh as well.

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Table 1: Union-wise List of Elected Woman Chairpersons (WCs) in Bangladesh

Division	District	Upazila	Union Parishad	No. of WCs
Chittagong	Chittagong	Hathazari	Kurishawar	1
Subtotal:				1
Dhaka	Faridpur	Faridpur Sadar	Machhaar	1
		Vanga	Manikdaha	1
		Boalmari	Chandpur	1
	Sariatpur	Sariatpur Sadar	Binodpur	1
	Sariatpur	Jajira	Senerchar	1
	Munshigonj	Sirajdikhan	Malkhanagar	1
	Narayangonj	Araihazar	Duptara	1
	Mymensingh	Gafargao	Dotterbazar	1
Subtotal:				8
Sylhet	Hobigonj	Chunarughat	Deorghas	1
	Sunamgonj	Bisamvarpur	Solukabad	1
Subtotal:				2
Khulna	Barisal	Wazirpur	Jalla	1
	Patuakhali	Sadar	Chotbighai	1
	Borguna	Patharhgata	Kalaniga	1
	Khulna	Dighilia	Senhati	1
	Khulna	Fultala	Damodar	1
Subtotal:				5
Rajshahi	Pabna	Vangura	Ostomonisha	1
	Pabna	Atgharia	Laxmipur	1
	Gaibandha	Palashbari	Betkapa	1
	Gaibandha	Palashbari	Pobnapur	1
	Sirajgong	Belkhuchi	Daulatpur	1
	Natore	Singra	Chowgram	1
	Rajshahi	Putia	Putia	1
Subtotal:				7
Grand Total:				23

Source: Data collected by the author, 2013.

Table 2: Selection of Research Participants and Settings for Phenomenology and Case Study

Division	District	Upazila	Union Parishad	WM	MM	WC	MC
Chittagong	Chittagong	Mirsarai	Wahedpur	3	2		1
	Comilla	Comilla Sadar	Bijoypur Modham	2			1
			North Durgapur	2			
			South Durgapur	3	1		1
			Amratali	3	3		
			Kalir Bazar	1			1
		Chouddagram	Alkora	2		1	
			Suvapur	1			
			Chiwra	3			
			Gunabati	2			1
Dhaka	Faridpur	Faridpur Sadar	Machaar	-		1	
		Vanga	Manikdaha	1		1	
		Boalmari	Chandpur	1		1	
Sylhet	Sylhet	Sylhet Sadar	Tuker Bazar	2			1
			Khadimpara	2			
Khulna	Barisal	Wazirpur	Jalla	2		1	
Rajshahi	Bogra	Sherpur	Mirjapur	3	2		
			Garidaha	2			
	Gaibandha	Palashbari	Betkapa UP	2		1	
Total: 5 Div.	7 Districts	10 Upazilas	19 UPs	37	8	5	6

Notes: WM=Woman member, MM=Male Member, WC=Woman Chairperson, MC=Male Chairperson

Source: Data collected by the author, 2013.