

WOMEN IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT POLITICS

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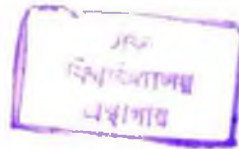


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This is to certify that Ms. Umme Salma has conducted her Master of Philosophy thesis (Research) entitled " **Women in Local Government Politics**" under my guidance and supervision.

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The Research is dedicated to my MOTHER

382816



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Abbreviations

UP	Union Parishad
EWMs	Elected Women Members
VGD	Vulnerable Group Development
VGf	Vulnerable Group Feeding
TLM	Total Literacy Moment

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CHAPTER- 1

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The introductory chapter covers global perception of women's status, background of the study along with women's status in Bangladesh and the study objectives.

1.1 Women's Status: Global Perspective

Women are the world's largest excluded group. As individuals, women have participated in essentially all of the activities performed in human societies. As a group, however, women have been identified with particular roles ascribed to them by their societies; these roles have commonly been presented as naturally linked to women's physiology, including childbearing and infant care. Even in societies where women have been given broader responsibilities and power, men have normally dominated formal political life. The emergence of classes, states, and major religions have universally strengthened male dominance, and the rise of capitalism has furthered this tendency.

According to class position, women continued to exercise varied roles and enjoy some legal protection for property. Women's legal position had improved as a result of complex social change. During the 19th century, women became more concerned with social reform and improvement of their own position. Women fought for and won gradual improvement in the property rights of married women, divorce, and child custody. By the 20th century they began to claim full citizenship and control over their own reproductive powers.

Since World War II the position of women around the globe has begun to change at an accelerating rate. Women have gained most in politically progressive or economically developed countries, but in no country women do enjoy full political, legal, economic, social, educational, and sexual equality with men. Most women remain concentrated in low-paying, low-status, "female" jobs, especially primary and secondary school teaching, service jobs, and some clerical and sales jobs.

Throughout the world women continue to earn less than men for comparable work and to be systematically excluded from the best-paid and most-prestigious jobs. Women's exclusion from the highest incomes and most dynamic economic sectors is closely related both to their formal political and legal rights and to the persistence of traditional religious, cultural, and family value construction. Women have also failed to gain until recently equal access to higher (especially technical) education. Any account of the relationship between women and politics, in contemporary Western societies at least, must assign a central place to the women's movement. Although women took part in public politics long before winning the vote but studies conclude and some simply assume that woman's political behavior is dominated by the men in their lives and women generally have acquired the vote, they do not exercise political power in proportion to their numbers. The generalization that husbands dominate their wives' political behavior and received some empirical confirmation, there is little evidence that father dominate the political attitude of their children, or at least of their daughters. (Grolier 1996) A few have attained the highest political office: Indira GANDHI, Golda MEIR, Margaret THATCHER, Khaleda ZIA, SHEIKH Hasina and a few others. Most, however, attained office because of their membership in ruling political families or elite.

1.2 Women's Status in Bangladesh

Women are the most vulnerable part of the society. Where the female population of Bangladesh has been estimated at 53.3 million during 1989-90 representing 48.5 per cent of the total population¹, (Task Force, 1990) in every strata of existing society they are downgraded and male are blessed with an authoritative position. Women's status in the society and their participation in socio-economic and political fields are very low. So, women are passive beneficiary not active participants in every revolution, change and even in development process. An overwhelming majority of women are illiterate, malnourished, poor and deprived. By traditional socio-institutional and cultural norms, customs and beliefs, women have a much lower status compared to

¹ At present, the total population of Bangladesh is 122.7 millions (1997), source : Human Development Report 1999; UNDP.

men. Historically Bangladeshi women were confined to the household. Throughout their life they spend their time as unpaid labor force and are considered as economically inactive as well. They are generally not involved in the decision-making process of the family and do not represent in the central government and local-government institutions as well. In fact, gender inequality is established through socio-economic inequality, distribution of authority and assets between sexes as determined by the family organization and social stratification. In Bangladesh, here neither strong infra-structural support nor institutionalized women demand exists to develop the psychophysical condition of womenfolk.

As women's empowerment rests on education, it will help our women to break out of their dark world, take control of their lives and assume a status and identity beyond childbearing. It could allow women to participate more fully in the public life and open wider horizons, creating more awareness, more confidence, new opportunities and most importantly, empowering women with extending choices. So we should first make them aware of themselves, then their morale and esteem sense should be heightened and ultimately they must be empowered. The current trend indicates that the traditional roles of women in Bangladesh are changing fast due to increasing poverty but substantial contributions made by women especially in agriculture, livestock, poultry and fisheries have remained unrecognized and unaccounted due to which women have remained at the periphery of economic development. In Bangladesh, in terms of status, women get only specific welfare and family planning projects as their share in total development planning. In fact, on the basis of indicators related to health, marriage and children, education, employment, politics and social equality, the status of women in Bangladesh has been ranked lowest. Despite advances in health, education and working conditions, life for millions of women across remains needlessly hard and nation as a whole suffers.

1.3 Background of the Study

Traditionally, woman in Bangladesh is highly excluded from all spheres of socio-economic and political issues for a long time, which are very closely related with social development. But the positive thing is that very recently it started changes due to emerging movements towards their empowerment. The issue of women's political status is also significant because it is an indicator of women's role in the policy making process. With a view to bring empowerment of women it is important to ensure their participation in the general politics and through Union Parishad the system can play as a basic platform in empowering the rural women in both present and future time. It is also significant for an effective democracy. In a country like ours, it is quite evident that women's presence is minimal at all spheres of decision-making bodies. But a strong democratic base can happen only with the mainstreaming of women into the system. It is therefore necessary to bring women into political process so that they can contribute to build a society based on the principle of gender equity. By implementing the local government (Union Parishad) (2nd amendment) Act, Dec.'97, a process started to eliminate marginalization of women or their exclusion from political power.

To bring significant changes, different GO and NGOs interventions have already initiated and implemented several programmes relevant to this issue and also became quite successful. With such an interest of reducing gender inequality from our society several research studies also have been conducted to clarify the present changing status of the women and more likely to search proper issues to bring concrete and meaningful recommendations for further changes for women's empowerment. But it is found that in most cases of the research study on women issues, emphasis has given on women's education, employment, social and legal status rather a few in political status which is one of the basic area of women's empowerment. Even we can say that without women's involvement in the political area empowerment is impossible but it is neglected. Moreover, most of the research studies emphasize on central level politics (parliament base), not the politics of women in the local level i.e. micro level. Therefore, in essence of doing research on women's empowerment through local

government political participation the study is hoping to reflect the limitations and possibilities of the directly elected system of women in the recent Union Parishad Election 1997, which could be a new scope to work with in ensuring and enhancing women's empowerment in the near future.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

Main objectives

The prime objective of the research study is to closely assess the present scenario of empowerment of women and the future possibility in every sense relating to political power. To find out the true role of directly elected Union Parishad women members in exercising power, authority and decision-making in the office and in social life and to understand their perception about the future projection of women's empowerment through this local government institution.

Specific objectives

1. Review the past and present structure of the Local Government System with and within the Union Parishad and assess the position of women in that structure to identify the ground of empowerment of women.
2. Evaluate the present structure and functions of Union Parishad as the focal point of the Local Government Institution and analyze the role of women as elected members.
3. Examine the constitutional basis of local government and woman's political right.
4. Assess the status of women in participatory decision making in the family and outside the family.
5. Identify the involvement of women members in development activities of the Parishad.
6. Identify constraints faced by women members in getting elected and performing duties and responsibilities after being members.
7. Assess the changing work trend of women members in the family or in society.
8. Examine some cases of cluster of women's empowerment in local level politics as they relate to:

- (i) The personal and family background of the elected women members of Union Parishad.
- (ii) The source of motivation or any sort of support they enjoyed from their family.
- (iii) The opportunities and inputs they are getting and some sort of changes in their livelihood.
- (iv) Role differentiation about the past existing system.
- (v) The relationship of women members with their male colleagues i.e. other Union Parishad members and the local people especially the woman.
- (vi) The conceptualization of reserve seats for women members in the system.
- (vii) Consciousness about the political right given by The CEDAW.
- (viii) The future projection on women's more participation in political decision making, education, empowerment issues and finally overall development.

CHAPTER- 2

2.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains more detail of the research methodology. It contains information collection, research area and sampling procedure and research methods. Duration of the study and limitations of the research are also being presented under the methodology chapter.

2.1 Information Collection

The research is based on information collection from primary and secondary sources. Moreover, interviews, case study and intra-personal communication play a very significant role to pile-up the basis of the study. The researcher was conscious and careful not to be biased while collecting information from different sources.

2.1.1 Primary Sources

As effective tools of social research primary information were collected through direct field visit, personal interviews with the women member of Union Parishad as well as the member of the respective family, observing closely the respondent, 10 case study in five UP and thorough intra-personal communication with core and peripheral i.e. members of the family and local people.

Also as an empirical basis the study proved its “appropriateness” by the evidence gathered through participatory exercises and data collected through case studies. So, detailed case studies were compiled and analysed and in doing this, the researcher has given emphasis more on presenting the perception and knowledge of the respondents. As the study was conducted on the basis on participatory exercises, the rationale of the information collection and analysis was to reflect the respondents views as the study findings which explored the strengths and weaknesses of the existing system. Also, as empowerment is an issue of modern time and it is referring to measure the achievement level by involving the beneficiaries into the process, so to make a more

concrete findings of woman's empowerment through direct participation in the Union Parishad, information was analysed and rationalised.

Interviewing, observation, and limited participation of the other family members and people at different levels were also considered in the process. And only the checklist has followed during the whole study.

In the field study, women members were interviewed with same sets of checklist and the family members were interviewed informally and without any checklist. Each woman member was interviewed individually and separately and therefore in most cases the researcher has visited their houses for interviewing them and other members of the family. Besides the researcher has also met some of the women members in the Union Parishad office to avoid troublesome communication.

The checklist that was developed covered socio-economic information of the elected women members, understanding about the absence of women from the power structure for a long time, rationality of woman's ability in the power structure, comparative value differentiation of both the selected and elected women members in the Union Parishad, trend of change responsibility, and role of elected women members in the Parishad and herewith the real consequences. In addition, understanding of their perception about empowerment concept and process, specially awareness about the general condition of Bangladeshi women i.e. gender equality and access, control over resources and women's participation in the decision making process, limitations and prospects of the present local government reform and their recommendations to make the system more effective towards empowering women were also included. (See appendix 1)

2.1.2 Secondary Information collection

As appropriate tools of social research secondary information were collected from relevant books, journals, magazines, publication and newspapers. The uses of secondary information helped to give a perfect shape of the study directly and as a whole indirectly. In order to interpret correctly and analyse the collected information from primary sources, an extensive use of secondary information which were obtained from sources like books, journals and publications those documenting the nature of, and changes in, women's empowerment through political participation in Union Parishad. The researcher took support from the daily newspapers and weekend magazines as well. All these were also important for an extensive literature study. Information from secondary sources provided a conceptual support about the research and its' relation with the historical background of Union Parishad, more precisely quoting several relevant Acts and amendments from the Constitution are being used to give a logical support of the study.

2.2 Research Area & Sampling Procedure

The total research area covered 9 Union Parishads under Kaliakoir Thana, Gagipur district. Out of nine Union Parishads of Kaliakoir Thana, five were selected for the analysis with a focus on elected women member's present status both in the council and the family, specially analysing their perception on present significance of elected UP women members i.e. attitude of the people of the area regarding the issue and critical analysis of the limitations of the newly initiated local government reform where women started elected by direct voting system. In selecting the sample Unions, accessibility to the area has been considered here. (See Table 1)

The study particularly focused on elected women members of the Union Parishad. Although the sample included only women, they were also asked questions about their husbands and children and other family members including the local people. The reasons for interviewing women due to the head of the research. Information

collection took place with women's empowerment through political participation specially in understanding their perception and knowledge about women's present status and future possibilities to bring changes. On the basis of study requirements individual case study was conducted with 10 women members. The risk of "women bias" was partly overcome through cross checking the information. At this level, after the end of each session, the findings of the participatory exercise were shared with the respondents.

Table:1

SELECTED AREA, NAME OF UNION PARISHADS AND NAME OF THE RESPONDENTS

Kaliakoir Thana of Gazipur District			
No. of Cases	Name of Union Parishads	Respondent's Name	Respondent's Designation
01	Madhyapara Union Parishad	Mrs. Jamila Begum	Women Member
02	Do	Mrs. Jahanara Begum	Do
03	Mouchak Union Parishad	Mrs. Julekha Begum	Do
04	Do	Mrs. Khurshida Khanom (khuki)	Do
05	Sutrapur Union Parishad	Lakhi Rani Shaha (widow)	Do
06	Do	Mrs. Rahima Akter	Do
07	Srifaltali Union Parishad	Mrs. Momotaj Begum	Do
08	Do	Shafia Begum (widow)	Do
09	Chapair Union Parishad	Nurjahan Begum (Divorced)	Do
10	Do	Mrs. Mosammat Salma Begum	Do
Total Cases 10	Total Union Parishads 5		All are Women Members

A suitable combination of techniques in setting sampling design made to best meet the desired research goal. In choice of sampling techniques the researcher considered primarily on the nature of the problem, the cost and time factors and the desired level of perfection or reliability of the result.

MAP OF BANGLADESH

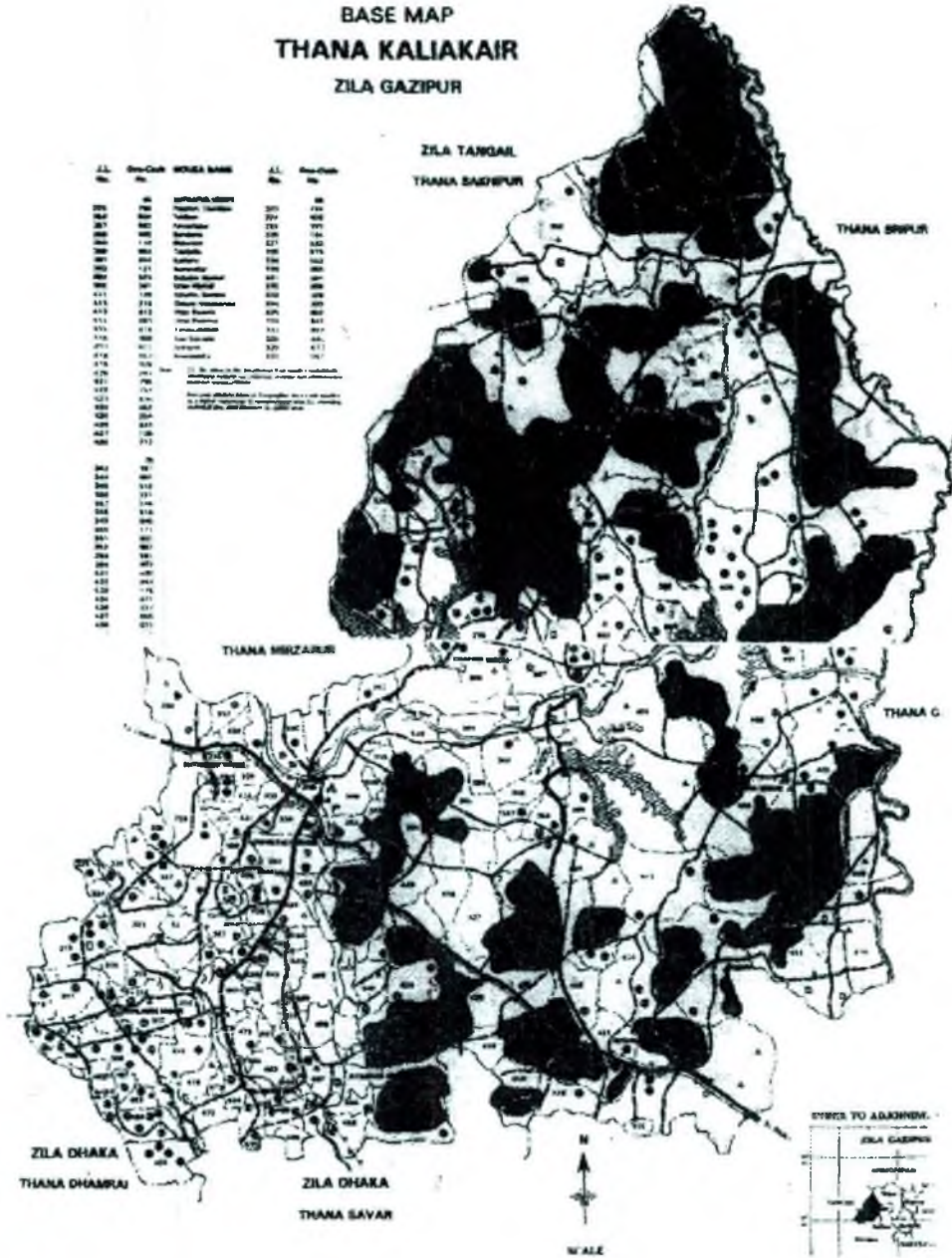
Scale 1" = 80 Miles

REFERENCES

- International Boundary ————
- District Boundary - - - - -
- Railway ————
- River ————
- Air Line - - - - -



**BASE MAP
THANA KALIAKAIR
ZILA GAZIPUR**



2.3 Research Methods

The methods used in the field research were individual in-depth interviews with two women members in each of the Union Parishad, and process documentation by compiling case studies through field visits.

The study can be considered a qualitative empirical research, in the sense that through in-depth interviews with each case, it made a whole-hearted combination of opinions and perceptions of local government i.e. UP members. Although the study is not an action research but the advantage of the research is, the findings are of practical value and recommendation could be implemented as a means of participatory exercise. Moreover, as the recommendations are based on the close interviews and observations of the members so recommendations are also a result of participatory exercise. Findings also translated into practical guidelines for the greater scope of women's empowerment. The participatory approach also implies that the data were collected with the primary objective of understanding the success of women's empowerment in future.

2.4 Duration of the Study

The study period of one year was divided into three phases:

- **Phase I** included the selection of the study areas, formulation, and finalization of the checklist.
- **Phase II** is devoted to the fieldwork.
- **Phase III** was spent for the compilation and processing of the information, editing and report writing.

2.5 Limitations of the Study

Two major limitations have been faced during study period. One is fund crisis. As the researcher had to do the whole study by self-finance, to meet up the crisis it needed to loan huge money from family sources. The another one was to select very limited geographical field areas due to shortage of fund. Therefore, the study could cover only one thana under the lone district of the country.

Most unlikely being a woman, the researcher herself faced social insecurities studying in the remote field areas. As our road communication setup is yet to develop to move smoothly the researcher just couldn't avoid the time trouble due to this.

CHAPTER- 3

3.0 HISTORY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT I.E. UNION PARISHAD IN BANGLADESH

This chapter presents the history of local government politics and women's involvement in union parishad, constitutional basis of local government institutions and the women's political rights in relation with politics and women's empowerment. Most of the information were collected taken from secondary sources.

3.1 Historical Background of Local Government i.e. Union Parishad and Involvement of Women in it

3.1.1 BRITISH PERIOD

The institution of local government is not a new idea in the sub-continent countries, particularly in Bangladesh. It is well known that in earlier times since British Period (1765-1947), the traditional Panchayet system as the first attempt of the Bengal Village Chowkidari Act of 1870, used to dissolve disputes arising among villagers which was initiated local government at the Union level. After that, Lord Ripon's famous Resolution on Local self-government of 1882, with certain modification, passed in 1885 as the Bengal Local self-government Act of 1885, in order to extend the system of local self- government in Bengal. Under the 1885 Act three tiers of local bodies came into operation- (a) the District Board in the District, (b) the Local Board in a Sub-division and (c) the Union Committee for a group of villages.

The next landmark in the development of local government during the British era was **the Bengal Village Self-Government Act, 1919**, which brought important changes in the structure of the local bodies. The three-tier system was replaced by a two-tier system comprising Union Boards and District Boards. A Union Board usually

consisted of 6 to 9 members of whom two-thirds were elected and one-third nominated. The system of nomination was finally abolished in 1946.

3.1.2 PAKISTAN PERIOD

During Pakistan Period (1947-1971) the major changes in local self-government occurred with the introduction of the Basic Democracies Order in 1959 by Ayub Khan. It had four tiers in the rural areas. From bottom to top, this consisted of Union Council, Thana Council, District Council and Divisional Council. At Union Council, the lowest level of the local government, two-thirds were elected and one-third nominated by the government. In 1962, the system of nomination was abolished, and the Union Council became a fully elective body.

3.1.3 BANGLADESH PERIOD

After independence, in Bangladesh (1971-), the first action of the new government was to rename the rural local bodies. The name of the Union council was change to Union Panchayet, the Thana Council was changed to Thana Development Council and the District Council to Zila Board. By the President's Order No.22 of 1973, the Union Parishad in the rural area underwent marginal compositional changes but the functions and sources of income remained the same as in the Basic Democracy Order of 1959. By including the President Ordinance no. 22, 1973, this institution renamed as 'Union Parishad'. The first election to the Union Parishad in Bangladesh was held in December 1973. However, the Local Government Ordinance of 1976² broke away from all previous legislative traditions in order to ensure the direct participation of women in local government and in socio-economic development at the rural level. In fact, for the first time specified that two seats had to be reserved for selected women in each Union. It compressed one elected Chairman and nine elected members, two

² The Local Government Ordinance, 1976 provided for two nominated women members only. Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development & Co-operatives, Notification. The Bangladesh Gazette Extra, April 16, 1979.

nominated women members and two pleasant representative members. (NILG) ✓ In the long history of local government institutions, since 1982 the government has introduced significant devolutionary changes in the Union Parishad i.e. decentralization and devolution took place in a great extent. (Siddqui, 1995) According to Local Government (Union Parishad) Ordinance, 1983, the composition of Union Parishad included a Chairman, nine elected members and three selected women members. Therefore, provision of nominated members in local bodies has been prevailing since the beginning of local government in this country. On September 1996, Local Government Reform Commission, proposed and later executed by the respective authority for a four tier local government structure and elected local bodies at all levels: (a) Gram Parishad at the Village level, (b) Union Parishad at the Union Level, (c) Upazila Parishad at the Upazila level, and (d) Zila Parishad at the District level. (Journal of Mass Communication; 1997) Under this set-up, the Union Parishad consists a Chairman as head with nine elected general members from the nine separate wards and three elected women members (Researve seat) from those nine wards; considering three wards a single constitution.

The structure of local government has been reformed and changed by various governments throughout our history and today's Union Parishad is a result of this evolving process. At present, Union Parishad is directed by two laws one is Local Government (UP) Ordinance, 1983 and the other one is Local Government (UP) (amendment) Law, 1993. According to the 1993 (amendment) law, elected members and Chairman for each Union selected three women members.

So, the history of local government in Bangladesh indicates that Laws/Ordinances have been formulated to form local bodies at the village, thana and divisional levels from time to time. Changes in the levels of local bodies with the change of government have made the whole system unstable and fluid. Besides absence of real participation of women made it more difficult to play an effective role. However, in our country, only the Union Parishad is chronologically existing within all the changes.

Figure:1
LOCAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE IN BANGLADESH

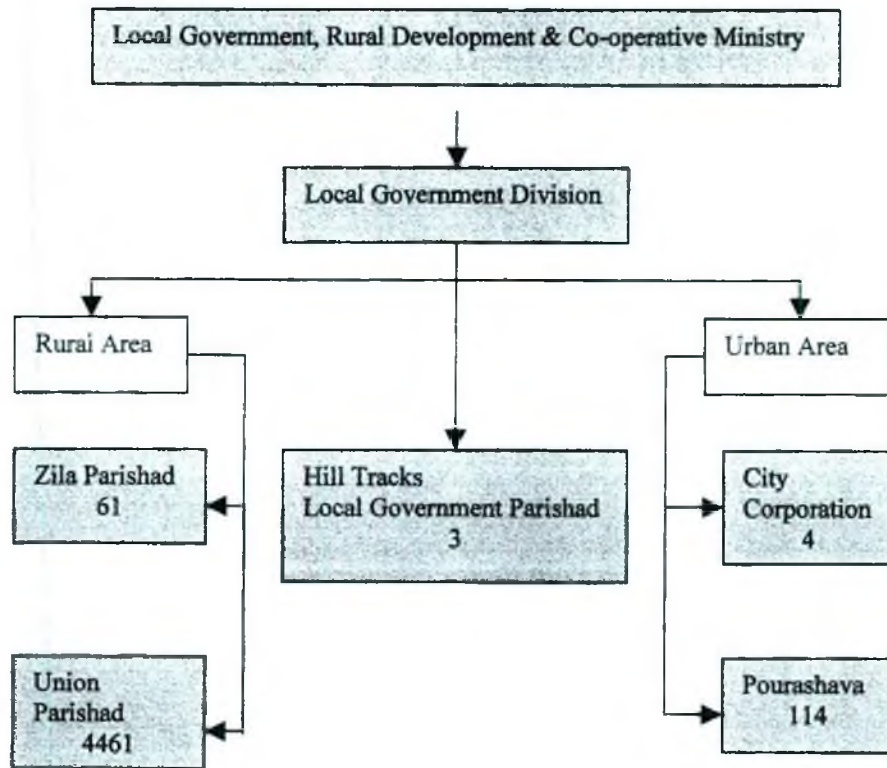
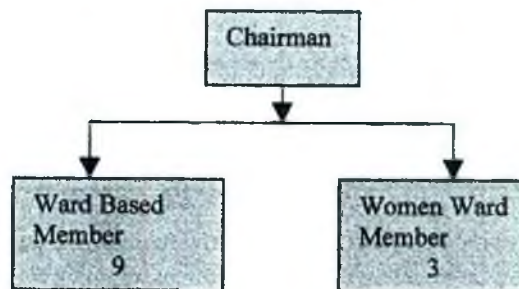


Figure: 2
UNION PARISHAD STRUCTURE



3.2 Constitutional Basis of Local Government and women in it

After Independence in 1971, for a democratic Local Government structure the Constitution of Bangladesh has included the Local Government, as a part of its Executive Branch. Here the **Article 59(1)** defines the nature of Local Government and its functions. According to the Constitution, "Local Government in every administrative unit of the Republic shall be entrusted to bodies, composed of persons elected in accordance with law". The most important issues for Local Government's efficiency lie on its accountability of the Chairman and member, and transparency of the process. In fact, the effectiveness of Local Government depends on the amount of devolution of power that is given by the Central Government. Therefore the Constitution in **Article 59(2)** stated the functions of the Parishad relating to "(a) administration and the work of public officers; (b) the maintenance of public order; and (c) the preparation and implementation of plans relating to public services and economic development". In addition, **Article 60** stated that "for the purpose of giving full effect to the provisions of article 59 Parliament shall, by law, confer powers on the local government bodies referred to in that article, including power to impose taxes for local purposes, to prepare their budgets and to maintain funds.' In order to ensure democratic process in the real sense it should be mentioned explicitly that the women in the country who comprises half of the total population must be involved in the development process through active participation of their representatives in the Union Parishad by means of direct election. Because the basic structure of the local government institution at the 'Union Parishad' level, keeping the villages as the focal point of all development activities. Therefore, **Article 9** of the Constitution of Bangladesh states that, 'The State shall encourage Local Government institutions composed of representatives of the areas concerned and in such institutions special representation shall be given, as far as possible, to peasants, workers and women.' Again, **Article 10** states that 'Steps shall be taken to ensure participation of women in all spheres of national life.'

CHAPTER- 4

4.0 EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN BANGLADESH & THEIR POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE UNION PARISHAD

The chapter describes the general concept of empowerment, women's empowerment in politics and the scope of Union Parishad. Therefore, some practical examples of politically successful women in both the positions of Chairman and member and their development and empowerment visions are included.

4.1 Concept of empowerment and empowerment of women

Since 1990's empowerment has become a major purpose of social development intervention. It is closely related with the measurement of evaluation of social development, which is helpful to understand empowerment from the beneficiaries' perception. With the growing importance of concepts like participation, capacity building and empowerment it is an increasing need to know how to monitor and assess the effect and impact of these qualitative processes. Thus the study put greater emphasis on the issue on how the powerless people perceive the concept of empowerment and perceive the changes, which government is trying to bring to their lives.

Empowerment reflects the notion of power, its use and distribution because it has shown that power (power over, power to and power within) (Rowlands, 1997) is, in most contexts, are the basis of wealth, while powerlessness is the basis of poverty. Women are the most powerless in all aspects in our society so, it needs to bring them in the empowerment process. The following quotations illustrate the range of meaning of empowerment in a development context.

. . . an alternative development involves a process of social and political empowerment whose long term objective is to rebalance the structure of power within

society by making state action more accountable, strengthening the powers of civil society in the management of their own affairs and making corporate business more socially responsible. (Friedmann 1992)

While the empowerment approach acknowledges the importance of women of increasing their power, it seeks to identify powerless in terms of domination over others and more in terms of the capacity of women to increase their self-reliance and internal strength. It places less emphasis than the equity approach on increasing women's status relative to men, but seeks to empower women through the redistribution of power within, as well as between, societies. (Moser 1991)

As empowerment has different dimensions like it could be social, cultural, economic, psychological, organisational and/or political so, from different levels, it could be personal (sense of self-confidence), relational (negotiation, influence and decision making) and collective (forming co-operative or involvement in political structures. (INTRAC 1999) Therefore, empowerment may achieve through behavioural changes by enhance self-esteem and self-satisfaction. As it is a continuous process, women's political participation in a long run positively can create their empowerment in all aspects. The present women's direct election system in the Union parishad in Bangladesh, of course is a positive initiative because it seeks to create an interactive and sharing approach to development in which people's skills and knowledge are acknowledged.

4.2 Politics and Women's Empowerment

Politics is about how people influence the distribution of resources, so it is related with development. But desired development is not possible if women stay away from national development process. Women's empowerment issues are emerging now a day so that woman can break the existing exclusion from all areas of social development. As politics is an important area in the national life and through Articles 27 and 28 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, the principle of equality of all citizens has been established, so constitutionally both men and women

are equal partners of state politics. Specially the constitutional provision on gender under the Article 28 mentioned in detail, which gives women and men equal rights.

Box No. 1

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS ON GENDER

Article 28

- (1) The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth.
- (2) Women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the State and of public life.
- (3) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth be subjected to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to access to any place of public entertainment or resort, or admission to any educational institution.
- (4) Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making special provision in favour of women or children or for the advancement of any backward section of citizens.

The Bangladesh Constitution also indicates that: "The State shall adopt effective measures to remove social and economic inequality between man and women and to ensure the equitable distribution of wealth among citizens, and of opportunities in order to attain a uniform level of economic development throughout the Republic" (Article 19(2)).

The fact is that in our society, socio-cultural and religious notions controlled women's equal rights. Men in their lives dominate women's political behavior and as a result, politically, women are placed in a marginal state in their social and mental horizons. Thus it is clear that in the long run such kind of discriminatory attitude could be a barrier to ensure any true development. Rather, the impact of male-dominated politics will not really make any sense to emphasis women's participation. There was no real public policy to restore women's right. The growing literature that examines

public policy on women in different national and historical contents makes clear that women, as a distinct group, have been importantly affected. So, women's participation in the political process is of crucial importance from the consideration of both equity and development. Their demands, hopes and opinions must be reflected in social development. As political participation is a means of gaining access to the power-structure where decisions with regard to the allocation of resources amongst people and other issues of community's concern are made, it is a major path to women's empowerment to increase decision-making power and greater ability to influence matters that affect our lives in the community and the larger society women must take part on it.

4.3 Union Parishad as the 'focal point' of the Local Government Institution and Rationale of Women in Participating in Politics

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In Bangladesh, The Union Parishad acts as a ground of genuine transfer of power-political, administrative and financial to local bodies i.e., devolution of power. Devolution involves the transfer of power from the central government to units of local government that lie outside the formal command of the central government. It is a political power transfer from the center to the periphery. From 1997, Union Parishad acted as the 'Focal Point'.

Local level politics comprises the activities of local government system. As a subsystem of the National Government its' function is to play an important role in promoting democracy and good governance in the local based institutions and ultimately strengthen the central government. Local government can also help to improve the cultural, political and economic environment of the country by strengthening all of these in its locally devaluated areas. Generally, it provides services and facilities to the people of a specific area according to their needs. Local Government works in a locally based political environment. Its base is politics. Thus local government is a core of power that is political power. Since long only the men



enjoyed this political benefit and women didn't have any entrance. But now in very recent they got that right to participate in this political super ground and also got the right to enjoy the sense of equality. Therefore, women's involvement and participation is an important issue from the political points of view. Moreover, women being half of the human resources should also be the contributors and beneficiaries of such a service. They are expected to focus on the issues of the women, ventilate their problem and pioneer their cause before the Parishad. Now in Bangladesh, the present Government took an attempt to make a change in the structure of Local Government where for the first time women have the right to stand for direct election that is elected by the direct voting of the people. Although they have reserve seats in this regard, turns something negative but for the existing state of affairs i.e. malpractice of the society as a patriarchal exploitation and religious issues, the 'reservation' could not be an absolute wrong idea. Nevertheless, women's participation in the Union Parishad will enhance the wider range of opportunities to make them empower.

4.4 Successful Examples of Women UP Chairmen and Members: increasing popularity of women's involvement in Union Parishad politics from past experiences

During the last 28 years after our independence, six local government elections were held in Bangladesh (1973, 1977, 1984, 1988, 1993 and 1997). Experiences from real examples update that in 1973 election, only one woman from Rangpur was elected as the Chairman of Union Parishad but she was killed long before the completion of her term. In 1977 election, four women were elected as Chairman of Union Parishad. In 1984, 1988 and 1993 only four, one and thirteen women were elected for the post of Chairman respectively. In the 1997 election, under 4198 Unions and 12894 reserve seats, a total of 46000 women were contested.

An interesting success is that in the last election of 1997, a women candidate elected as the Chairman of Kargao Union of katiadi Thana of Kishorgange District. She was defeated against eight male candidates. (Daily Ittefaq' 12th January, 1998) It is a big

example of women's interest and popularity in politics, and the possibilities of empowering women. It is quoted that "she came to face the election to figure out disorder, gambling, robbery, murder and harassment of terrorist and more extendedly as a conscious and educated person she liked to work for the ordinary people as they can live happily and be protected from all kinds of violence. Also, to bring peace in the society and to ensure proper distribution of government support she explores her devotion." Again, in Gaibandha district, total 25 women have been elected in the general membership posts and without any reservation they contest and win against male in the Union Parishad. (Bhorer Kagoj, Daily Newspaper, 14th January, 1998. The increasing popularity of women's political participation is also noted such as in the Nilfamari District, among 61 Unions women candidate for the General Membership post was 92, 3 for Chairman and 725 for women reserve seats, which was more than few multiplication of that of 1992 UP election when the candidate number was 57 only in the same area.

CHAPTER- 5

5.0 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This Chapter reflects the findings of the study. Through the case study analysis and interpretation it presents the perception and opinion of the elected women member on different issues relating to their knowledge about women's status and empowerment through politics. Thus the chapter illustrates elected women members' perception about their empowerment concept and process, overall status of women's empowerment through involvement in local politics in our society, and how female participation reflects in the local government i.e. Union Parishad and can bring a meaningful and radical change in empowering women.

5.1 Socio-economic Information of the EWMs

5.1.1 Personal Information

In the study area, average age of women members is 38 years and stands in a range between 31 to 47 years, however, the majority/core age group are in between 32 to 35 years. Out of the ten members only one has completed secondary level education and the rest members are below matriculation. Among them 50% have primary level education.

Considering marital status, all members are married and half of them got married when their ages are in between of 10 to 14 years except one member who got married when she was less than ten. Members husband status reflects that single is legally separated and husbands of two are dead. About husband's occupation 60 per cent were involved with services and the rest 40 per cent husband's of the EWMs were involved with business, agriculture, household activities and professional occupations. Among the members no one has more than 4 children and their birth spacing is also considerable. Most of them have individual family consists of husband and children and their family is also average in size. Two aged widow members live with their children and only divorcee member is attached with her father's family.

TABLE: 2
SELF AND FAMILY INFORMATION OF EWMS

Information areas	Number of Cases									
	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6	Case 7	Case 8	Case 9	Case 10
Age	32	37	40	31	35	35	47	47	43	35
Education	IX	V	VIII	Under HSC	V	IX	IX	V	V	V
Marital Status Married =1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Marital age	13	11	12	18	7	13	15	10	12	15
No. of Children	1	4	3	2	2	3	3	2	1	4
Own Occupation	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1
Husband's Main Occupation	5	3	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	4
No. of earning persons	2	2	3	2	3	2	2	2	3	2
Family size	3	6	6	4	2	5	5	6	5	6
Land Ownership	2	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	2	1
Religion	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1

Occupational Code:

Housewife and/or Household activities= 1
 Service (NGO School Teacher, service in Book shop) = 2
 Agriculture= 3
 Business= 4
 Professional= 5

Land Ownership

code:
 Yes= 1
 No=2

Religion Code:

Muslim= 1
 Hindu= 2

Average earning persons of these families is less than 3. As women members are being honored with monthly allowances, they have been included as a contributor of the total earnings of the family. So, mostly they are from solvent family background and everybody has agricultural and homesteads lands. About sixty per cent women members have land ownership which are generally owned from their fathers land but a very few have gained land from their husbands. Among the owners of lands 50 per cent have more than 150 decimal land and the rest have less than 50 decimal land along with ownership of homestead lands.

5.1.2 Political Background

TABLE: 3
POLITICAL INFORMATION

Information areas	Number of Cases									
	Madhapara Union Parishad - 9		Mauchak Union Parishad - 4		Sutrapur Union Parishad - 6		Shrifaltoli Union Parishad - 1		Chapaier Union Parishad - 2	
	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6	Case 7	Case 8	Case 9	Case 10
Previous membership	×	✓2 term	×	×	×	×	✓2 term	✓2 term	×	×
Party support	AL	BNP	JP	JP	×	AL	JP	AL	×	AL
Family member's political involvement	✓	✓	×	×	×	✓	×	×	×	×
The most influential persons	2	3	4	6	6	4	1	5	5	2
No. of contestant	2	2	3	3	3	0	6	1	1	7
Amount of Votes	2000	2005	3900	3002	1248	Total	1483	2200 approx	2000	1062
Vote difference (with nearest one)	44	400 approx	2300	1357	12	NA	600	230	88	90
Financial support (amount of money)	1	4	1	2	3	3	3	2	2	3
Financial support (Sponsor of money)	2	1	3	5	4	7	5	3	6	5

Influential persons in political life (code)

Self= 1
 Husband= 2
 Father + Husband= 3
 Relatives= 4
 Family members + Relatives= 5
 Area People= 6
 Nobody= 7

Range of amount of money needed in the election (in taka)

1 Lac to 1 Lac 40 Thousand= 1
 50 Thousand to 1 Lac= 2
 20 Thousand to 50 Thousand= 3
 Below 20 Thousand= 4

Sponsor of money Code

Self= 1
 Husband= 2
 Self + Husband= 3
 Self + Son= 4
 Self + Family members + Relatives= 5
 Relatives= 6
 Nobody= 7

From analysis of EWM's political background, it is found that only 30 per cent of them were selected women members in the local government institution (UP) of other government regimes and all of them were in the position for two terms. The rest of them are very new in their political life and participated for the first time in politics and elected.

Due to existing law all have participated neutrally in the elected, said the EWMs but, 80 per cent of them do support any of the big political party (Awami League 40%, Jatiya Party 30%, Bangladesh Nationalist Party 10% and no party 20%). However, many informed that they support their party very closely.

Despite many social and attitudinal barriers 1 out of 10 EWMs mentioned mostly self-interest as the cause of being in the position. Among the rest 90%, 30% are being influenced by the family members, 40% as a whole by the family members, relatives and the local people. And lastly, 20% of EWMs mentioned about the influence and motivation only by the area people specially the young generation.

In fact, for election eligibility, three major factors i.e family background, good manner and education influenced a lot while 20 per cent of EWMs perceived education as their success in the election and the rest of them consider their manner and behaviour as a cause of their success. But all mentioned that the family background specially for a woman members, husband's and father's family act as a core important and effective issue entering into the position. It is also mentioned that all EWMs have perceived the issue that without getting good manner only for education generally people didn't vote them. But they are optimistic about the future that then educated women will be elected in the Parishad. In addition, at present many women even didn't know or understand anything about the importance and power of the system. Now everybody knows what EWMs enjoyed power by government laws and rules and also its increasing positiveness. So, it is clear that many women will participate in future. According to study findings, the frequency of total contestants is 6/ 7 for 20 per cent, 2/ 3 for 50 per cent, only one for 20 per cent and without any contest is 10 percent.

The range of vote of EWMs showed that 30 per cent was in 1000 to 1500 votes, 40 per cent was in 1500 (above) to 2500 votes and the rest 20 per cent was in 2500 (above) to 4000 votes.

For political participation financial support is an essential requirement. As they are from quite solvent village family background nobody needs to sell their land at all. In the issue of unavoidable money expenditure for election counseling the study reveals that 20 per cent EWMs spent more than 1 Lac taka, 30 per cent of them spent above 50 thousand taka, 40 per cent needed above 20 thousand taka and only one out of ten said as she was elected without any contest so, she spent very small amount of money. About the sponsor of money only one was self-finance and among the rest EWMs, only husband or both father and husband sponsored money for 30 per cent EWMs, only the relatives or area people provided support for 10 per cent and 10 per cent respectively and the rest 30 per cent EWMs, both their relatives and family members sponsor the money.

5.2 Understanding about the absence of women in the local government institutions for a long time

The UP women members mentioned that the overall social, economic, cultural and religious causes are both directly and indirectly responsible for downgrading the general women's participation in the political power structure. From this ground they specify the following causes:

- The social structure considers woman as a product of home.
- Male always wanted female to see as an inferior class.
- Religious and cultural superstitions were practiced in the village as a whole in "the society" that, if any married or unmarried women or girl go outside the house they would be depraved.
- Women are being kept less educated and to some extent without education.
- Women in general neither owns assets nor involves in formal occupation for earning.

- In our society, male used to practice that it would be their shame if women's position becomes equal with them. That's why when women work in local government power structure, male feel afraid of it because women are getting closer connection with the public officers. Out of such believe of male, women members are being excluded from most of the very important development activities and decisions.
- Women themselves also felt fear on social and religious prohibition because in the villages, people defame them by saying that 'talking with other male persons would keep female in the hell'.
- Women have had lack of self-confidence. However, at present this situation is quite changed specially because of being involved with different NGO's savings and credit programmes. Most of the village women are doing income generating activities and thus initially create and then increase their self-respect in the family by providing financial supports to their husbands. Moreover, due to the present revolutionary step of the government, women started to think their own participation in the national programmes and actions.
- Male never wants women in any position of the UP power structure. Most of the works they do by themselves leaving very little for the women members. Still this attitude of male is persisting. So, there was and still absence of cooperation of the male.
- Male believes that women will be inside the Pardah (veil).

5.3 Role differentiation of both the selected and elected women members in the union parishad

To the present women members, women's participation in the previous selection process of local government system (UP) were merely not involved with any kind of development activities at all, even they didn't know anything about the functions of Union Parishad and their own role and responsibilities in it. One, who was a past selected member of the Parishad, mentioned that at that time they had no work or role in the Parishad rather they only participated in the meetings and signed wherever necessary. She also mentioned that then nobody knew them as peoples'

representative and/or political leader. Another X-UP women member said “We used to come once or twice in the Parishad to collect the government allowance and never put concentration on area needs and problems at all because we had not given any responsibility at that time”. The UP women members who are new in the political area mentioned that those who came by the selection process was never seen to do any work for the area or we met them for any support.

On the other hand, the present UP women members who are in the position through direct election system, know each and every function of the Parishad, know about their own role and responsibilities, are directly involved with development activities and are performing their responsibilities as a chairman of different development projects. Apart from that they are also participating in different training programmes, seminars and conferences as elected peoples’ representative through the Government and NGOs.

In fact, as in the selection process there was no voting system the members were not accountable to the people. Due to the direct election system by the Government law, now everybody is going to the elected members. Members themselves are also feeling a sense of respect and people are taking their issues in the local Shalish (local tribunal). Moreover, the area people who elected them by giving vote recognise them as their elected members, seek their support for any sort of family dispute and agree easily with their decisions. Now they are getting scope to go outside for activities and to learn many things because of their increased mobility and meeting different types of people. Thus this is also increasing their experiences and knowledge.

5.4 Union Parishad Election, 1997: General Analysis along with EWM's Perceptual Knowledge

5.4.1 General analysis

The study reveals that in our villages, the importance of elected representatives of Union Parishad is unbelievable. Here Union Parishad election is also considered as festival because those who participate in the election are mostly very well known to the general people and somehow they are someone's relatives, a type of closeness which is truly absent in our city areas. The ordinary people used to go to the Chairman and members for any kind of necessity like family justice, Shalish, ideas and suggestion, problem solution and others. However, from such an institution i.e. Union Parishad, women, the half of the total population were excluded and socially imposed by involving them only in the household activities. Even they were not considered in any decision-making issues and power structure at all. But at present, through this system women are not only involved in the household-based activities but also working outside. The Parishad is mainstreaming these powerless women as the core person here, mainly to make concrete idea about problems and possibilities of the village women. Regarding this, women members have got huge importance to make people and system obligated. Moreover, recently the Government of Bangladesh by its Local Government Division ordered the Thana Nirbahi Officer (T.N.O) to implement projects of the amount of taka of twenty-five thousand under eight projects in a year and therefore Eight Project Implementation Committees also be considered. Some major steps have taken to protect huge power for the 13 thousand (approx.) elected women members of above 4 thousand Union Parishad. The followings are the given preferences for women's empowerment in the power structure:

- Women members will definitely be responsible as the Chairman of one-third (three out of twelve) Standing Committee. (Source: Local Government (Union Parishad) Ordinance, 1983)
- To implement the annual development projects, in the eight Project Implementation Committees, women member will be the Chairman of one-third projects.

- ❑ Those women members who cannot be the Chairman of the project committee must be the member of that Committee.
- ❑ An UP Chairman/member will never be Project Committee Chairman in more than one time in each fiscal year.
- ❑ The women member will be the Member in the Place Selection Committee of Tubwell installment and in selection of deprived people under VGF/VGD Program as well.
- ❑ In Aged-allowances Committee, Union Parishad women members are responsible as co-Chairperson.
- ❑ Under the Primary and Mass Education department women members will be the Chairmen of one-third of Compulsory Primary Education Committee.
- ❑ In the monitoring system of Rural Maintenance Program, women member will be one out of three responsible person.
- ❑ In Relief and Disaster Management Project Committee, women members are responsible as member for one-fourth Project Committee.
- ❑ With the three elected areas of the each women member, Village Social Development Committee³ has been established where only the women members would get the responsibility as Chairperson.

So, it could be clear that through political empowerment as well as participation in power structure women's empowerment in the family and the society might be enhanced.

³ Collection of Birth-Death Statistics, Education specially to enhance women's education, to increase health awareness, to encourage to take Family Planning Facilities, Fisheries and Poultry, development of Small and Cottage Industries, Action on Women Assault and others.

5.4.2 Role of women members in the Union Parishad and their achievement

Under the banner of functions of UP, women members at present are performing their roles in the following areas: (See Appendix- 2).

1. Agriculture
2. Infrastructure Development i.e. Rural Maintenance Programme (RMP), Road Maintenance Committee (RMC), Water and Sanitation and others
3. Education i.e. Total Literacy Moment (TLM)
4. Communication i.e. Earth work
5. Test Relief (TR)⁴

5.4.3 Understanding about the Present status of Women Members in performing their Roles

From the study findings it reveals that women members can conceptualise their role as a peoples' representative, their present status in performing their roles and the future of it. Regarding this they perceived their present status as follows:

- Discrimination in card distribution (VGD, VGF) is prevailing now but in near future this will not be continued.
- Sometimes those women members are getting more scope to work who have good term with their male colleagues specially the Chairman of the Parishad.
- Only those items are getting more preference, which the Parishad is bound to pay. For example, out of 7 VGF cards 5 is getting the women members however, it is not always maintaining properly.

⁴ Note: Under the test relief VGD was giving in every month in account of 30 kg. Wheat per family for total 30 families, the Parishad ultimately distributed total 900 kg. Wheat which was two years project earlier but at present it reduced the time and make it total for one and half years. Here the rule is that among 30 family both female and male members will get cards in equal share. Again for VGF (Vulnerable Group Feeding) cards each of the Union gets wheat only for 3 months duration (August to October) and total five hundred vulnerable families are getting 10 kg. Wheat per family and here the male-female ratio of card distribution is 2:5.

- The study findings reveals that where the Chairman possesses a good mentality and is quite impersonal, the women members are getting more justice in the Parishad to perform their role for the betterment of the people.
- Some cases show that the minor group (i.e. the Hindu women member) is not getting equal share as that of the Muslim member.
- It is found that in some Union Parishads, women members didn't do any sort of infrastructure development and somewhere they did highest 5/6 development works.
- To enhance education under TLM, women members have huge responsibility such as to supervise and monitor the progress of the total process and activity and to motivate the adult students in the programme more extendedly.
- In some cases (for example, case 3 and 6) women members are also thinking that although they are getting less VGD/ VGF than the male colleagues, it is positive because they don't know much about the people's needs and problems in their all three areas at present time.

Box No. 2

EWMs' Present achievement in empowering them through political participation in the Union Parishad

- Getting training on different current issues and gathering knowledge.
- Working/ moving outside.
- Going regularly one or twice in a week in participating the UP meeting in the office.
- Going to different offices and thereby increasing communication linkages specially with TNO.
- Participating in discussions.
- Being known among the people of the area and getting unbelievable respect.
- Participating in different meeting and seminar in both local and national levels.
- People are considering their advice as the leader.
- Disputing quarrel of the area.
- Participating in social and area development activities.

At present women members are generally doing some works to develop the livelihood status of the general women with an intention of reducing the long run sufferings. By the government and NGO's different interventions they have already started largely to perform their duties and responsibilities to make people conscious about certain issues such as, early marriage, polygamy, torture against wives, health and nutritional awareness, and family planning. They are also motivating people specially the women in adult education, supervising TLM schools, providing suggestion to involve them in different income generating activities like fisheries, earth cutting, poultry etc. By getting knowledge on different law related issues such as divorce and torture law, dowry law etc. they are making people aware and solving disputes among brothers, quarrel between husband and wife, land related problems and others. So, they are providing awareness education, suggestion and support to the local area people in general and women in particular.

5.5 Elected Women member's Perception of their empowerment

Although 'empowerment' is a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation, to greater decision-making power and control, and to transformative action. (Karl), the respondents' view is much different. This is clear that they do not understand the concept of empowerment rather they raise question on it. At present, what they understand that is really the power. The study finding reveals that they can explain empowerment. (See Box no. 3)

Box No. 3

EWM's perception about power

(As they perceive empowerment as power)

- They have got membership of Union parishad.
- When they can contribute in any specific social issues they feel their power.
- When family members feeling respect because of her.
- Actively participate in the family decision making and in the community.
- When villagers can recognise them and respect them.
- When they distribute VGD/ VGF cards, construct roads and install tubewells in the area.
- Playing role as a chairman of the development projects.
- Disputing area problems and people do agree with them.
- General people come with their problems.
- Proving advice and suggestion on different awareness issues what they already have or knew after getting training on specific issues.
- Others.

5.6 Political participation and woman's empowerment process

Political participation and the empowerment process of women are closely related with (1) Women's awareness building on overall situation of women i.e. discrimination, rights, opportunities, self-identity and power; (2) On understanding of gender equality i.e. access and control in every area such as poverty, education, health, human rights, property and labour force i.e. gender distribution of resources; (3) Capacity building and skill development; and (4) Participation and greater control and decision-making power in the home and the society. (Karl)

The study reveals that women members are aware enough about the overall situation of women in our society. They mentioned that women are enjoying less rights and opportunities in comparison with men. In the family and the work place women are being discriminated in every area even they have lack of self-identity and power. However, during last few years NGO interventions mostly and the other wider socio-political changes and influences at the global level all had their impact on our society specially it happens some radical changes in consciousness raising issues of our women and the other persons of the society. They mentioned the following examples:

Discriminatory rights:

- About child custody children are being known by the name of father from generation to generation but mother has no such a right.
- Girls or women are getting less percentage of property rights by the law of Islam and the Hindu law woman's property right is totally neglected.
- Most of the working women are poorly paid. Among the poorest women, maidservant is a very common job.
- They also mention discriminatory attitude of the male members. For example, in any bill for development works is passed by getting the majority male member's vote. Development works are mostly done by the male members and women are deprived from their rights and also only by being a woman, women members are getting less relief distribution cards compared to men.

- In decision making of any official dealings, elected women members are getting very less scope in relation to that of male.

Cultural and social practices:

- Due to early marriage and religious beliefs women in our society are less educated.
- The majority women are compulsorily involved with household activities for lifetime. Thus they are involved with unpaid family work, which has no economic value judgement.
- Women in general take food after finishing every member's fooding of the family.
- Women have to leave their own house after getting marriage. Around the whole life they are living first in their father's family, then in husband's family and later on son's family. The interesting thing is in everywhere they themselves feel these families as their own where they have no right to put her name with the children, no equal property right, no live environment to work outside as they have to do lots of work in the family already. They are always overloaded.
- Lack of self-confidence is an important issue. In Bangladesh society, women cannot move freely because there is possibility to be raped. So, they do not go outside at night and also they afraid of ill speak of the people.

Gender equality:

A strong patriarchal tradition, social norms, beliefs and values and religion shape gender relations in Bangladesh. Unequal access and control is prevailing in all aspects of poverty level, education, health, human rights, property, power and labour force.

Poverty level: Women are most deprived due to their less education, malnutrition and physical unhealthy condition. They have little or no access in property and lack of awareness. The women members said that of course women are poorest and vulnerable but those who are more illiterate, their poverty level is comparatively high. Due to lack of money the poorest women also cannot participate in the politics. They

are most deprived because as they feel shy to work outside, they have no food at home. But in our society, male are getting privilege in all these issues.

Education: As compared to men, women are getting less scope to be educated. However, the successive and present governments have showed preference of woman's education by providing free education till secondary level and encouraging adult education but due to early marriage of girls they cannot continue their study. And after then pressure of household activities and lack of awareness of them and everyone of the family they usually showed lack of interest in adult education. However, at present they are becoming aware to be literate. According to the women member's voice, 30 to 40 per cent of women are literate in their villages. 50 per cent male want that women will be educated but they will not give them permission to work outside. They also viewed that as after the marriage their daughters leave the father's house so, daughter's education should not get that much priority.

Health: Women in general are conceiving baby within 1-2 years later on they used to feed good food to the male members in the family first. So, women naturally have unhealthy and malnourished physical state.

Property: Due to inheritance property rights women are deprived in our society. Besides, traditionally women used to go to husband's house after their marriage and psychologically consider husband's property as their own. Always women have to depend on their husband or father for necessary money.

Human rights: Under the status of International Human Rights, Bangladesh Government however has ratified the UN 'Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW; 1979). But none of the elected women UP members knows about it or the given international rights including their political participation. The following table indicates the fact.

TABLE: 4

KNOWLEDGE ON UN CEDAW AND THE GIVEN POLITICAL RIGHT OVER THERE.

Case list	Name of the Area	Do you ever hear the UN CEDAW?
01	Madhapara Union Parishad	No
02	Do	No
03	Mauchak Union Parishad	No
04	Do	No
05	Sutrapur Union Parishad	No
06	Do	No
07	Shrifaltoli Union Parishad	No
08	Do	No
09	Chapaier Union Parishad	No
10	Do	No

Culturally women have constraints to express their opinion. The birth identity of the children is always goes to father. Although mother is suffering a lot and does more care than the father does to their children, they have no social and legal recognition of child custody. Superstition also prevails in the society that children will go to hale if they call in their mother's name. Women are not getting human rights in all spheres of society, husband and children, education and property at all.

Power: As women themselves are financially poor they are being excluded from any sort of development activities and even in the family they are being beaten by their husband and other members of husband's family. In many cases, women didn't get the democratic right yet. Many women cannot put their own vote.

Social security: Women are socially vulnerable. They cannot go outside at night due to their physical insecurity. In the society, women have no scope to live a secured life and home free movement. However, such an insecurity is created by the male, they are even putting barriers and does discourage not to go outside the home at night and even at daytime.

The women members also said that women from generation to generation are downgraded because of all these constraints and rules in all spheres but gradually this will not prevail any more. However, women are in a better position than they were previously. The main reasons behind it are NGO's savings and credit programme,

income generating activities, education training and awareness programmes, and the garments factory where a larger portion of poor women are being employed. Also the local government system of Union Parishad where women are directly participating in the national development interventions and achieved a legal and powerful basis to work for all discrimination against women is another important reason.

5.7 Rationale of Women's Ability in Participating the Politics

The elected UP women members have perceived women's ability and even explained their strengths and weaknesses in dealing with the public. They mentioned that women are not doing less and comparatively easy works than men rather while men do single work women do involve themselves at different types of household activities. Side by side by being actively involved with savings programmes of NGO Samity (cooperatives) they are communicating regularly with those organisations, taking necessary training and repaying unpayed loan by working in income generating activities. Also at present, they are doing government activities through the Union Parishad. They raised demand against disparity by saying that "both men and women are human beings so, we must capable of doing such development activities".

To rationalise women's ability they also indicate the comparative progress of their own courage in performing public responsibilities. They said, after completing one year as EWMs from last year their movement, voice and overall courage have increased many times. Beside due to government law and counseling the regular procession by the mass media, women's courage increased a lot to put their own vote with self-interest. In addition, our Prime Minister, leader of the opposition Party, UP Chairman, magistrates and in many other prestigious posts women are doing better, which inspire them to do something positive. Thus they wish that next time in the local level, many women would elect as UP Chairman.

5.8 Changing trend of responsibility

From the study findings it is also found that woman's involvement is shifting slowly from only involvement of household activity towards Union Parishad or Council related work responsibilities. It is revealed that among respondents 70 per cent of them were only the housewives before being elected member of the council and the rest were previously involved directly in the political area as selected members. Previously both category of women were naturally doing all sorts of household activities as a rural housewife such as cooking, cleaning the whole house and yard, washing clothes, taking care of their cattle and other domestic animals, cultivating vegetables, threshing paddy etc. In addition, usually women do take care of their children, look after children's education, and take care of husband and other family members. Apart from this, in leisure time they were doing sewing, embroidery, netting, and preparing mat. Most of them were involved with savings programme of different NGOs and other social welfare types of activities. As they have at least primary level of education, they used to take care of their children's education at home and overall caring.

Now, due to being member of the Union Parishad, naturally it creates time crisis for EWMs in performing proper roles of the previous duties and responsibilities. But only those are getting less time for their family who previously either fully involved in household activities or have huge pressure of Parishad's activities. On the other hand, those who previously involved with different NGOs' activities, who are little bit aged, who have adult sons and daughters or daughter-in-law in their house generally they do not face problem. Although their husbands do not get that much service from their wives but as they support their wives' participation in politics but they are not facing any problem at all. Moreover, in some cases as because the women members are not getting enough scope to do development works, so they are easily doing their regular household responsibilities without time constraints. But it is true that all of them more or less are compromising with their time in performing both social and family related activities. In many cases it is found that their husbands have support in participation of politics of their wives but in reality they are not cooperating with them

in household activities. So, in this socially patriarchal system, although women members' responsibility and work load certainly have increased but as they have got a very few public responsibilities through the Parishad generally they are not facing problems.

5.9 Opinion and Recommendation of Women Members about the New System: Women's Direct Political Participation

The Elected Women members have identified a number of positive areas in the present local government reform (UP). They are hoping that if the whole system become more disciplined and obligatory to all, in near future this will ensure the progress of women and women will be no more subordinate group. In fact, the women at present however cannot go all their areas wherever necessary but they think that gradually this could be possible if they have real support and cooperation from all members of their family including husband. Moreover, it needs to create awareness building for all people and arrange employment opportunity for the unemployed. To secure women's social life it should be strictly maintain the law and order and implement given punishment and other necessary steps. Men have to encourage feeling respect to women. And for all this, media and counseling will enhance the area of scope to solve the arising barriers in implementing woman's rights. The EWMs perceived the issues under as follows:

Box No. 4

Opinion and Recommendation: Society

- The local people specially the female can express their problems to the elected women members.
- They will put special attention on female assault and will take appropriate action against it.
- Continuous participation of women in the direct election process would create worthiness in the society e.g., awareness education for both men and women, unity among people and empowerment of women.
- This will provide positive impact in the overall development of the country.
- Women members may act as a literate mother who will give us a literate child.

Box No: 5

Opinion and recommendation: Institution

- As voters encouraged them, so the present system may be practiced in future.
- It may become a positive initiative if right person will elect through the Union Parishad election.
- Direct nomination of women member will be functional when the Government will consign their responsibility more specifically.
- If women member can perform their responsibility properly then this should be a good step.
- If the women member properly supervise their works and distribute correctly, it will be helpful.
- Due to reservation however, women members somehow being neglected by the male members but for present situation it is very urgent, even more reservation of seats should not be terminated because of inadequacy of women in the process for a long time. However, in future women will compete and elect without any reservation.

Box No: 6

Opinion and Recommendation: women's empowerment

- It must bring women's empowerment.
- It is a good step in terms of women's meaningful involvement into the power structure.
- Despite household activity women as a human will participate in different outside activities.
- It will ensure women's participation in every stratum of existing society.
- Nobody knew women as a member when the male member nominated them, but now people know them as a member and also respect their leadership.
- Government has given the chance to empower women, so they are doing their jobs regarding this.
- It will create an opportunity to do something better for women and thereby women's empowerment as a whole.
- The woman member does not have equal power at present in the society so this will be a platform to raise women's demand and voice against oppression. So, they have to wait and work side by side with men.
- As because our society is patriarchal, the new system will enhance women's right and reduce woman's access and control in the decision making both in the family and community issues.
- It will enhance power of women, make them literate and will help to take rational decisions.

5.10 Opinion of women members about their male representative

- 100% goes to negative attitude of male members. Male colleagues do not appreciate their presence as a same type of member.
- They don't give enough importance to their opinion.
- They don't want that women members perform their role rather making disturbance.
- Though women members elected by three words and they get more VGF cards accordingly, male representatives including the male Chairman do not like to give that right. Even they give them less VGF card than the male members.
- No male member cooperates with them. Some avoid their negligence but most show clearly their lack of interest to cooperate.
- Male members don't want that female member will become prominent.
- They don't provide any help but always wishing that only they would work in it.
- Because of reservation male member don't give them recognition and their rights as well.

Not everybody but majority of male members in one or two wards work together and exchange their ideas but in the Union Parishad other members including the Chairman actually provide discrimination between male and female members.

5.11 Limitations of the System and Problems faced by EWMs (before and after election)

Several factors hamper women's effective political participation. These are classified as socio-economic, cultural and political. The study also reveals that the patriarchal social system limits women's involvement in politics, and the reproductive and family roles and economic dependency also make it difficult for women to be fully involved in politics. The nature of general problems they faced are reported below:

- There were social and religious barriers raised during participation in the election. Most of the male people of the area showed lack of interest on women's outside work.
- Communication and transportation problems.
- Lack of finance. Majority of them had to depend on their husband's money or other male members' support.
- Lack of materials for development works in the Parishad.
- Lack of cooperation from the chairman and male members.
- Women members do not have that much importance in any decision making of the Parishad at present.
- From other two wards of the EWMs, people are not coming with their problems yet.
- Sometimes agenda and necessary papers of development works are not sending to the EWMs in time.
- Male members are mostly doing the major development works. Also, proper distribution is somehow absent here and in many cases distribution is not doing according to population density.

In fact, women members emphasised communication and transportation problems both in time of counseling for election and performing their responsibilities when they need to visit different distant villages. The underdeveloped and indigenous communication systems in our rural areas make it difficult for them to move around in the three wards and to attend the meeting of the Parishad. The study findings also reveals that mostly the EWMs are doing some judges in their own area and little some infrastructure development activities such as, 1 or 2 new road construction and/or road maintenance work, tubewell installation etc. Most of the time in distribution of VGD and VGF cards, women are getting one third of that of men, although they are elected from three Wards (Men represent one Ward) and committed to provide services to the people. In fact, in comparison to male, women members are getting less scope of doing road maintenance and tubewell installation works at present, they are facing constrains to provide their service to the people in this specific issues and regarding this the position of women members is facing trouble.

CHAPTER- 6

This concluding chapter presents ideas, future projection and recommendations of the researcher and the stakeholders i.e. elected women members of Union Parishad about the possibility of women's empowerment through directly elected political participation in the local government system.

6.1 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Local Government is the base of democracy and Union Parishad is the first step to enter village people into grass root level politics and thereby national decision making as well. Union Parishad is a representative local government institution, which is constituted with elected representatives and performs administrative responsibilities. Parishad acts as a media of communication between government and people. In fact, it acts as a political school as well. Despite a long history of local government in Bangladesh, since 1997 women started for the first time to participate in a meaningful way in the local level politics through direct election. In this election, under 4198 Unions and 12894 reserve seats, a total of 46000 women were contested. So, by this election it can be deserve that a huge positive impact on political empowerment as well as socio-economic empowerment of the powerless women would achieve in the coming future.

Previously, in our rural society, women worked only for household activities and their role was family based and the reproductive as well. But at present, by the Government policy to political empowerment of Bangladeshi women they are now the elected representatives of the Union Parishad. In fact, the rural women had no idea about political empowerment before participating in the local government council but now they do understand and feel the strength of such participation. As a result they are working side by side the men as an elected member. In the local council formally for the first time women have gotten legal right and scope as they are saying confidently that if this system will continue, women in Bangladesh will be empowered. So, the process of women's empowerment from political perspective has already started and it is indicating positive changes for the coming future. For

example, due to legal position for the first time women are being involved in the Shalish to resolve the local conflicts in true sense, which was entirely impossible in previous days. But as they are learning now so they are usually taking support of the local influential persons who have good reputation to the poor people. Again because of Government Law, the general people of the area believe and except the power of the woman member. But for an effective distribution of power with equal share in our local government politics it is very urgent to specify the duty and responsibility of the women member as they can properly direct the development activities in their areas. The women representatives are also raising their demand for it. In some instances, women members are thinking that inspite of given power by the government they are not enjoying the right to implement that power by the Parishad and therefore, they mentioned the reason behind it as mostly the patriarchal attitude of the Chairman and 9 Male Ward Commissioners. Even in some areas it is protecting so badly that women members of that area are feeling very disappointed in such an existing condition. Sometimes male members say that women will not get power. However, according to power they have already achieved something from the government rules and thereby the elected UP women members are getting more power increasingly day by day. For example, the declaration from the government that "the Chairman of one-third of Annual Development Projects (ADP) will be the elected women member".

The following are the recommendations of the Study:

1. To emancipate financial dependency of the womenfolk, it is important to explore suitable job for the women. Income generating training and therefore the related projects should be undertaken and implement through this Parishad. It will reflect important role in women's empowerment.
2. Traditionally, womens' works do not get proper evaluation, which is very important to develop in one's personal life and professional life as well. As financial stability comes first to recognise one's social value so, women will never be considered as a respectable person until they turn themselves in the process of

self-dependency. So, they must have to make aware about it and keep them in the process immediately.

3. To recover the long run deprivation of the women if some conscious people of the society have some cooperation, women must overcome the existing backwardness of them and will go far from here. Therefore, it is important to make aware the male people of the society.
4. It is very important to conduct an in details participatory impact assessment on roles and responsibilities of Union Parishad so that it will explore the existing problems facing the women ward commissioners being in the system and thus it could be possible to make the system more effective by changing all necessary structural and functional malpractices and will ensure the maximum implementation of it.
5. Beside the government level research, it is also important to conduct same participatory research by private expatriates, and/or NGOs. Research from different levels will give us a concrete assessment of the new system and women in it that will be useful to ensure people's participation in the study findings and project the future problems and possibilities.
6. Regular monitoring and evaluating empowerment would be an essential step unless empowerment of the women may not be sustainable or turn into drowsiness or even it could loose ultimately the interest of the process to the general women of the society including the women ward commissioners as well.
7. To political empowerment of the women it is necessary to come into an equal understanding of the power and responsibility of the women members by providing compulsory training and demonstration.
8. It needs to ensure getting all essential papers and schedules from the Chairman by the Parishad in due time.

9. Women need to be educated, as they can easily understand all disorderliness and discrimination against them realise their equal rights and fight for that and make their empowering process regular and effective.
10. Women members however get government allowance regularly but mostly they are not getting the Chawkidary tax by the Parishad. Therefore, they suggested that the Government could give total 400 taka.
11. In spite of getting three times vote in compare to male ward commissioners, their salary is the same and male are also getting priority in any development activities. So, such kind of disparity needs to remove to make the system effective.
12. The designation and roles of the women ward commissioners should be transparent as Chairman and other male counterparts cannot show disagree and create hindrance in cooperation with the women members, which is almost absent at present system.
13. If government really wanted to empower the women, then it is important to keep the position of EWMs just after the Chairman. In such a way women's empowering system will be more effective. In fact, in reality they are working under the male ward commissioners and presently getting 25% development works only.
14. Such an empowerment process for women should continue but it is simultaneously important to get more realistic and substantial power to the women ward commissioners. For example, in case of internal Shalish in the Parishad it needs total five votes to resolve, but as there is already nine male members in the Parishad, they fulfil the total number of essential votes. So, here women do not have any excess really. Therefore, if we want to make it meaningful it needs to enclose provision of at least two of the women ward commissioners' vote to finalise any decision.

15. Without having overall preference i.e. like seat reservation and others for women, at present, women's empowerment will not be achieved.

16. Many significant interrelated factors affect women's ability to participate in politics and the life of society such as access to financial resources, household status, employment and remuneration, work-related rights, double burden of work, education and literacy, health, control over own body, legal rights, tradition, cultural attitudes and religion, socialization, self-confidence, violence against women, mass media and other factors. So, in empowering women all these areas need to address in the planning of the process and keep concentrate on an appropriate implementation.

It is hoping that the study could help to understand the logical basis and alternative possibilities of empowering women. Hence it will enhance women's empowerment by making a continuation of their participation in the Local Government institution and thereby display the gaps from their male colleagues. At present, by the Government of Bangladesh, the local level women got that power which could act so powerfully to empower them to achieve equality and development. As because the core point of the study lies on exploring and analyzing those issues of women that will support empowerment of the root level powerless women and thus the countrywide women. However, the study covered the Union Parishad of Bangladesh more specifically one Thana of one specific district, the findings of the study is hoping to give us some concrete guidelines about the essence of continuation of women's political participation for empowerment of women.

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Appendix- 1

CHECKLIST for the Elected Women Member

➤ Personal Information and family background

Name of the respondent

Age

Education

Marital status

Year of marriage

Birth spacing among children

No. of children

Family size and nature

Total earning person in the family

Respondent's Occupation

Respondent's association with welfare organisations

Husband's main occupation

Land ownership of the respondent

➤ Political information

What party they do support and their value on party politics?

How many contestants they had to face?

Total number of vote they got and the vote difference with the nearest contestant.

Family member's relation with politics.

Who provides financial support and total amount of money they needed for election purpose.

➤ Opinion on several issues relating to EWM's knowledge and experiences.

- ◆ What is your understanding about the absence of women in the local government institutions i.e. Union Parishad for a long time?
- ◆ Do you know anything about the role of selected UP women members? What are the differences between selected and elected women members?
- ◆ What are the role of UP and the elected women members in general? Can you perform all of your responsibilities?
- ◆ What is your status now of decision-making in your family, society and Parishad?
- ◆ Why you have participated in the election?
- ◆ What is your understanding about women's empowerment? How you perceive that you are empowered by the present election system?
- ◆ What is the rationale of women's ability to participate in politics?
- ◆ Do you face any difference in doing regular household work? What specific changes you identified?
- ◆ What exactly you can share more in your own family and the larger area after being EWM of UP?
- ◆ Do your husband cooperates you to do household activities?

- ◆ What is the feeling of your husband and children as because you are an elected member?
- ◆ Do you know about the status of our general women in Bangladesh?
- ◆ Do you support the principle of seat reservation for women? How can you rationalise it?
- ◆ How long you want reservation for women member in the UP and why?
- ◆ Obstacles of women's political participation. What is your opinion about the male colleagues in the Parishad?
- ◆ Why more women didn't participate in the Union Parishad at present? What will be in future?
- ◆ What is the status of voter support? Why women participants with some exceptions are not able to attract strong voter support?
- ◆ How many public meeting and seminar you have attended? What was your learning and how do you share those?
- ◆ What is your opinion about the new system of women's direct election? What is the future of it?
- ◆ Do you think that the present system should continue? What is possible to achieve through this process continuation?
- ◆ What is the attitude of general people about women's direct election in the UP?
- ◆ What is your interaction with the general people?
- ◆ Do you know about CEDAW and its provisions?
- ◆ What is your achievement of being an EWM in the UP?
- ◆ Will you participate in the next term? Will you encourage your daughter and other women relatives.
- ◆ Who is the most poorest in the society? How can you explain it?
- ◆ What are your recommendations about the new system in enhancing women's effective participation and thereby women's empowerment?

Appendix- 2
Activity wise women's performance (including comparison with their male colleagues where information is available)

List of UP Functions	Madhapara UP ; 9		Mouchak UP; 4		Shitrapur UP; 6		Shrifaltali UP; 1		Chadpur UP; 2	
	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6	Case 7	Case 8	Case 9	Case 10
1. Agriculture	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
2. Infrastructure Development										
• RMP/ RMC	1 (President); RMC	X	X	1 (President); RMC	1 (President); RMC	X	5/6 (2 President)	1 (President); RMC	2 (new) 1 (Repair-President)	X
• Water and Sanitation										
3. Education										
• TLM school supervision	✓	✓		✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X
4. Communication										
• Earth work	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
5. Test Relief	✓	✓		✓	✓					✓
• VGD			15 (male got 45)			40 (male got 30) 5	28 (male got 30/40) 5 (male got 2)	27 (male got 5)	30 (male got 30)	
• VGF										
• Aged Allowance										
• Others i.e. wood distribution										
6. Social work										
• Shalish										
• Discussion and Suggestion	Health & Family Planning	Women's Education, Family Planning	✓	2/4 Poultry, motivate for Handicrafts esp. sewing	✓	✓	Polygamy, Divorce, Dowry, torture, quarrel among brothers	✓	✓	Dispute quarrel between husband and wife