

Struggle of the Reserved Women Councilors at City Corporations for Building Political Congruence in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT : Struggle for building political congruence of women councilors at city corporation's reserved seats is literally complex and multidimensional in Bangladesh due to various persisting challenges. Historically women were largely neglected and their participation in politics had been insignificant. In recent years, a remarkable progress has been seen in terms of women's leadership and their participation in political arena. Particularly, city corporation is considered as one of the vital organs of local government and its reserved seats for female councilors through direct electoral process within their constituency signifies undoubtedly a milestone for women empowerment in Bangladesh. However, the elected female councilors of the reserved seats can hardly play a crucial role in decision making process due to lack of genuine women empowerment in city corporations. This article tries to explore the process, challenges and prospects of building political congruence on the part of women councilors at reserved seats of city corporations against the backdrop of male superiority and the incidence of female subordination due to the patriarchal social system in Bangladesh. This article puts forward recommendations to build a strong political congruence for women councilors elected to the reserved seats at city corporations by figuring out various structural and attitudinal challenges in reality and a way out to overcome these challenges, which can eventually enable them to play active role and also to come out of their current status of being merely a symbolic councilor.

Key Concepts: *Women empowerment, reserved women seats, direct election, political congruence, City Corporation*

I. INTRODUCTION

Empowerment of women remains deficient in Bangladesh and women are relatively weak in the country due to lack of proper education, religious superstition, exclusion, and patriarchal attitudes. In Bangladesh struggle for building political congruence of women councilors at city corporation's reserved seats is literally convoluted and multifaceted as they are facing various challenges in recent years. Political congruence is considered as a pre-requisite for women's political empowerment in Bangladesh. It is more than just identifying with a particular party or ideology and it requires genuine participation, access to resources, and influence in decision-making. While women's political representation has historically been scarce in Bangladesh and women had no rights to participate in local government for a long time. There has been a significant improvement in women's political representation globally after the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995), which advocated some guidelines for women's political development. Eventually Bangladesh had also been committed to follow the guidelines of this conference like other countries for upholding the spirit of this event. As a result, at local government system in order to ensure strong political representation of women in both municipality and city corporations, the rule of women's nomination instead of direct election had been nullified. It became effective even though it was late to make it happen. In 1997 women's political representation through the promulgation of local government act in 1997 marked the pivotal moment at the Union Parishad through direct elections for reserved seats. Direct elections for women's reserved seats had been introduced in city corporations and municipalities, under laws like the Local Government (Municipality) Act, 2009, and through amendments to the *Pautrashava Act* signify a milestone in promoting women's political participation in Bangladesh (Sultana et.al,2010)[37]. It has been a great advancement in supporting women's empowerment to ensure their increased participation and representation in local governance and this is recognized as a vital step to promote gender equality and strengthen women's voices within local administration

Apart from this remarkable progress in women empowerment, this is to mention that since 1991, Bangladesh has been led by two female prime ministers for a total of 31 of the 33 years until August 5, 2024. During this period, major opposition party leader was also female in most of the time. Because of this reason, even though women empowerment in Bangladesh seems optimistic, real political empowerment of women was not up to the expectations. It is now crucial to do research on the political role of women councilors especially at the city corporations, as the key organ of the local government, to observe whether the women councilors at reserved seats can get equal rights to exercise political power successfully and also can be able to build their own political congruence to ensure real women empowerment. Because, Bangladesh is still a burning example of patriarchic practice and women subordination, where women are considered as passive dependent and subordinate to husbands in a family (Kabeer 2011[27], Rozario 2006[34], Khan 2005[26]). According to Muslim Law 90 percent sisters get half the share than a brother, which is why a wife has entered into the husband's family as a subordinate to her husband. Patriarchal system and lower socio-economic status of women has placed them at risk of abrupt declines in economic status, which makes them weak in Bangladeshi society. This situation has been called "patriarchal risk" coined by Cain et al (1979)[10]. Against this backdrop, the rule for women's reserved seats at city corporations elected by direct votes is seen as a remarkable political development of women, however the impact of the rule of these direct elections for women's reserved seats on real women empowerment needs to be explored.

Through Local Government Ordinance (1997) the rule of direct elections for women's reserved seats had been introduced, which was the reflection of "Beijing Declaration" and sign of commitment on the part of Bangladesh for implementing GAD (Gender and Development) guidelines of Fourth World Conference on Women. This kind of introducing reserved seats for women and quota system is considered a quick strategy to increase women representation in politics. (Tripp and Kang 2008[40]; Krook 2009[27]; Dahlerup 2005 [15]). According to Dahlerup (2006) [16], Quotas are legitimate tools that can be used to increase women's political representation and also quota is an effective tool to get rid of barriers to women's political representation (Dahlerup 2006 [16]). However, despite direct election to reserved seats through quota increases the presence of women in politics, many scholars argue that real empowerment of women are directly elected for reserved seats, in local government system women participation is merely symbolic, real women empowerment does not take place (BASHOSH, 22 February, 2014[6]). According to one English newspaper, 'Women representative has only the chair without power.' (The Daily Star, 7 March, 2024) [18]

While direct election to reserved seats increases the presence of women in politics, their real empowerment is limited by patriarchal structures, lack of influence over policy and resource allocation, and insufficient support systems. The introduction of gender quota at local government election can and will increase women's political representation in Bangladesh.

II. RATIONALE OF RESEARCH

In local government, creation of reserved seats for women at city corporations to get elected through direct votes like other organs is considered as a significant step towards political empowerment of women. Many women entered into politics due to introduction of direct election system for reserved seats of women in city corporations. Most of these women took over as political representatives without enough political background. However, this kind of duty of the elected women for reserved seats is nothing but symbolic participation. Real women empowerment has not yet been materialized on the part of these women councilors of city corporations. Against this backdrop, it is important to analyze how the political congruence of these reserved women councilors is being built, to what extent these women councilors can influence political agenda within their political parties and their challenge and prospect to get elected directly in the future. That is why this research is very much significant particularly to understand the critical issues of these reserved women councilors in city corporations of Bangladesh.

In recent years, equal rights of women and men in decision making process are the main foundation of democracy. Convention on elimination of all discrimination (CEDAW: 1979)[12] identified women empowerment as the foundation of gender equality. Most of the scholars believe women's political representations are considered as a pre-requisite for Bangladesh Banerjee Ges. Oquist (2000:3)[5] said that 'Unless gender equity in a administrative system is not ensured, women can never be equal to men in any sector of real life.'

Policy makers frequently consider only the number of women participating in political arena (i.e. the number of women's reserved seats) as the indicator of women empowerment. But women empowerment cannot be understood unless we analyze the issue of building political congruence of women, their active role in decision making and creating identity within the political party. The number of women participating in politics is not an indicator of women empowerment, rather analyzing nature of power and political behavior is the real evaluation

of women empowerment (Naznin, S, Tasnim, Sakiba 2010)[28]. Sometimes it is observed that even though reserved women councilors work for their concerned political party, they get excluded in the process of nomination during election. Women's power to turn their political capital into taking decisions is largely limited. That's why their political identification is dependent on their male counterpart.

Self-identification of women representative is frequently expressed through male patronization, which hampers building women's independent identity. Real women empowerment poses one question which comes over again and again- Is the reserved seats the only way to create a path to women leadership? Or whether this is one type of political gatekeeping, where women leadership is confined to a certain limit. The success of the Reserved seats depends on the extent to which women can create their political self-reliance with identification. Political congruence of women does not only depend on gender disparity, but it the mixture of education, class, political party affiliation etc. At the center of politics and women, mixture of class, gender and culture should work. If this reality is ignored, real nature of women empowerment is not possible (Crenshaw, Kimberlé : 1991)[13]. It is possible to analyze this kind of complex situation of women empowerment in Bangladesh.

In this study, besides identification of the role, efficiency, participation and real situation of political empowerment of reserved women councilors in service-oriented activities, the perception of the male councilors about the role and performance of their counter parts women councilors are also highlighted. A number of research work (Aktar 2009;[2] Panday 2008[32]; Frankl 2004[19]; Aminuzzaman 2003[4], Ahmed T, 2015[[1]) shows that female councilors have got involved in dispute and conflicts with male councilors while performing their official duties. In this research, we try to explore the extent to which this kind of dispute influences in ensuring real and substantive political empowerment in Bangladesh. In this study, apart from analyzing the struggle of women councilors in city corporations, building women identification for poetical empowerment within a male dominated environment and also provide recommendations for policy makers, aimed at promoting more inclusive equitable and participatory local governance system that genuinely enhances women's political empowerment in Bangladesh.

III. Research Statement

- 1) Introduction of reserved seats for women in City Corporations is helpful for women empowerment to flourish partially; however, it fails to ensure the target of real women empowerment.
- 2) Lack of awareness about the rules and regulations, male domination in decision-making and implementation process, insufficient training in delivering government service and current Act are major barriers to women's real political empowerment.
- 3) Inequality in nominating women councilors, election expenditure and gender inequality are key hindrance for women to participate in election of general seats

IV. Literature Review

Creation of reserved seats for women in city corporations is considered as an important strategy to ensure women empowerment (Nazneen & Tasneem, 2010), but most of the studies has stated that, reserved seats actually confine women's power instead of giving them real power. Sultana (2011) [39]in her research work shows that women leaders cannot get established without political patronization. Internal political constructions within the party makes it more difficult for women to build up their political congruence. In a research work of Chowdhury, a comparative picture is drawn between reserved seats for women councilors in city cooperation and reserved seats for women in Union Parishad. According to Chowdhury, women representatives in local government are the victim of patriarchal political domination (Chowdhury 2018)[11].

Scholars in Bangladesh highlighted the important role of women leaders in local government (Guhothakurda and Suraiya, 1996, Siddique 1994) [22]. In Indian Panchayat although system 33% reservation of seats for women is made compulsory for women, without right training and delegation of power women cannot participate in decision making process (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004) [14]. In 2018, a daily newspaper published a news titled dissatisfaction of women due to activities of Mayor, in which it was stated that during city corporation's election there was much inspiration among two women councilors who pledged to bring about development in their constituency if they get elected. However, after three years the elected women councilors start losing their hope and inspiration gradually. The relevant sources claimed that the reason for this frustration of reserved women councilors was due to activities of Mayor himself, male councilors and higher officials (The Daily Amar Songbad 11 July 2018)[38]. Another newspaper in 2018 published a news titled implementing pledges of women for women empowerment. This news stated that women councilors have to win over in three wards, even though women councilors are being elected, they are treated as the tool of beautification.

Women councilors need to get permission from male councilors for merely fixing a light in the street. Even though there are specific rules and regulations for women's reserved seats, these laws are not enforced properly in reality (Prothom Alo, 27 July 2018). Women's symbolic participation in local government has been increased,

various scholars argue that women leadership in local government is declined to almost zero (Bashosh, 22 February 2014) [6]. Karim notes in his article that although policies and laws exist, women still cannot work independently in the decision-making process. Family, society, and administrative authorities act as major barriers to their effective participation. However, there is no comprehensive field-based analysis available on the real experiences of reserved women councilors in city corporations and their effective roles in delivering public services (Karim:2022) [23]. UN Women report presents statistical data on women's representation in local government, outlining the nature of legal quotas and the extent of female representation at the local level. While this information is useful for comparative analysis of women councilors' empowerment in city corporations, it lacks a detailed discussion on the implementation of legal quotas and the actual influence of women in local-level decision-making (UN Women: 2023) [42]. Azizuddin (2024) [4], in his research, has stated that the absence of political party support, training, and institutional assistance has been identified as major challenges. However, this study does not provide an in-depth observation of the effective participation of reserved women councilors or the administrative barriers they face (Azizuddin, 2024).[4] Shafinaj discussed the limitations of rural women's political participation, but the real challenges that affecting the political participation of urban/city corporation reserved women councilors were not clearly examined (Shafinaj, 2024) [36].

After analyzing several book and articles, it can be seen that the struggle of women councilors of reserved seat in city corporations in delivering government services related research is very much timely and crucial.

V. Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework of this research work is based on three important theories as socio-economic pillars i.e. a) women representation theory b) Theory of building identity c) theory of power and knowledge, these theories help explain women empowerment of reserved women councilors.

5.1.1 Women representation theory

The pioneer of this theory is Anne Phillips who has stated this theory in his book 'The Politics of Presence' (1995). According to this woman representative theory, it's not the symbolic presence of women, it the active participation of women which can ensure political representation. Anne Phillips has stated that only the number of presence or nomination of women is not political representation of women, rather active participation in decision making process can ensure women's political representation. Descriptive representation can be effective only when it turns into substantive representation. In this research, during collection of primary data, it has been seen that even though women councilors attend most of the meetings, their opinions are given less emphasis. For example, Rahela Akter [2] (imaginary name), became elected to women's reserved seat twice back-to-back and attended most of the meetings of City corporations. However, her role in decision making process was largely limited. She said she went to the meeting, but her words were not heard and most of the issues were pre-decided. This kind of symbolic representation of reserved women councilors questions the women representation theory, which is similar to the arguments of Phillips.

5.1.2 Theory of Identity Building

The pioneer of identity building theory is post-structuralist and philosopher Judith Butler. He has explained this theory in his book titled Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (Butler:1990) [8]. According to his opinion gender identity is created through performative and repetitive role. Because gender is performative, meaning that it is maintained, created or perpetuated by iterative repetitions when speaking and interacting with each other. Judith Butler's theory of identity building has stated that gender is not a stable, inner essence but a fluid, unstable social construct performed through repeated, ritualized actions that conform to societal norms. He further argues that identity is not expressed by acts but is constituted by them, as individuals perform gender through language, dress, and behavior, which in turn reinforces the very categories of "masculine" and "feminine" they embody. Judith Butler talked about different stages in building identity which are as follows (Figure 1):

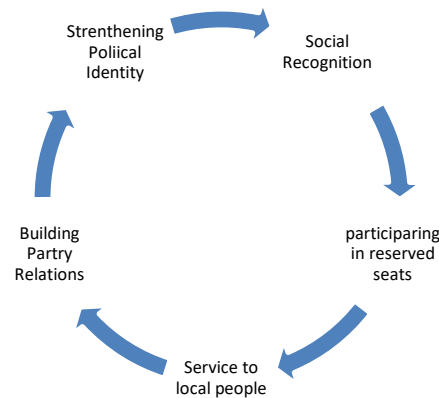


Figure 1-Different steps in Building Political Identity

While collecting data it was observed that it was not difficult to get nomination for those who are family members of Political party leaders. In Bangladesh, due to strong family chain in political arena, educated women don't have much courage get involved in politics without being member of a family involved in politics, because without recognition of big political party and its affiliation, this has become very difficult for women to get nomination for becoming a candidate in local government election. However, according to theory of identity building, this kind of conservativeness in political party has become a barrier to build political identity of women in reserved seats of local government i.e. city corporations.

5.1.3 Theory of Power and knowledge

Michel Foucault (1980) [20] is the pioneer of theory of power-knowledge and in his book titled *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* (1980) he argues that that power and knowledge are inextricably linked, with power dictating what is known and knowledge serving to legitimize and expand power. Foucault's theories of power and knowledge profoundly impacted feminist thought by revealing how gender categories and women's identities are not natural but socially and historically constructed through discourses, power relations, and systems of knowledge. Foucault argued that power and knowledge are not separate but mutually constitutive; power produces knowledge, and knowledge reinforces power. If women cannot enter into political party's 'power-knowledge' nexus, it becomes difficult for women to have partnership of power within the political party. In the context of this perspective, women elected in reserved seats of local government system particularly of city corporations are not allowed to get engaged in important discussion for taking important decisions. Rather monopoly and domination of male councilors are seen in every important decision-making process at local government. Therefore, women are still considered inefficient and incapable in performing crucial duties as being elected women councilors in reserved seats at city corporation. As a result, women councilors are confined to perform social activities and thus they could not enter into main power-knowledge of political party to play active role in mainstream politics.

Theoretical framework of this research revolves around the combination of above three theories and their key arguments, which literally provide the justification of this paper's key research statement regarding current situation and challenges to identity building of reserved women councilors in city corporation. In the light of theoretical perspective of Phillips, only the increasing number of women elected to reserved seats in city corporations is not enough for women inclusion in politics. Buttler (1990) [8] shows that identity building is possible through active participation of women in political decision-making process and Foucault focuses on the reasons why women are far away from the mainstream political power. Eventually, the combination of all the three perspectives of the above three theories has shaped the theoretical framework of this research work.

VI. Research Methodology

Mixed methods are used for this research. The research work has been done in combination of qualitative and quantitative methods based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data is basically collected from the field, and secondary data is also utilized to justify the key arguments of this research work and also for gap analysis. According to the *Local Government Division (LGRD), Dhaka*, there are currently 465 general councilors across all city corporations in Bangladesh, among whom 156 are women councilors elected to reserved seats. For this study, a sample of two city corporations—Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) and Chattogram City Corporation (CCC)—was selected. These two metropolitan areas were chosen because they represent diverse socio-political and administrative contexts and are governed under the same legal framework

applicable to all city corporations in Bangladesh. Therefore, data drawn from these two cases can reasonably reflect the overall situation of reserved women councilors across the country. Primary data was collected from the reserved women councilors of the two selected city corporations through structured questionnaire. There are reserved seats for women councilors in 14 wards out of total 41 wards in Chittagong city corporations and also in 18 wards out of total 54 wards in Uttara city corporation respectively.

Since all the city corporations are regulated by same law and rules, an overall picture can be drawn from the primary data of two selected city corporations such as from the data of 14 ward's reserved women councilors of Chittagong city corporation and 18 reserved wards from Uttara city corporations (reserved women councilors elected in 2015 and 2020). In 2015 there are 36 wards in Uttara city corporation and reserved seats for women were 12. In 2018-20 Constituency of Uttar city corporation was extended and total number of wards were increased to 54, thus the number of reserved seats for women became 18. In 2015 and in 2020 7 reserved women councilors became elected for two terms back-to-back and in Dhaka city corporation 3 elected for two terms, therefore the sample size for two city corporations was $(21+27) = 48$. That's why in total 48 women councilors elected for reserved seats in 2015 and in 2020 respectively were selected as samples of this research. Individual observation and in-depth knowledge have been applied to analyses real scenario while collecting data through questionnaire in order to get targeted result of this research. Apart from structured questionnaire, primary data was collected through case studies of five reserved councilors by exploring their life history. The limitations of questionnaire survey were largely overcome through the data collected from case studies.

Furthermore, in order to know about the overall situation of women councilors, observation (Infrastructure) method was also used. This kind of observation method also help to overcome the limitations of questionnaire survey. In this way, it can be said that as a result of combination of questionnaire survey, case studies and observation methods, real situation of the struggle on the part of reserved women councilors has been reflected in this research perfectly.

Apart from the above-mentioned sample size, structured interviews were done to five male (general) councilors for collecting data to justify key arguments of this research. Data was collected from one expert and three civil society members through interviews. Therefore, through collection of these data, it became possible to gather empirical knowledge about the struggle of reserved women councilors in city corporation to ensure real women empowerment and also to know about the way out to overcome these challenges for actual women empowerment in reality.

VII. Data Analysis and Research Findings

There has been a remarkable change regarding women participation in politics for the last few years. Particularly, one of the most important tiers of local government system is city corporation and the initiative to keep reserved seats for women in city corporation is a milestone for political participation of women in Bangladesh. However, it is significant to analyze to what extent this inclusion of women in city incorporation is effective and also how it has impacted in ensuring political congruence of women and for real women empowerment. Because in many cases, this kind of women's political participation is seen merely symbolic till now, in which women representatives face various challenges and barriers to practice real empowerment of women. Primary data collected through 48 samples has been analyzed below.

a) Educational Qualification of Reserved Women Councilors

Table-1: Educational Qualification of Reserved Women Councilors

Level of Education	Number of Respondents (Chittagong City Corporation)	Number of Respondents Uttara City Corporation	Percentage (%)
Primary	1(4.76%)	0(0%)	1 (2.08%)
Secondary	2 (9.52%)	3(11.11%)	5 (10.42%)
Higher Secondary	8 (38.09%)	13 (48.14%)	21 (43.75%)
Graduate/Honors	6 (28.57%)	8 (29.62%)	14 (29.11)%
Masters/post-graduate	4 (19.04%)	3 (11.11%)	7 (14.58%)
Total	21persons (100%)	27 persons (100%)	48persons (100%)

All the respondents are educated and most of the respondents (43.75%) are having education up to secondary level. 21 respondents out of 48 have education upto secondary level and 14 respondents (29.17%) are having education graduate level, 7 (14.58%) respondents are having post-graduate degree. 5 respondents (10.42%) are having education upto secondary level and 1 (2.08%) respondent has primary education (Table 1). In Table 1 it is observed that majority respondents have higher secondary education meaning among five levels of general education Bangladesh women councilors education is in the mid-level. Education level is a pre-requisite for Leadership quality

b) Professional Efficiency

Table 2: Reserved Councilors' Profession

Type of Profession	Number of respondents (Chittagong City Corporation)	Number of Respondents (Dhaka North City Corporation)	Percentage
House wife	13 (61.90%)	12 (44.44%)	25 (52.08%)
Business	3 (14.28%)	6 (22.22%)	9 (18.75%)
Income from House-rent and agricultural land	5 (23.80%)	9 (33.33%)	14 (29.16%)
Total	21 (100%)	27 (100%)	48 (100%)

Most of the respondents said their profession was house wife 52.08%. 18.75% of the total respondents was involved in private business and 29.17% said their income comes from the house rent and agricultural land as the owner, they got these houses and agricultural land from their father or either from husband. Even though women councilors were educated they did not get involved in any job before being elected as women councilors to reserved seats in city corporation. Table 2 shows that 50% of the total respondents was house wife. In the context of Bangladeshi society, while women are not economically self-reliant and the women councilors don't take their role as political profession, but they are empowered in society to some extent, The explanation of this situation lies in the support of husband to their housewives for practicing political power in order to win over election for women's reserved seats to get elected as women councilors through competition.

C) Reflections on Financial Status

Table 3: An Overview of Monthly Income of Women Councilors

Monthly Income	Chittagong City Corporation	Uttar City Corporation	Total
Below 5000 taka	5 (23.81%)	1 (3.70)	6 (12.5%)
50,000- 1,00,000	7 (33.33%)	5 (18.52%)	12 (25%)
100,000 -200,000 taka	3 (14.28%)	10 (37.04%)	13 (27.08%)
No answer	6 (28.57%)	11 (40.74%)	17 (35.42%)
Total	21 (100%)	27 (100%)	48 (100%)

Among the women councilors, 35.42% respondents did not answer to the question about their financial status or either their income level. 27.08% respondents answered that their income level is between 1 lac to 2 lac taka. 25% respondents said that their income is between 50,000 to 1 lac taka. But 12.5% said that their income is within 50,000 taka, these 6 respondents said that the allowance, they get for performing their duty as women councilors, is the only source of their income and they sometimes take loan due to financial constraint.

d) An Overview of Participation in Election and Source of Electoral financing

Table 4: Opinions regarding participation in election

Willingness of the women councilors to participate in election	Number of respondents (Chittagong city corporation)	Number of Respondents (Dhaka Uttar City Corporation)	Total
Self-Willingness	7 (33.33%)	8 (29.63%)	15 (31.25%)
Willingness of Husband	10 (47.62%)	12 (44.44%)	22 (45.93%)
Willingness of Father/Brother/Children/Relative	4 (19.05%)	7 (25.92%)	11 (22.92%)
Total	21 (100%)	27 (100%)	48 (100%)

It is evident from the above table-4 that most of the respondents participated in election in accordance with the willingness of their husbands. On the other hand, 31.25% respondents participated in election willingly. Self-willingness of the women councilors to contest and participate in election shows that women are more aware of political power practice than before. In table 4 it is also observed that more 68.75% women councilors participated in election as they were influenced by the willingness of their husbands and relatives.

Table 5: Sources of Electoral Financing for Women Councilors

Sources of Financing	Respondent (Chittagong City Corporation)	Respondents (Dhaka North City Corporation)	Total
Self	4 (19.05)	4 (14.81)	8 (16.67%)
Parents/siblings	4 (19.05%)	6 (22.22%)	10 (20.83%)
Husband	10 (47.62%)	14 (51.85)	24 (50%)
Relatives	2 (9.52)	2 (7.41%)	4 (8.33%)
Political party	1 (4.76%)	1 (3.70%)	2 (4.17%)
Total	21 (100%)	27 (100%)	48 (100%)

In table 5, it is seen that, on the basis of primary data, the source of women councilors' financing for costesting election has been from their husbands, parents, siblings, relatives or political parties. However, some women councilors spend their own money to contest the city coprtation's election. According to tabe;l 5, 50% women councilors got financial help from their husbands during city corporation election and 20.83% women got financial help from their parnts, siblings, relatives or from their political parties. But 16.67 % women spend their own money during election. 8.33 women took financial help from their relatives to bear the expenditure during election. 4.17 % women claim that they got financial help from their political parties during election. Therefore it is clear that most of the omen councilors got financial help from their husbands during election. Hence, 80% women councilors are depernent on their husbands, relatives, parents, siblings political parties and 4.17% women councilors depend on their political parties to bear the endpenditure during election (table 5)

e) Knowledge about the activities of local government

Table 6: Knowledge of Women Councilors about activities, rules and regulations

Knowledge about rules and regulations	Respondents (Chittagong City Cooptation	Respondents (Dhaka North City Corporation)	Total
yes	4 (19.05%)	7(25.93%)	11 (22.92%)
no	15 (71.43%)	15 (55.55%)	30 (62.5%)
No answer	2(9.52%)	5 (18.52%)	7 (14.58%)
total	21(100%)	27(100%)	48(100%)

In table 6 it is seen that, elected women councilors' efficiency largely depends on how much they are oriented about the job description and activities of city corporations. That is why questions were asked to elected women councilors whether they have got clear ideas about their role and duties as well as activities of city corporations. According to primary data collected from the questionnaire survey, it is seen that most of the women councilors (73%) said that, they have got a little bit of knowledge about the activities of city corporations and 6.7% said that they have got sound knowledge about the activities of city corporations. However, 20% of the elected women councilors said that they got very little or no knowledge about the activities of city corporations. Gaventa Ges Cornwall (2001) has said that Agents with power (structures, organizations, and people) maintain their power by monopolizing knowledge generation and dissemination, which play significant role in maintaining balance and drawing demarcation life to challenge inequality. But perspective of male councilors about female councilors were negative.90% male councilors opined that women councilors are not capable of playing the challenging role in local government i.e. city corporations.

f)Female and Male Councilors

While collecting primary data, most of the male councilors claimed that women councilors are mostly ignorant about the activities of city corporations. They further claimed that women councilors are largely dependent on their husbands and cannot take decisions independently. Male councilors complained that women councilors are used as a tool to meet up their husband's political ambition and perform their duties under their husband's representation. As a result, it is clear that conflict and disputes between women and male councilors are persisting, which is neither congenial nor in favor of women empowerment

g) Participation in Standing Committee:

Table 7: An Overview of the women councilor's role regarding decision making process in Standing Committee of city corporation

Role in the Standing Committee's meeting's decisions or in making recommendations	Number of Respondents (Chittagong City Corporation)	Number of Respondents (Dhaka North City Corporation)	Total
Playing proper role	1 (4.76%)	2 (7.41%)	3 (6.25%)
Playing Medium role	2 (9.52%)	3 (11.11%)	5(10.42%)
Playing No Role	16 (76.19%)	18(66.67%)	34(70.83%)
No Answer	2(9.52%)	4 (14.81%)	6(12.5%)
Total	21 (100%)	27 (100%)	48 (100%)

Local Government Ordinance (1993 & 2001) mentioned different standing committees through which activities of local government are being implemented. These standing committees play important role in Formulating guidelines and implementing development activities. According to the ordinance at least one third committees' chairperson must be women councilors and each elected member must be member of three committees. Thie standing committee is considered as a tool for women empowerment, But, 78% women councilors complained that they are not being appointed in these standing committees. Women councilors were appointed as member of such standing committees (women and children, environment, family planning, universal education and tree plantation) in which allocation of budget and asset are limited. Women councilors are deprived of being appointed as members of finance, administration and audit related strategically important standing committees, where allocation of budget is high.

h) Women Councilor's political identity**Table 8:** Women Councilors' Political Identity

Sources	Chittagong Medical College	Dhaka North City Corporation	Total Number
Political Family Background	18 (85.71%)	22 (81.48%)	40 (83.33%)
Encouragement of Husband and Family	2 (9.52%)	1 (3.70%)	3 (6.25%)
Self-motivation towards politics	1 (4.76%)	4 (14.81%)	5 (10.42%)
Total	21(100%)	27(100%)	48(100%)

According to table 8, majority of the of the respondents (83.33%) from reserved women councilors won the election due to their pollical family background. But, 6.25% respondents came to politics and got elected due to willingness of their husbands or family members without having any political background. Moreover, 10.42% women councilors came to politics and got elected to reserved seats in city corporations because of their self-motivation towards politics

l) Nature of Election Campaign

Politics of recognition and political identity is built through close relations with voters and also through election campaign in a political constituency. A women councilor usually gains trust and confidence when they are active to solve a local problem, which paves the way for women empowerment. The cost of election campaign for women councilors seemed very high, however this cost would have been reduced if they could be able to secure absolute support from their political parties

j) Presence in Media and Political Empowerment

The research work done by Rahman (2015)[35] has shown that when women increase their participation in different social, economic and cultural activities within their political constituency, their political identity is not only strengthened but also their contribution to women empowerment is expanded. Recognition of political identity for women symbolizes not only social respect for them but also ensures real power as well as creates opportunity for making decisions in different important issues. Women councilors visibility and active role in television, newspaper or in other social media paves the way for their political recognition and women empowerment.

Research Findings

Political identity is the cumulative effect of political role, societal prestige and social recognition of a person or a group of people, which play a crucial role in creating political empowerment and leadership quality. The system of reserved seats for women in City Corporation is a significant step to ensure a number of women's representation in political arena.

Out of twelve city corporations, primary data was collected from two city corporations such as Chittagong and Dhaka city corporations and questionnaire survey was done on 48 reserved women councilors of these two city corporations. After analyzing the data collected through this questionnaire survey and other observational data, it is seen that in urban politics women's participation becomes gradually visible, however structural discrimination still persists clearly in their political representation and empowerment. In case of women, political recognition is usually attained by high level of acceptance from a political party and also by strong position within their political constituency. Apart from this, most of the women councilors are traditionally part of political family and they think that male members of their family are more suitable for general seats of local government. As a result, although reserved seats are becoming alternative entry point for women councilors, this tend actually has been creating their politically dependency and getting stuck to peripheral stage. Women agreed that getting nomination to reserved seats are relatively easier but they are not willing to become candidates for general seats. Through these finding male domination becomes very much evident in politics. Moreover, women face one of the most critical barriers such as financial constraint when they want to contest for general seats. Because most of the women do not have financial capacity to bear the cost election campaign. Furthermore, in the context of Bangladeshi society men control the properties and assets, which seems to be a cause of women's structural deprivation to participate in apolitical competition.

At the revised representation of the People's order (RPO), it is stated that all the political parties have to ensure 33% women seats at all levels, However, in reality most of the major political parties have not yet ensured 33% seats for women. To achieve this target major political parties are gradually increasing their seats, but they are taking time by showing different excuses to comply with the provision of ensuring 33% reserved seats for women at all political levels. Against this backdrop, although reserved seats for women were granted at the parliament or at the local government levels, women in Bangladesh are still ignored and lagging behind in

terms of taking political party's decisions or in contributing to policy making process. As a result, women are having symbolic attachment to political party without getting functional power in their hands and women's power literally has got stuck into documentary obligation. The main reason is the parochial political culture in Bangladesh for which women cannot participate in decision making process of a political party actively till now.

Women are far away from the center of decision-making process of a political party. According to their opinion, importance of male members gets priority always within any political party's core structure, as a result women members are literally situated at peripheral position of a political party's decision-making process. After analyzing this situation, it becomes evident that women are not getting justified opportunities for equal participation in political arena. Women participated in the questionnaire survey said that if they express their interest to participate in contesting general seats for election, they face threats and violence which makes them bound to get back and makes them less interested to contest for the general seats. This reflects the trend of potential violence in Bangladeshi politics, which is considered as a functional tool to restrict women participating in politics actively. We also observed that although the reserved seats created structural opportunities for women participation and increased the number of women participating in politics. However reserved seats for women are also said to create barriers to build women's political congruence by restricting their entrance into general seats. That is why it can be said that reserved seats for women have failed to be considered as a functional tool of women's political empowerment in Bangladesh and it has been restricted to be considered as symbolic representation due to the domination of male in politics in our parochial system. They think that general seats are more suitable for male members of a family and reserved seats for women are more pragmatic entry point of women in politics. That is why women face less barriers to get nomination from a political party, however, political leaders of a party are reluctant to provide nomination to a woman for general seats. At the end, it can be said that reserved seats for women as a source of building women empowerment has lost its practical functionality due to male domination in parochial political culture of Bangladesh. This trend has restricted the role of women councilors to play merely a symbolic role and women's the framework of women's meaningful participation is not yet established. For meaningful participation of women in politics, reserved seats for women are not enough,

VIII. Discussion

- 1) Although reserved seats for women partially supports to build up women's leadership, it has failed to attain expected level of women empowerment. After analyzing the primary and secondary collected data in this study, it is seen that in a society of gender discrimination in order to achieve the goal of ensuring women empowerment, the system of reserved seats for women were implemented at local and national levels. So that a number of women representations would be ensured as well. Through these reserved seats for women a specific number of women representations was attained, however women can hardly play an active and functional role in political arena at local and national levels due to patriarchal political culture of Bangladesh. Especially women councilors cannot play functional role in decision making process of city corporations. In this research work, it becomes evident that women councilor's opinion is usually ignored in decision making process. At local level, women councilor's role is very limited in planning development work and its implementation process. According to the finding of this study, it is also evident that women councilors barely can play functional role in meeting voter's expectations or either providing service delivery to people within their constituency. Thus, considering all the above-mentioned factors it can be said that the hypothesis of this research is proven true.
- 2) Due to lack of proper training, awareness and knowledge about rules and regulations of city corporations on the part of reserved women councilors, domination of male councilors are major barriers to women empowerment. Most of the women councilors do not have proper knowledge about legislative documents like Local government (city Corporation) Act, 2009, The "Local Government (City Corporation) (Amendment) Act 2015" and the "City Corporation (Councilor and Reserved Councilor's Duties, Activities and Opportunities Rules) Amendment 2012" and its Amendment in 2015. Women councilors seem to be less aware of these legislative documents of the Local Government and they also know little about their activities in city corporations. During this study it is also evident that there is not enough scope for providing necessary training to women councilors. During this study it is also apparent that male councilors dominate overall decision-making process, government service delivery and development work in city corporations. These reasons are the major barriers to real political empowerment of women councilors for a long time. Therefore, in summary based on overall consideration it can be said that the hypothesis of this study is proven true.
- 3) Inequality in getting nomination from a political party, high cost of election campaign and gender discrimination are major barriers to elected women councilors for contesting general seats at city corporations. During this research work, it is seen that women can barely get nomination from political party for general seats. The number and role of women in major political parties are not satisfactory. Women are still at lower level of society in Bangladesh. According to the Representation People Order,

1972 (Amendment 2008, there is a provision to keep 33% women leaders in a political party for ensuring gender equality between men and women, however political party have not yet followed that provision properly till now. It is very tough for women to win over general seats unless they get nomination from major political parties. Apart from this, women are not yet fully independent financially in Bangladesh and they are mostly dependent on male persons of their family. Financial solvency is required to win over general seats in which women candidates are lagging behind due to the fact that women are barely self-reliant and moreover they are mostly dependent on male persons in their family. Therefore based on overall consideration this research statement is proven true in this study.

Recommendation

Based on the research findings of this study has put forward few following recommendations, **Firstly**, City corporations's current act should be reviewed and amended. **Secondly**, All kinds of gender discrimination should be effectively eliminated for Women councilors in decision making process and in providing government service delivery and also in development work by ensuring their active role through legal support as per requirement. **Thirdly**, To arrange regular training programs for women councilors in order to build their capacity regarding rules and regulations of the local government. **Fourthly**, it should be made mandatory for all the political parties to comply with the provision of 'Representation of the People Order, 1972' (Amendment 2008), to keep 33% leadership position for women within the political party.

IX. Conclusion

The meaning of empowerment is not only to attain power but also to create field for sphere of influence and to demonstrating leadership. Gaventa I Cornwall (2001), said that power and knowledge production is relational or discursive, He also described that political empowerment is a kind of self-reliance attained through the implicit notion of relationship between power and knowledge, in which political congruence is the first step or reflection of such self-reliance.

In Bangladesh, selection of women representation for reserved seats elected through direct election creates scope for women to contest general seats in local government and also creates opportunities for genuine women empowerment. Women councilors play a vital role in delivering public service to citizens, however several barriers exist to attain political empowerment for women which is why women continue their relentless struggle to turn their role from symbolic one to an influential one by building political congruence.

The attitude of male colleagues in city corporation makes women powerless and thus their role becomes symbolic or ceremonial. As a result, the role of women is very limited in key decision making process regarding budget allocation or implementation of development projects. This feeble situation of women exists because of patriarchal societal and political structure of Bangladesh, which is considered to be a great hindrance to build political congruence of women councilors in Bangladesh. Although women councilors are elected to reserved seats, most of the times women are not recognised as real politicians. Rather women's presence is the reflection of merely an institutional system to fill up the women quota in city corporation. Consequently, in spite of women's legal and political progress because of reserved seats for them in city corporations, flawed societal and political perspectives about women become barriers to women councilors to play active and functional role. A long period of transition for women's role from family and societal role to political role and then their role in city corporations, an important organ of local government, creates new opportunities on the one hand and generate new structural and societal barriers on the other. Political congruence of women cannot be built only by introducing reserved seats for women elected through direct votes, rather it is created through continuous struggle with party's structure, close connection with citizens and also by creating individual position.

Domination of male representatives is common in patriarchal societal structure. Lack of efficiency or sense of responsibility, deficiency in education and lack of knowledge about rules and regulations of local government etc. are major barriers to women empowerment in Bangladesh. In local government, usually male councilors play the leadership role, hence only reserved seats for women is not enough to attain women empowerment, rather it has become almost unattainable vis-a-vis general seats of men. In a nutshell, the research findings of this study shows that structural reforms of local government institutions are urgently needed in order to get rid of such weak situation of women empowerment. Moreover, all sorts of discrimination of women seats vis-a-vis men's general seats should be eliminated through constitutional amendment, in which equity needs to be ensured immediately by making proportional balance for one woman against three men. This is the dire need for women empowerment in Bangladesh at the moment. Referring to the research findings of this study, it can be also said that creation of women friendly environment is crucial for women empowerment in Bangladesh. Furthermore, it is necessary to arrange training programs for male councilors to build awareness among them, which can incorporate women rights issues and GAD approaches. In the end, this study has proposed to arrange long term training programs for women councilors, by which they can be able to strengthen

their efficiency and also can enhance their capacity to understand policy, actions, relevant rules and regulations of local government appropriately.

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