

## Women Elites (Civil Service) in Bangladesh: A Governance Paradox

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### Abstract

*This paper mainly presents the status of women in leadership position in the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS). Based on document analysis this article argues that although in the last three decades the number of women in the civil service has increased, but their position in terms of power and influence on decision making has not yet improved. In particular, the number of women in the leadership position of civil service does not reflect ideal gender balancing. In fact, this situation of women is not an isolated case; it portrays a global picture of women's status in the work environment. The analysis of documents and government websites in 2016 reveals that there are only 5 (out of 75) women in secretary position, none of the Divisional Commissioner, 5 (out of 64) Deputy Commissioner Position, and 70 (out of 425). These are the most important leadership position in the Public Administration in Bangladesh. This has raised questions about women's position in the elite service in a Bangladesh context, particularly when two women run the country for last 25 years. It raises question about woman's own commitment to ensuring equality of women in the decision making process.*

**Keywords:** Women, Gender, Leadership, Civil Service, Elite, Bangladesh

### Introduction

What is the current situation of women in the civil service, leadership position is an important question? This is important for at least on three counts: (1) women represent the half of the population, therefore it is logical to see them in the half of the leadership position of the civil service, (2) Gender equality in all spheres is an international commitment. Particularly 33.3 percent or larger representation in local and national Governments, and (3) in last two decade's number of women in political leadership in government have increased. A number of women in their countries have successfully led the government as head of the government, therefore at least these countries should have a good number (may not be half) of

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women in leadership position. However, this research found an unsatisfying result on this issue in Bangladesh, the only country in the world that have women in leadership position in all three important levels, i.e., party government, and opposition in the parliamentary leadership since 1991.

Civil service is an essential part of the government of any country. The effectiveness of the civil service holds the key to efficiently and judiciously manage the state issues (Islam, 2013). No government, however democratic or any other kind cannot drive, without the tools (Morshed, 1997). In the last 42 year Bangladesh has achieved a lot in regards to equality of women, social wellbeing and women in political leadership position. The representation of women in the civil service has also increased and currently more than 2 million women are working in civil service. However the scenario regarding women in top level civil service position is frustrating. Only a few women are working as Secretary, the top most position of the Civil Bureaucracy (Zafarullah, 2000). A quota system was introduced to increase the presence of women in the government employment sector in the entry level but it is not followed for leadership positions in the civil service. This paper discusses for the major concerns of policy makers, stakeholders and professionals from different countries are expected to be invaluable.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The representation of women in the leadership positions of Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) does not reach a satisfactory level. At the entry level, the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) has already taken some measures to confirm acceptable level of women's participation in the civil service field. It is essential to define some concepts.

### **Women**

Women are categorically distinct from the complex chemistry of social relations which initiate and disseminate their construction. The different appearance of the woman that emerges in the global capitalist market is what is issuing around that she herself appears to conspire in the patriarchal structure of her personality. Household chores easier to work with them when technological revolution, it must be mentioned. Women who go out to work, that is the increasing demands of consumerism of the family necessities. So, they have to carry out a double workload both as an employee and as a housewife. They accomplish duties which a range includes augmenting her husband's career prospects and bring pleasure for the family (Abraham, 2002).

### **Civil Service**

Civil Service of a country basically indicates all permanent functionaries of government excluding defense service. A member of civil service also excludes from judicial or political offices. According to Finer, "Civil Service is a professional body of officials, permanent, paid and skilled.

Policy formulation is the function of cabinet/ ministry, but policy implementation, the main aspect of development is the function of the civil servants. Although the policy formulation is the jurisdiction of cabinet/ ministry, it depends largely on civil servants for data of policy formulation” (Quoted in Islam, 2013). The civil servants face difficulty in the political-administrative environment, which demonstrates the ineffectiveness for any documentation with any or other structures (Ali, 2004).

### **Elite**

Accomplish the policies and projects of government are the responsibility of Bangladesh Civil Service. They are the trained administrators who are considered as nation's most influential group of civilians. It has been that, the number of female employees is very significant in the central decision making arena. Though, the nerve center of the government is Secretariat. The superior decision making position includes Secretary, Additional Secretary, Joint Secretary, in the Ministries or Division's decision making entity (Kabir, 2011). According to the range of responsibility, salary and qualification, the Bangladesh Civil Service is vertically divided into four classes are class-I, class-II, class-III and class-IV. Class-I is the professional class and others are responsible for different supporting functions. Class-I and Class-II officers are 'gazetted' and others are 'non-gazetted' officers. The 'gazetted' officers enjoy power, responsibility and privilege more (Jahan, 2012). The Class-I level of the civil service can be considered the elite and leader class of the civil service.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the paper are given below:

1. To present the existing status of women in leadership positions of Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS).
2. To find out the obstacles behind the lower representation status of women's leadership positions.
3. To suggest measures to increase the representation of women in the leadership positions in the civil service of Bangladesh.

### **Methodology**

The paper has been prepared on the basis of review of secondary data sources conducted in concerning this area. Relevant books, research reports, journals, government circulars, annual reports of Bangladesh Public Service Commission and Ministry of Public Administration, websites of the relevant ministry/department were taken into account to accomplish the research.

### **Women in the Civil Service in Bangladesh**

Bangladesh inherited a civil service system which is developed in British India and United Pakistan. The history of Bangladesh is linked with the rest of the Indian subcontinent (Ahmed, 1986). Indian Civil Service (ICS) was

handled totally by men. There were no women in the ICS till 1935 (Jahan, 2007). However, in large, ICS remained male dominated service in British India. The Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP) continued the trend of the ICS. The equality of opportunity was neglected. The recruitment rules allow women in the audit and accounts service, military accounts service, income tax service and postal service. Candidates for All-Pakistan and other Central Superior Services were reserved for the male. The recruitment condition included one interesting rule that woman will be appointed on that condition that she has to resign from the service if she got married (Chaudhuri, 1969). By dint of this Article of Recruitment Rules, a number of educated women in Pakistan were dispossessed of their basic right to come into a line of work. Consequently, a very insignificant number of women get the opportunity to enter in the civil service (Mahtab, 1995).

Therefore, under-representation of women in the civil service was an obvious reality at the beginning of newly independent Bangladesh. The good thing was that the Constitution of Bangladesh has made noteworthy provisions to offer equal opportunity for men and women in every sphere of life after identifying this problem (Jahan, 2007).

### **The Constitutional Provision for Equal Job Opportunities**

Bangladesh Constitution to declare equal conduct for males and females in every phase of life. According to the Constitution of Bangladesh Article -29, about the equal job opportunities are:

- a. There shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in respect of employment or office in the service of the Republic.
- b. (No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect of, any employment or office in the service of the Republic.
- c. Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from-
  - a. making special provision in favour of any backward section of citizens for the purpose of securing their adequate representation in the service of the Republic;
  - b. giving effect to any law which makes provision for reserving appointments relating to any religious or denominational institution to persons of that religion or denomination; reserving for members of one sex any class of employment or office on the ground that it is considered by its nature to be unsuited to members of the opposite sex.

### **Quota System in BCS**

After the independence of Bangladesh, the constitution created the provision of equal opportunity for all citizens. It should be the main regulatory principle in recruitment of public service. Depending on the constitutional

provisions, the government of Bangladesh also prepared distinct measures known as “quota system” to generate special prospects for underprivileged like women, freedom fighters, tribal people, etc. In the matter of Recruitment issue, the government follows the Bangladesh Civil Service Recruitment Rules of 1981. The quota circulation in the Civil Service is shown in the next table:

**Table 1: Quota system in Recruitment of Civil Service**

Sl.	Distribution of Quota	Percentage
1.	Merit	45%
2.	Freedom Fighters/Offspring of Freedom Fighters	30%
3.	Women	10%
4.	Tribal People	05%
5.	Others (Common People of the Districts)	10%
	Total	100%

*Source: Ministry of Public Administration, GOB, 2011*

Table 1 depicts that, According to this quota system, only 45 percent of the posts can fill up by merit-based open competitive arrangement. This reservation system was presented in March 1997 (Jahan, 2007). Recently, government included 1% quota for people with disabilities. Consequently, only 44 per cent is recruited on the basis of merit. This quota system resulted well in many years. That increases the number of women in the Civil Service. However, currently the quota system is producing dissatisfaction within the larger segment of common competitors who argues that in spite of scoring higher marks, they are not getting the civil service job because quota is taking a higher percentage than merit (Bilkis, 2013).

### **Status of Women in the Higher Civil Service Position**

Class I leadership posts of the civil service are classified vertically into six ranks includes Secretary, Additional Secretary, Joint Secretary, Joint Secretary, Deputy Secretary, Senior Assistant Secretary and Assistant Secretary (Ara, 2012). The selection of applicants for the different cadre services is made through an open competitive examination at present (Khan & Ara, 2005).

**Table 2: Number of Female Officers in the Civil Service**

Class	Ministry/ Division (Secretariat)	Department/ Directorates	Autonomous Bodies/ Corporations	Divisional/ Deputy Commissioner's office	Total
I	435	9794	5310	248	15787
II	277	3866	2901	0	7044
III	313	150682	7022	940	158957
IV	315	43196	3003	1124	47638
Total	1340	207538	18236	2312	229426

*Source: Khan, 2013.*

The table 2 depicts that, the representation of women in the civil service is very much insignificant. The table shows that the number of women in the Class I post in different Ministries/Divisions, Department/ Directorates, Autonomous Bodies/Corporations and Divisional/Deputy Commissioner's office is only 15787. The total number male in the Class I post is 103776. The percentage of women holding first class posts are 15.21% and the percentage of men holding first class post is 84.79%. Women are also in poor condition in class II clerical posts (Khan, 2013). Women's representation in the leadership position shows a very frustrating picture.

The table 3 presents data about the male and female officers at middle and senior levels working in the civil service. Women are made up 21 percent of middle and senior level of administration in 2011.

**Table 3:** Representation of Male and Female Officer's Breakdown by Sex from 1999 to 2011

Rank	2011		2006		1999	
	Men (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)
Secretary	96.1	3.9	98.4	1.6	98.0	2.0
Additional Secretary	94.8	5.2	100.0	0.0	98.2	1.8
Joint Secretary	90.2	9.8	93.2	6.8	98.5	1.5
Deputy Secretary	88.1	11.9	88.3	11.7	98.6	1.1
Senior Assistant Secretary	79.8	20.2	84.3	15.7	91.0	9.0
Assistant Secretary	79.8	25.9	77.3	22.7	85.7	14.3
Total	79	21	85	15	91.5	8.5

*Source: UNDP, 2014.*

We can see from the table 3, there are progresses of numbers by comparing from right to leftover time. There is slow and steady progress with intensifications up to the position of Joint Secretary from 1999 through to 2011. Though, there is no noticeable increase in 12 years at Secretary Position and, at the Additional Secretary position. There is intensification in 2011 to 5.2 percent only. Still, it is very low in absolute numbers. In the Bangladesh Civil Service Administration Cadre, about 15 percent of officers were women, but at the level of Secretary represent only about 2 percent and 7 percent of the level of Joint Secretary in 2006. The participation of women in the civil service was around 15 percent and by 2009, this had increased to 21 percent and their percentage at class I position was 14 percent in the year 2006 (UNDP, 2014).

There is noticeable difference can also be found in the leadership position of field administration. The country is divided into four tiers: Division-District-Upazila and Union for administration purposes. Therefore, leadership position in the field administration poses very distinctive position in the civil service. Particularly position of the administrative head of

Division, District and Upazila is an important leadership position in the civil service system. They are recognized as an elite position in the field level bureaucracy. It was found that in Bangladesh the officials of the BCS (administration) cadre filled up this position. Those who are posted in this position have high probability to take the position of Secretary. The following table shows the representation of women in this leadership position:

**Table 4:** Women in Field Administration, Leadership Position

Rank	2016	
	Men	Women
Division Commissioner	8	0
Deputy Commissioner (District Head)	64	5
UpazilaNirbahi Officer (Upazila Head)	425	70

*Source: The Ministry of Public Administration, 2016.*

The table 4 shows that women have no representation in divisional commissioner position. The analysis of the document also shows that women were never posted as divisional commissioner in Bangladesh. However, women are posted as Deputy Commissioner (DC) and currently 5 female officers are serving as DC in five Districts. The most positive change happened for women mainly in the position of UpazilaNirbahi Officer. Female UNO can be easily found in this position. Even several women are working as UNO in most remote Upazilas of the different hill district. The above table shows that 70 out of 425 UNOs are women. This can be taken as a positive trend for women in Civil Service leadership issue.

The following Table 5 depicts that, the presentation of women in different cadres of the civil service serves no way for satisfaction. The other cadres of the civil service, excepting the administration, the representation of women is poor.

**Table 5:** Number of Selected Male and Female Candidate in Different BCS Examinations

Name of BCS Examinations	Men	Percentage	Female	Percentage	Total
26 <sup>th</sup> BCS	703	66.13	360	33.87	1063
27 <sup>th</sup> BCS	2417	74.62	822	25.38	3239
28 <sup>th</sup> BCS	1520	69.41	670	30.59	2190
29 <sup>th</sup> BCS	1232	71.54	490	28.46	1722
30 <sup>th</sup> BCS	1623	68.57	744	31.43	2367
Total	7495	70.83	3086	29.17	10581

*Source: Ara, 2012.*

The table 5 depicts that, the number of female candidates in the 26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> BCS examinations less than half of their male counterpart at the entry level of the civil service as assistant secretary level. The

percentages of selected male candidates are 70.83, where the percentages of selected female candidates are only 29.17. So, it can be said that women are very poorly represented at the entry level of the civil service, though there is an opportunity of quota for the female candidate.

### **Obstacles behind the Lower Representation of women's Leadership Positions in the Civil Service**

The obstacles behind this insufficient representation of women in the leadership positions in the civil service are multi-dimensional.

#### **Organizational Issues**

##### **Lack of Appropriate Policies and Procedures**

The policies and procedures for the recruitment and selection, training, deputation and transfer suffer from lack of appropriateness. For the posting, transfer and deputation of female candidates at unsuitable location, dispirit women to join the civil service.

##### **Superiority Complex, Negative Attitude and Noncooperation of Male Colleagues**

Superiority complex and negative attitude of male colleagues towards the female colleagues leads noncooperation in the work place. Male colleagues want to assign the female colleagues with a desk bound job. This leads low level experience gathering and untimely this creates a negative image of women that they cannot perform in the critical situation.

##### **Lack of Protection and Security**

It is a very common matter in Bangladesh, there is harassment of women and lack of security of women. Females feel insecurity in challenging job. Though, BCS is a challenging sector, women feel insecurity and afraid of abuse. This is another cause of women's lower representation of women in the leading positions.

##### **Absence of Supportive Environment at Workplace**

The unfavorable work environment is one of the major reasons of poor participation of women's in the civil service. Nonexistence of day care centers, absence of an individual room to work, inaccessibility of separate restroom facilities, the absence of separate toilet facilities, lack of transport facilities, scarcity of residential accommodation and deficiency of hostel facilities of working women's are playing an obstructing role in the way of women's representation in the upper layer of the civil service (Jahan, 2007).

##### **Absence of Gender Sensitive Code of Conduct**

There is a severe absence of gender sensitive code of conduct and awareness for male who working in the civil service (Ara, 2012). This absence of gender sensitive code of conduct leads ill manners of male colleagues towards female colleagues.



### **Political Issues**

The bureaucracy of Bangladesh is highly politicized. The transfer, promotion and deputation activities are mainly controlled through the politics of the country (Kabir, 2013). Women don't want to involve them such kind of political hassle and feel discouraged to serve themselves in the civil service.

### **Cultural Issues**

#### **Male Dominated Social Structure**

Our society is traditionally male dominated. The religious values also hinder the way to enter into the job market and women cannot properly utilize their talents in a proper manner.

#### **Family Duties**

Culturally, most of the family responsibility lay on the shoulder of women. Most of the time, women cannot make balance between professional career and family life. Multiple role of women leads to poor performance in job and family sector. It becomes really tough to make all happy.

#### **Deficiency of Child Care Services**

Childcare has become a major issue for all working mothers. Due to the changing structure of the family structure people now live in nuclear families; there is virtually nobody present to look after the children or to support in the household activities (Kashem et. al., 2002). That's why women leaves the opportunity of going ahead and reach the highest peak of the civil service.

#### **Societal Backwardness**

Because of the cultural reason, a common perception contains within the employer to the common people that women are incompatible for administrative tasks and challenging businesses. Consequently, women are not presented as a 'magistrate' or 'police officer' and not accepted by the common people (Jahan, 2007). Social backward attitude regarding female career leads to low interest to women in building and developing career in civil service. Though it is a challenging job, women want to avoid this job.

#### **Non Cooperative Attitude of Husband and Family Members**

Most of the husbands of our society do not share responsibilities in the household chores. They expect that, their wives would perform the family tasks and look after all the family members well being. Though a wife is a working woman, the husband expects from her to be a perfect homemaker.

### **Recommendations**

The following strategies should be taken and implemented to ensure equitable representation of women in the leadership positions of the civil service.

- Effective measures should be taken to ensure proper posting and transfer of women as per their requirement of their family.
- It should be ensured that women will not differentiate in giving responsibilities. Appropriate steps should be taken to create a congenial environment in offices and to make sure of effective participation of women in decision making level.
- Provision of day care centers, an individual room to work, accessibility of separate restroom facilities, separate toilet facilities, transport facilities, availability of residential accommodation and hostel facilities of working women's may play a positive role in the women's representation in the leadership positions in the civil service.
- Positive attitude towards the female colleagues and be cooperative to them in the work place.
- Promote gender sensitive code of conduct and awareness building within the male working in the civil service.
- Establish day care centers around workplace to take tension free care of the child.
- There need a big publicity campaign on a regular basis so as to create a positive social attitude towards women civil servants.
- The transfer, promotion and deputation activities should controlled through specified rules, not through the influence of the party which is in power.
- Adoption of a clear and concrete policy on gender equality incorporating recruitment, selection, promotion, transfer and career development within the civil service.
- Members of the PSC should be appointed from the qualified women and on a competitive basis as well.
- Make sure about the appointment of gender sensitive and sincere persons as Chairman and Members of Bangladesh Public Service Commission.
- Ensure strong institutional set up of PSC, that leads to the proper utilization of 'Quota' and eliminate discrimination against women in the civil service.
- Ensure cooperation of the husband and family members to choose their career in the civil service.
- Women should participate strongly at the policy making level so that they can address and solve their problems properly.

### **Conclusion**

In the last four decades, Bangladesh has made many recognizable achievements in women's development. Particularly from 1991, Bangladesh has seen many changes in engaging women in all aspects of public life and development. The country adopted "Women Development Policy" in 1996 and revised it in 2010; Reforms have been made in Local Government Policies to include 33% women in Local Government Institutions and as a

result huge numbers of women are working as elected representative in all kinds of local government institutions; number of women in the Civil Service has increased etc. This research found several obstructions for women getting civil service leadership position. There is a need for policy changes on different issues. We would not put too emphasis on gender sensitization, but it seems there is a need for gender desensitization for political and bureaucratic high ups which may lead to policy changes. Appropriate strategies, actions and a social measure leading towards forming a gender sensitive environment may lead to increase women's representation in the leadership position of civil service of Bangladesh. Last but not the list we already mentioned that this research was based on secondary data and sources. Therefore, this research will encourage further empirical research for policy recommendation on this issue.

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