

**ARE WOMEN PROXY OR SURROGATE LEADERS?**  
**EMPIRICAL EVIDENCES FROM A FEW CASES OF THE**  
**UNION PARISHAD OF BANGLADESH**

**Md. Mizanur Rahman\***

**Abstract**

*As a unit of rural local government, Union Parishad (UP) started functioning in the Indian subcontinent in 1870 but until 1997 there was hardly any scope for women's representation in the UP. In a traditional society like Bangladesh, following a reservation policy a huge number of women members have become leaders in the UP. At the same time, out of 4498 UPs, 24 women were directly elected as the Chairpersons in the UP. Against such a context, the paper is aimed at unraveling the research questions: Are these Women Chairpersons (WCs) proxy or surrogate leaders? and if so, what factors helped them become leaders at the community level? The paper is based on in-depth case study method. The findings revealed that WCs were the product of the family legacy, while some of them emerged as leaders using their social capital gained through NGO involvement and political network. In most of the cases, the women leaders entered into political space by using their family network and dynastic political legacy, being surrogates for their husbands or fathers or other relatives.*

**Key words:** local government, Union Parishad, women leaders, family legacy, Bangladesh.

**Research Methods:** Case study

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\* Kotbari, Comilla, Bangladesh.

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### 1. The Research Context and the Problematic

Since the colonial era there was hardly any provision of women representation in the UP. Women's representation in the UP was ensured in 1997 which provided one-thirds reservation of women. Following a one-thirds reservation system, along with a huge number of elected women members, a few women leaders were elected Chairpersons in the UP. At present the number of Male and Female Chairpersons in the UP are 4474 and 24 respectively, who were directly elected as the Chairpersons in the lowest unit of rural local government in 2011. Although the number of Women Chairpersons (WCs) at the UP is small but in a traditional society like Bangladesh where women are almost excluded in all spheres of socio-political life, which may trigger question who are these WCs, and what factors have helped them becoming leaders in the UP. Against such a backdrop, this paper aimed at uncovering the research questions: Are these WCs proxy or surrogate leaders? and if so, what factors helped them become leaders at the community level?

### 2. Methodology Employed in the Paper

This paper is prepared from a broader research design of a Ph.D. dissertation(Annexure-1) and hence focusing on 5 in-depth case studies on the Woman Chairperson, this paper tried to delve into the process of the leadership of the Women Chairpersons in the UP analyzing their socio-economic profiles. These cases were abridged substantively deducting some data to make the cases focused and sharpen in line with the research questions. This paper is mainly based on primary data. These data were collected during July-December 2013. To support primary data some secondary data were also used. Following the premise of the qualitative method<sup>1</sup> the selected cases were chosen based on purposeful selection and easy access from different socio-cultural zones<sup>2</sup> of Bangladesh.

### 3. Women's Representation in Local Government in Bangladesh

The British colonial rule introduced local governments (LG) in the undivided Indian subcontinent with the *Village Chowkidary Act in 1870*, which was the cornerstone of today's Union Parishad (UP) of Bangladesh. With the end of British rule in India in 1947, India and Pakistan emerged as two different states. Afterwards, Bangladesh achieved its independence in 1971 from the "internal colonialism<sup>3</sup>" of Pakistan and inherited the LG system from Pakistan with some modifications in its structure. Since from 1870 the functionaries of local government<sup>4</sup> were

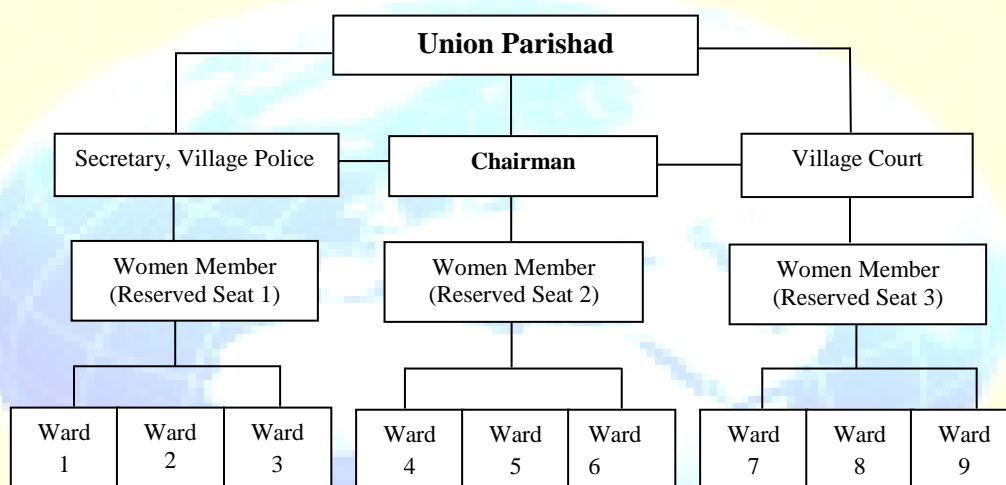
always in the hands of males (Chowdhury *et al.*, 1994: 6) and rights to vote in the local bodies were dependent on the educational qualification, possession of property and tax payment etc. (Smock, 1977: 117; Women for Women, 1992). Although women's representation in the political community was allowed by the Government of India Act in 1935 (Forbes, 2002) but women for the first time took part in the election of the rural local bodies in 1956 (Rashiduzzaman, 1968; Inter Parliamentary Union, 1987). Following this provision during Pakistan regime only one female candidate was elected in the UP election of 1956 and 1969. After independence of Bangladesh, in the first UP election of 1973, out of 4352 UPs, only one woman from Rangpur district was elected as UP Chairperson (Alam and Begum, 1974: 38-51). Afterwards, women's representation to local government was enshrined by two presidential ordinances namely the Local Government Ordinance of 1976 and the Municipal Ordinance of 1976, which provided a provision of nomination of 2 women members in the UP. Regarding women's representation in the UP, important development took place during Ershad regime<sup>5</sup> through the passage of the Local Government (Upazila Parishad and Upazila Administration Reorganization) Ordinance of 1982 and the Local Government (Union Parishad) Ordinance of 1983. According to the Local Government (Union Parishad) Act of 1983, provision of nomination of three women members was introduced (Haque, 2003; Khan, 2011; Khan and Ara, 2006). A major breakthrough in the representation style of women members in the UP was made in 1997, which provided reservation of one-third seats for women members. At the same time, some women were also contested and thus elected as Women Chairpersons in the UP and this paper mainly focused on those women chairpersons.

### 3.1 Structure and Functions of Union Parishad in Bangladesh

Union Parishad serves as the lowest unit or tier of rural local government in Bangladesh that covers an area of 10-12 sq. km. A UP shall consist of a body comprising a Chairman and 12 members, who were elected in every five years on a non-party basis. Each UP represents villagers ranging from 10,000 to 30,000. Among 12 members only 3 positions are reserved for the women members in the UP. A Union is divided into 9 Wards<sup>6</sup>, among which 3 Wards are reserved for a woman member. In each Union nine male members are elected from 9 Wards and 3 women members are elected from their respective reserved Wards (Figure-1). There are a few salaried employees *i.e.* Secretary, *Dafader* and *Chowkidar* in the UP. Jurisdictionally UP covers

a wide range of community services such as, promotion of cottage industries and family planning; protection and maintenance of public property; maintenance of law and order, birth and death registers, UP records, hats and bazaars; lighting of public ways, public streets and public places; plantation and preservation of trees; maintenance and regulation of cattle pounds; issue of various kinds of certificates and license; settlement of petty disputes; and excavation of derelict ponds for pisciculture; building and development of physical infrastructure; regulating community behaviour; and improving environment, forestry and disaster mitigations etc. UP

**Figure- 1: Structure of Union Parishad**



#### 4. Socio-economic Profiles and Leadership Process of the Women Chairpersons: A Few Evidence Based Cases from the Grassroots

This section described the leadership process of the women UP Chairpersons covering their personal, demographic, family, economic, social, political backgrounds, family network etc. which revealed many crucial factors relating to women's leadership in the UP in Bangladesh.

##### 4.1 The Case of Mst. Razia Begum (Mina), Chairperson, Bethkapa UP

Mosammat Razia Begum (Mina), a widow of age 48, after contesting Chairman 3 times was elected Chairperson of Bethkapa Union, Palashbari Upazila in the Gaibandha District in Bangladesh. She runs her small but single family<sup>7</sup> with a monthly income of about 40,000 taka<sup>8</sup> (515 US\$). Her family is composed of 2 sons and the eldest one has recently passed the MBBS (Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery) from Dhaka Medical College, and the youngest one is a BBA (Bachelor of Business Administration) student at Dhaka University. Mina hails from Khamar Norail village and obtained a BA (Bachelor of Arts) degree, and owns some landed property from her husband and parents. Most of her income comes from agricultural land of about 2.5 acres and it is supported by the monthly pension of her husband. Razia comes of a good family. Her father, a matriculate served in a public office has recently passed away. Her mother, having education up to the SSC level, is a widow and worked in a private organization; she is now passing her retired life.

In the family of Rezia Begum, nobody acted as leaders in the any of the political positions i.e. Union Parishad, Upazila or Zilla Parishad, or the National Parliament, but a few of her ancestors played roles in the Sardary/Matbori<sup>9</sup> system in village. Before coming to the UP, she was involved with the *Grameen Bank*<sup>10</sup>. She was elected to this office for the first time in her life. She maintained a good communication with the MP (Member of Parliament) of her concerned constituency, a person that was a teacher of her late husband. She and her husband hailed from the same Union. She studied in a high school and government college in Palashbari Upazila. During her college life she and her husband were both involved in the same students' political organization that ultimately led them to get married. Her husband had a cherished desire to become an MP as a candidate from Bangladesh Awami League (BAL), a major political party

in Bangladesh. Her husband thought that before that, if his wife was elected on the UP, it could help him win in the MP election. Being inspired from her husband, Rezia Begum quit her permanent position at the Grameen Bank where she had worked for the previous 13 years. While she decided to contest in the UP election she was promoted to Manager in the Grameen Bank. She told that her coming to UP was fully backed and supported by her husband. At the age of 21, she was married to her husband. As a government official Mina's husband was a very honest officer and he maintained a good linkage and network with the socio-political elites at the district and sub-district (Upazila) level as well with a view to becoming future MP from that constituency. As soon as she entered in to the public political sphere, her husband suddenly passed away from the world in December 2012.

### **Analysis on Mina's Case**

*Socio-political involvement helps developing leadership:* Through delving into the description of Mina's case study, it was learnt that she had been involved in student politics since her school and college life, which might have helped her take her present political leadership position in the UP. She had been working in *Grameen* Bank for a long time where she had obtained the qualities of a managerial role, techniques of interpersonal communication, socio-political consciousness, and social mobility using her positions and in the ultimate analysis all such qualities prompted her to hold leadership positions in the UP.

*Family support is helpful for leadership:* Although Mina did not have any political network in her family that could help her become a leader in the public domain, she received tremendous support from her husband, who gave her mental courage and enthusiasms to become the UP Chairperson.

*A strong socio-economic background helps with the leadership role:* Globally politics is the domain of the elites. In a mature democracy most of the world political leaders come to a leadership position following an elite formation process based on education, and the socio-economic and political process. In the case of a developing country, rather than education, politician hold position using their socio-economic and political prerogatives, which have become the usual practice in Bangladesh. The same might be the case in the grassroots-based local government in the UP. Mina's husband was an agricultural scientist in the public sector. Mina has a good economic base having a better income and some landed property. She possesses

good social status with a good family background and structures. For this reason, the strong socio-economic background of Mina's might have helped her playing desired role and performance in the UP.

#### 4.2 The Case of Samsunnahar Begum, Chairperson, Chandpur UP

Samsunnahar, aged 45, hailed from Dhopadanga village, and was elected Chairperson of Chnadpur UP, Boalmari Upazila, Faridpur District in 2011. Samsunnahar came from a rich family and was married to a rich businessman. She maintained her monthly income with an income of 1 lack<sup>11</sup> Tk. (1,286 US\$). Most of her income came from business and land. She owned landed property of 10 acres. She lives in a beautiful flat endowed with all the modern amenities and furniture. They possess 2 cars in their family. She and her husband obtained an education up to the HSC (Higher Secondary Certificate Examination) and BA (Bachelor of Arts) respectively. Her father read up to the SSC and was a businessman. Her family is composed of 9 members. She has 2 sons. She lives in a joint family<sup>12</sup> with some close relatives. Her husband is the family head. Through an in-depth interview with her, it was learnt that many of her predecessors used to serve in the UP. Interestingly her husband served as Chairman in the UP for 5 consecutive terms and her father-in-law acted as Chairman in the UP for 2 terms. Moreover, one of her 4 uncles acted as Chairman in the UP in the past. Most of the senior members/fore-fathers of her family members also acted as sarder/matbar in the informal judicial structure of the village-based community. Before coming to the UP she was also involved with an NGO related to human rights, *Manabodhiker*. Samsunnahar was involved in a student political party (Chatra League) during her school life. Now her husband is also involved with the Bangladesh Awami League (BAL). She has a good linkage with the local MP. She is also involved with two NGOs, named the human rights organization and women's welfare samittee (cooperative organization) as their chief executive. Now her husband is paralyzed and that has led her to take the helm of the UP; otherwise her husband could have become UP Chairman again. Sharing background of becoming Chairperson of the UP, she noted that 6 months before the UP election her husband became paralyzed all of a sudden. After that her father, a freedom fighter and the BAL leader, requested her to run for the Chairman position mentioning that it was their family tradition to rule through the UP. For example her father stated the following: *"Your parental grandfather, father in law and your own husband and many others in this dynasty served the Chairman position for many many years, so now it is your responsibility to take the helm of it as you do not*

*have anyone to serve in such a position. Immediately after that, the local BAL leader, local MP, Upazila Chairman, local political leaders and inhabitants of my neighboring areas came to me and convinced me to contest for the position of Chairman of that UP and thereafter I have been able to become UP Chairperson with a landslide victory.”*

### **Analysis on Samsunnahar’s Case**

*Socio-political involvement helps leadership:* Since her childhood Samsunnahar Begum has been involved in students’ politics and she was personally involved with a human-rights related NGO, *Manabodiker*, for a considerable time, before she was elected Chairperson in the UP. Both involvements in student politics and in the NGO might have helped her to become a public leader.

*Family legacy:* Her father-in-law, uncle and husband were involved in the UP for a long period and this gave her a foundation to become a public leader. Using her family political network, she became a public leader. Another factor is no less formidable: in contemporary politics, most of the women leaders in South Asia have occupied their leadership role in public life using their family network. Through using the family and political legacy of their ancestors, some women leaders come to the political sphere as is the case here for Samsunnahar.

### **4.3 The Case of Nargis Akhter Khandaker, Chairperson, Machchar UP**

Nargis Akhter Khandaker was elected UP Chairperson of the Machchar UP, Faridpur Sadar Upazila of Faridpur District in 2011. She hails from Gaandia village of that Union. She is 45 years old and is married to a businessman and has obtained an education up to class five only. On the other hand, her husband only passed the ninth class. Nargis runs her family with a monthly income of 60,000 Taka (772 US\$). Most of her income comes from her husband’s rice mill. Her husband is also owner of an earthen industry and a few fisheries. Her husband has some landed property, which is about 5 acres. Her father passed eighth class in the school. After marriage they have been living in a single family and until now they do not have any children. Her husband is the head<sup>13</sup> of this single unit family. She comes of a middle class family. She was never involved in any political organization in her student life or even afterwards. However, it was observed that some of her predecessors were involved in the local judicial process as sardar or matbar. She has a linkage with the local MP. She has 2 bothers-in-law that were BNP



supporters and are doing business. She came to the UP due to her husband's wish. Nargis' grandfather acted as a UP Chairman for 25 years. Her cousin also served in the UP. Her brother-in-law contested for a UP Chairmanship but failed and in later days he became a UP member for 2 terms (10 years). She said that her sister-in-law served as a member for one term in the UP. In her family background, Nargis had a political history in her past family life. She got married to a businessman that is actively involved in local politics. Her husband holds a president position in the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)<sup>14</sup> at the Upazila level. Nargis told that as and when party supporters visited her house, she always used to entertain them. As and when her husband invited party supporters in their residence she cooked food for them and thus she started connecting with local influential socio-political elites. She preferred attending many social occasions in her vicinity territory and every time where she went, people requested her to become a UP Chairman. Being the granddaughter of a grandfather that had served as a UP Chairman for 25 years she found that no one from the paternal side of her family had occupied public office until now. Based on such a basic premise, many of her paternal relatives also wished that someone would come forward to hold a public position. Her husband was involved in local politics, which helped him to achieve a wide political linkages and networks with local and national-level political leaders. Another factor might have influenced her thinking process. Having no baby in her married life she thought that if she could win in the election she would be able to serve the interests of the poor people and thus get some mental satisfaction. Getting blessings from all those aforesaid and drawing inferences from those multiple hidden factors, she was ultimately convinced to contest for the UP election as Chairperson in 2003 for the first time and she earned a massive victory in the UP election, winning 7 centers out of 9 in that UP. After coming to the UP she started doing some good projects related to road construction.

### **Analysis on Nargis' Case**

*Gateway to politics:* Coming into contact with the party supporters of her husband by inviting them in their family and attending many social occasions such as birthday parties, wedding ceremonies, circumcision ceremonies for male children, inaugural or opening ceremonies, etc. in her area, she made her first gateway to entry into political life.

*Family legacy helps leadership:* Analyzing the case of Nargis, it can be noted that she became a public representative in the UP using her family linkage and legacy. All of her relatives wanted

to see her as a public representative because they want to continue their dynastic tradition through her. Her economic background also could contribute to her becoming a woman leader in the UP. The political affiliation in her paternal family might have helped her becoming leader in the UP.

*Socio-political involvement helps leadership:* Nargis' involvement in an NGO helped her to become a UP Chairperson. Such socio-economic involvements have helped her achieve social mobility, remove inertia and develop her attitude to have a position in the public domain.

#### **4.4 The Case of Begum Parul Akhtari, Chairperson, Manikdaha UP**

After the death of her husband, Begum Parul Akhtari was elected Chairperson of the Manikdaha UP, Vanga Upazila, Faridpur District in 2011. In fact she served in this UP for 2 terms. After the death of her husband she contested in the UP election in 2006 and was elected by the adult franchise of the population of that Union. Parul, 38, an SSC and a widow, is now mother of 2 sons and one daughter and is living in a joint family with 7 family members. She needed to spend 40,000 Taka (515 UD\$) on a monthly basis to defray family expenses. She inherited some landed property from her husband, about 20 acres. Most of her monthly income is managed by earning that comes from the landed property and she has some small businesses also. Her father was an SSC while her husband, an IA degree holder, was involved in business; he had passed away long ago. In fact, her husband was killed by opposition people. Concerning political linkages, Parul disclosed that many of her close relatives were involved in the UP. Her family had a long tradition of serving in the political position. Her father was a 2-time Chairman while her husband served 20 years in the UP. Her father-in-law was Chairman of the UP for 37 years while her parental Grandfather also served as Chairman of the UP for 2 terms. Her brother-in-law also served as Chairman in the UP for 5 years. In the course of time, her father also became Upazila Chairman. By tradition most of her elderly family members served as sardar and matbar for many years in their respective villages. However, Parul had no political linkage during her school age and even after coming to the elected position she had no direct involvement with any political party. Nobody in her family was found to be involved in active party politics. She informed the interviewer that recently she had received justice in her husband's death from the Supreme Court. Immediately after the killing of my husband she was elected Chairperson in the Union Parishad. She said that her father-in-law had been UP Chairman for 37 years and her

husband served as UP Chairman for 20 years. The fact was that their family had been very close to the general public for a long time. She added that after her husband's sudden death, the public did not allow her to stay aloof from the UP and due to their frequent request she made up her mind to contest the UP election. She added that at first there was no contestant and she was elected Chairperson in the UP election. After that she was again elected Chairperson in 2006 for the following term. After nine years of her serving as a Chairperson, again she became Chairperson in 2011, contesting with 12 contestants in the UP election. She disclosed that to win the election some candidates spent more than crores<sup>15</sup> of Taka (128,568 US\$) but they could not win the election. She finally said that in fact due to the public demand she was involved with such representative politics but she never thought of coming to the UP.

### **Analysis on Parul's Case**

*Family Legacy and political network helps with leadership:* Parul became a UP leader using her wide family political legacy, networks and linkages, as many of her close relatives were involved with public political organizations for a long period. Although Parul had no direct political linkage in her student life, but her husband, father, father-in-law, parental grandfather, and her brother-in-law were directly involved with the UP for a long time and it was a family tradition which helped her be a leader in the public domain. Parul bears a long tradition of a family legacy serving in public office, as many of her direct blood-connected relatives had worked in the UP for quite a long time. Following family tradition she has successfully managed a leadership role in the UP. The paternalistic linkage is one of the formidable features in the women's leadership in South Asian countries, which was also corroborated in her case.

### **4.5 The Case of Urmilla Rani Baroi, Chairperson, Jolla UP**

After her husband's death by unidentified gunmen/miscreants, Urmilla Rani Baroi, 47, started serving in the Jolla UP, Wazirpur Upazila, Barisal District for the last 2 consecutive terms since 2006. As a widow she looked after her one son and four daughters with the monthly income of 20,000(257 US\$) that come from landed property of about 4 acres and a few fisheries. She read up to eighth class. Her father passed only sixth class while her husband was an IA<sup>16</sup>. She is heading a joint family which is composed of 9 members. She informed the interviewer that her husband served as Chairman of the same Jolla UP for 2 terms. Nobody in her family was

involved with any representative or political position. Before coming to serve in the UP, Urmilla used to work in an NGO named “Aloshikha.” Urmilla in fact was elected Chairperson in the by-election of the UP while her husband served as a sitting Chairman and was shot and killed by unidentified hooligans suddenly in 2008. While asked about the context of election in the UP she pinpointed that she needed to contest with 12 contestants among whom 4 were Muslims and 8 were Hindus, to whom she was one of them. She informed that all candidates spent huge amount of money but she had no money but public support. She won the election by using such public support.

### **Analysis on Rani’s Case**

*Socio-cultural involvement with an NGO helps with leadership:* Urmi Rani was involved in an NGO which helped her become elected to the UP.

### **4.6 Analysis of the Findings on Cases on Women Chairpersons of the UP**

In this part some of the findings obtained from the 5 case studies were analyzed in the light of the available literature from other studies. The issues included in the empirical analysis were socio-economic background comprising age, income, education, marital status, land ownership etc., and their leadership process includes family legacy, NGO involvement, political involvement, linkages with the MP, family support and training received by the women representatives etc. Moreover, other issues have also been analyzed in this section.

### **Leadership Process of the Women Chairperson**

*Family Legacy:* To become a leader, family legacy plays a supportive role. In the present paper it was found that out of the 5 cases, 4 Chairpersons directly come to politics using their family legacy. By observing their close relatives’ role in the public domain, some women Chairpersons obtained the proper attitude and stature to serve in the public domain. Thus using their family political network they became UP Chairpersons. In a traditional society, where women are socially, culturally, economically, and politically entrapped and enchained with lots of bottlenecks, in such a context, breaking the bondage of all of those hurdles women may find themselves helpless to become leaders in the public domain, so family legacy may be helpful for those women leaders to participate in the political sphere. This corroborates the findings of other

studies. Quddus, Begum, Zahid & Biswas (2001) found that 61% of the women members' nearest relatives and kin were actively involved in political activities, among which, around 50% of the husbands of the women members were actively involved with different political parties. Rahman and Sultana (2005) found that 17.95% of the women member's relatives were previously involved in the UP, followed by 54.84% in 2006 and 65% in 2013, which implies that over the years the number of women members coming to the UP leadership position using their family network and family political legacy was increasing gradually (Rahman, 2006a, 2013). In a traditional society like Bangladesh where women's role is highly confined to the household and reproductive activities and they are subjugated and differentiated everywhere due to myriad socio-cultural, economic, and political problems, this may happen so.

From the South Asian perspective, evidence shows that many national-level women leaders entered into political office using their legacy or political dynasty and as surrogates of their husbands or fathers. Evidence shows that "South Asia has a strong legacy of family politics where the phenomenon of daughters and wives standing as surrogates for their fathers or husbands is particularly apparent in regions of the world where women in leadership positions would be least expected" (Jalalzai, 2004). It was observed that the first women Prime Minister of the world, Sirimavo Bandaranaike (1960-1965, 1970-1977, 1994-2000), and her daughter Chandrika Kumaratunga (1993, 1994) from Sri Lanka; Indira Ghandhi (1966-1977, 1980-1984), Sonia Ghandhi (wife of Rajiv Ghandhi and daughter-in-law of Indira Ghandhi) and Rabri Devi (1997) from India; Benazir Bhutto (1988-1990, 1993-1996) from Pakistan; Corazon Aquino (1986) from the Philippines; Yingluck Shinawatra (2011 to date); Khaleda Zia (1991-1996, 2001-2006) and Sheikh Hasina (1996-2001, 2009-2014, 2014 to date) from Bangladesh—all belong to that political group of individuals that became leaders using their family legacy or political dynasty (Paxton & Hughes, 2007; Anderson, 1993:52; Boudreaux, 1991; quoted in Saint-Germain, 1993; Moraes, 1980: 127, quoted in Everett, 1993; Wikipedia, 2014). Scholars opine that the surrogate route to power may be most common where the attitude towards women is especially traditional (D' Amico, 1995: 18; Burn, 2005: 234). It was evident that in most of the cases surrogate women leaders refer to their father's or husband's achievement during their public address. The fact might be that after assassination or being hanged or spending a great deal of time in prison, they try to make their husbands or fathers as martyr or heroes in the eyes

of the public, and people vote for those surrogate wives or daughters as symbols of the continuing struggle that their fathers or husbands were engaged in. Analyzing the surrogate path to power, it was found that the “female widows of politically-powerful husbands often have little political experience before standing in as a surrogate for their husband. In contrast, it was found that “daughters of political figures have substantial political experience before taking power” (Genovese, 1993: 212-3). Another important phenomenon is interesting here—that in most cases the sons, daughters or relatives of those surrogate women leaders also followed their footsteps to come to the political sphere. India and Bangladesh are special cases in point.

*NGO Background:* Most of the women Chairpersons in the UP were found to have been previously involved with NGOs. It was evident that out of 5 UP Chairpersons, 4 were directly involved in different NGOs before they were elected to the UP. Rahman (2006a) found that 64.52% of the women members had a linkage with various NGOs and socio-economic development organizations<sup>17</sup>, 39% and 72% in 2007 and 2013 respectively (Rahman, 2007, 2013). Gani and Sattar (2004) found that 50% of the women members were involved in NGOs. Having been involved in NGOs these women leaders obtained enough experience to work at the grassroots level. During their involvement in NGOs they might have received a lot of training and opportunities to interact with many people and situations. The aftermath of all those factors might have helped contribute to better role as leaders in the community.

*Linkage with Political Parties:* Leadership does not grow automatically in human life. Some sorts of previous associations and linkages with political institutions can be helpful for playing leadership roles. It was found that out of five, 2 Chairpersons had political affiliation from their student life, which might have helped them achieve a leadership position. In the case of 2 other Chairpersons, it was found that their husband was currently directly involved in political parties. The fourth one i.e. Parul had a strong family legacy. In Bangladesh the political identity of women leadership remains clandestine because elections are not held on a party basis. Quddus et al. (2001) revealed that 39% of the women members were actively involved in politics but a few of them held positions in the political party. Gani and Satter (2004) found that 16.80% of the women members had a political linkage in the UP. Rahman & Roy (2005, 2006) found that 80% of women members were involved in political parties, and this was followed by 53% in 2013 (Rahman, 2013).

*Family Support:* Family support helped the women chairpersons to emerge as public leaders. In the case of Mina and Nargis, this was quite evident. The 3 others had a strong family legacy, which indicated that they also became women leaders by using their family support.

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

## 5. Conclusion

Analyzing the cases, it was found that most of the Women Chairpersons (WCs) had better socio-economic base, were married having their age in the early fifties and moderately educated. In response to the research question it was evident that most of WCs in the UP were the product of the family legacy, while some of them emerged as leaders using their social capital gained through NGO involvement. Most of the WCs entered into political space by using their family network and dynastic political legacy, being surrogates for their husbands or fathers. Women's prolonged association and work experiences with NGOs helped them to achieve social mobility, conscientization, enough practical knowledge, courage and mental strength, etc. This in turn might have helped them to form their attitude and behavior, beliefs and thinking patterns to develop their personality and achieve some managerial capacity. Women's previous political network, linkage with political parties and the local MP, their strong socio-economic stand and suitable role of the family– provided them a supportive base that facilitated the leadership process of the Chairpersons in the Union Parishad of Bangladesh. The combining effects of all those above factors helped them achieving a huge social capital–might have resulted and also contribute to their assuming a leadership role in the community.

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**Annexure- 1: Selection of Research Participants and Settings for both Phenomenology and Case Study**

Division	District	Upazila	Union Parishad	WM	MM	WC	MC	Others	
Chittagong	Chittagong	Mirsarai	Wahedpur	3	2		1		
		Comilla	Comilla Sadar	Bijoypur Modham	2			1	
	North Durgapur			2					
	South Durgapur			3	1		1		
	Amratali			3	3				
	Kalir Bazar			1			1	13WCM	
	Chouddagram		Alkora		1		1		
			Suvapur		1				
		Chiowra		3					
Gunabati			1			1			
Dhaka	Faridpur	Faridpur Sadar	Machaar	-		1		6 GV	
		Vanga	Manikdaha	1		1		11GV	
		Boalmari	Chandpur	1		1			
Sylhet	Sylhet	Sylhet Sadar	Tuker Bazar	-			1		
			Khadimpara		2				
Khulna	Barisal	Wazirpur	Jalla	1		1			
Rajshahi	Bogra	Sherpur	Mirjapur	-	2				
			Garidaha		2				
	Gaibandha	Palashbari	Betkapa UP		2		1		
Total: 5 Div.	7 Districts	10 Upazilas	19 UPs	29	8	5	6		

Source: Data collected from the field by the researcher himself, 2013.

Note: WM= Women Member; MM= Male Members; WC= Woman Chairperson; MC= Male Chairman; WCM= Cooperative Member; GV= General Villager

**End notes**

<sup>1</sup>In qualitative research, the size of the sample is of secondary importance to the quality of data, as “qualitative research is concerned with smaller numbers of cases with more intensive analysis” (Davidson & Layder, 1994: 173). Moreover, in qualitative research, the selection of the sample does not matter much; rather collecting data from the real world is much more important and even the term sampling is not used.

<sup>2</sup>In total there are 4498 UPs in 7 divisions and 64 districts in Bangladesh. The sampled UPs were selected from covering all seven divisions and 7 districts of Bangladesh i.e. Chittagong, Comilla, Faridpur, Sylhet, Barisal, Bogra and Gaibandha districts.

<sup>3</sup>The term internal colonialism was used by Rawnak Jahan(1972) in her book *Pakistan: Failure in National Integration*, USA: Columbia University.

<sup>4</sup>Here in this paper local government connotes rural local government, more specifically Union Parishad, the oldest rural local government body in Bangladesh. Till 1983, the only local government in Bangladesh was Union Parishad. In the last 144 years that spanned from 1870 till 2014, UP never loses its representative character and election was continued every 5 years alternate in UP unlike many ups and downs in Bangladesh society.

<sup>5</sup>Hussain Muhammad Ershad was one of the military rulers in Bangladesh. While he was the Chief of Army Staff of the Bangladesh Army, he declared Martial Law following a bloodless coup and became Chief Martial Law Administrator in 1982. Afterwards he became the President of Bangladesh from 1983 to 1990. During Ershad regime, following the suggestions of National Executive Committee for Administrative Reform and Reorganization (NICARR), he undertook substantive reform measures in the sphere of civil administration and local government system in Bangladesh.

<sup>6</sup>Ward is the lowest planning unit of Union Parishad, which is composed of one or more than one villages. Nine Wards make a Union.

<sup>7</sup>Single family refers to a single unit family of husband, wife and their children. In general husband acts as the family head in the single family concept. With the gradual development of the society the tradition of extended or joint family is changing whereas single unit family is getting preference in the rural society like the urban society.

<sup>8</sup>1 US\$=77.78 taka as of 2 March 2015. The figure is calculated more or less in full digit deducting the fraction amount.

<sup>9</sup>Sardar and Matbor refer to the local leader that performs a leadership role in local dispute resolutions in the community through an informal and unstructured mechanism. The act of providing service from the sardar or matbor may be regarded as sardari or matbori. Both terms are interchangeably used in Bangla and English.

<sup>10</sup>*Grameen* Bank is a specialized financial institution in Bangladesh. The *Grameen* Bank is a Nobel Peace Prize-winning microfinance organization and community development bank founded in Bangladesh. It has developed a group-based micro credit approach which is applied to use peer-pressure within a group to ensure the borrowers follow through and conduct their financial affairs with discipline, ensuring repayment and allowing the borrowers to develop good credit standing. More than 99% of its borrowers are women and through micro-credit program *Grameen* Bank helps empowering the poor women in rural Bangladesh.

<sup>11</sup>This is locally practiced in Bangladesh. One lack= 1,00,000 Tk.

<sup>12</sup>Joint family refers to an extended family that is composed of the members of a single family plus other relatives of husband or wife living in that family. A joint family is headed by an elderly person that may be the father, mother, brother, sister, father in law, mother in law, grandfather, grandmother of either husband or wife or any other close relatives of the husband or wife. During earlier days in the typical rural society, most of the family belongs to such extended family but nowadays the concept of joint family is undergoing change in the rural society.

<sup>13</sup>In a traditional Bangladeshi society family head refers to the position that makes decisions in the family.

<sup>14</sup>BNP stands for Bangladesh Nationalist Party. It is one of the major political parties in Bangladesh. The founder of this party was Major General Ziaur Rahman, the first military ruler in Bangladesh. It is a pro-Islamic political party in Bangladesh. According to the number of seats in the parliament it is the second largest political party in Bangladesh.

<sup>15</sup> This is locally practiced in Bangladesh. One crore = 10 million.

<sup>16</sup>IA= Intermediate in Arts, which is equivalent to Higher Secondary Certificate Examination in Bangladesh.

<sup>17</sup>The UP women members were found to be involved in various NGOs which included BRAC, Grammen Bank, Social Welfare Sangstha, CDA, NFP, FPAB, Nari Punarbashan Kendra, BRDB, KARITAS, CCDB, VARD, Nari Uddog, Palli Bikash, Manabik Unnan Seba Sanstha, CARE, Jatiya Mohila Sangstha, World Vision, CICP, Women's Affairs Samity Member, Bureau Bangladesh, SDC, ASA, Protigga Parishad, Nari Kollayan, Legal Aid, Vission, Proshikha, Podokhep, Satota Samity, Prime, CVDP, WEINIP, Uddogh, FIVDP and various socio-economic development organizations including Ansar VDP, educational institutes, some insurance companies such as Delta Life Insurance, Progati life Insurance, Meghna Life Insurance, Alico Life Insurance, National Life Insurance, and Islami life Insurance.

