

RESEARCH PAPER

Laudability of Gender Quotas in Negotiating Significant Change for Women in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the suitability of assigned quotas for women in Bangladesh and whether these special allocations have any effect to ensure significant change for them. It was conducted using quantitative and qualitative data as the data has been collected through survey questionnaire and interview. Available data substantiates that women's organizations, donors, and nongovernmental organizations have influenced the government of Bangladesh to introduce quotas for women. Although quotas have increased the total number of women in these arenas, but their representation in the decision-making process or the meaningful change has not yet been ensured. They still face several social, cultural, and religious challenges which hinder their participation and they are still neglected by their male counterparts. If they ask for their rights, they are very often victimized, assaulted, and harassed. The major causes of such restricted women's participation have been sociocultural, political, structural, educational, and economic factors. In such a situation, it is essential to bring changes to such cultural norms by initiating appropriate cultural, educational, and informational policies, constitutional and legal provisions by the government and the political parties of Bangladesh.

Key words: Change, Decision-making, Male-counterpart, Quotas, Women

Introduction

The gravity of gender impartiality is well known to all. Sometimes the number accounts for an accomplishment but that does not mean that everyone would agree on what gender equity means in a particular society. The depletion of the rights of women is measured by their participation in political activities of the country. The goal of equality, development, and peace cannot be achieved without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspectives at all levels of decision making in Bangladesh. "The economic sustainability and women empowerment depend on the extent of their integration in the decision-making process." (Husain and Siddiqi, 2002). The study examines the roadworthiness of assigned quotas for women in Bangladesh and if these special allocations have any impact to ensure meaningful change for them. The Millennium Development Goals Report (2013) has exposed, "Electoral quotas were used in 22 countries holding elections [and] with legislated quotas, women took 24 percent of seats and with voluntary quotas they gained 22 percent. When no quotas were used, women took 12 percent of seats". Another outstanding fact that

"nine out of the top ten countries which witnessed the highest growth in the number of women MPs in their lower house of parliament had used quotas" (The MDG Report, 2013). In academic literature numerical outcomes and theoretical arguments respecting equality, rights and democracy also set up a motif for gender quotas. It is entrenched that a socially inclusive society comprises a fundamental principle of democratic governance and as such, women are entitled to equal citizenship and full participation in human rights. The Director of the Democratic Governance Group of the United Nations Development Program has conceptualized quota systems as a "developmental issue" and "moral obligation", through the promotion of "more inclusive parliaments" to "strengthen civic engagement and democratic participation among citizens" (Women in Politics Map, 2014).

Meaning of Equality

The exercise of being unbiased to female and male is known as gender equality. To secure fairness, strategies and standards should be a must to compensate for women's historical and social disadvantages that prevent

women and men from otherwise operating on a level playing field to secure this fairness. Equity leads to equality. Gender equality needs equal enjoyment by women and men of socially-valued goods, opportunities, resources and rewards (Wollstonecraft, 1972). Where gender inequality rules, women become deprived in decision-making and access to economic and social resources. So, to promote gender equality women empowerment is a must, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives. Gender equality does not mean the equivalency of men and women; scarcely the opportunities, conveniences and freedom that can bring positive change in their life is neither dependent on, nor constrained by, their sex. Achieving gender equality requires women's empowerment to ensure that decision-making at private and public levels and access to resources are no longer weighted in men's favor, so that both women and men can fully participate as equal partners in productive and reproductive life. So, to ensure this development and productivity women may need more facilities than their men counterparts, and that is actually the gender equality (Wollstonecraft, 1972). To ensure women's equality to men they need some reserved quotas.

Criticisms of gender quotas

Gender quota has been criticized by some critics. These special seats for women undermine the principle of merit and it is the most pervasive criticism of quota systems. Consequently, they leave organizations at a competitive disadvantage. The principle of merit is an "important concept underpinning many public service practices in liberal democracies such as the United States and Australia" and requires that decisions relating to employment be "based solely on relative ability, knowledge and skills after fair and open competition which assures that all receive equal opportunity" (ABS, 2009). But as argued by Australian Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick, merit and quota considerations are not inherently contradictory – the merit system is "intended to eliminate favoritism, nepotism and bias and sexism" and similarly, "quota law has played a pivotal role in making women's talent and experience visible." Quota systems, Commissioner Broderick suggests, represent an "expression of equality, rather than an exception to it" (ABS, 2009). Furthermore, for an all-inclusive female political involvement, many experts do not agree that distinctive quota systems are the best way to bump up female empowerment. Quota systems are intrinsically fervent in quantitative gains – fostering female involvement through increased physical melee. For making meaningful contribution to all spheres, the existing qualitative barriers to female engagement must also be identified and addressed. Verge and de la Fuente characterize this point by highlighting the distinction between "rules in form" and "rules in use," the latter of which may actually leave power relationships intact and do little to address the "production and reproduction of gender effects" and "institutional sexist" culture (Verge and de la Fuente, 2014).

Quota system has been alleged to deprive many meritorious students from getting jobs in the Bangladesh

public service. Recently general students all over the country have been protesting it saying this present quota system should be reformed including a reduction in the number of quota-based government jobs. But this is totally a different issue. Quota based government job and quota for women's development are not same (Frankl, 2004).

Methodology

This study has been conducted using quantitative and qualitative data as the data has been collected through survey questionnaire and interview. Women related to politics and also from other sectors like government job, non-government job, business and also some male participants have taken part in data collection process.

Participants

In total 100 women and men participants were included in this study. Among them 20 women were doing government job, 20 women doing private job and business. Other 20 women were related to politics and there were 20 female students too. Besides these women, there were 20 male participants as well.

Procedure

All the individuals were given a pen and the questionnaire. Most of (7) the questions were open ended and few (3) of them were close ended. They were given around 20 minutes. All the participants gave their own opinion. In the interview they were asked about their scopes of work, facilities and problems working with their male counterparts when the male participants talked about what they think about women's development and changes of the society.

Results

Women in the National Parliament

Bangladeshi women lacking family credentials have not failed to make a mark on politics nor has Bangladesh been insensitive to the issue of gender justice in the political arena. In the 2001 elections, 48 women contested non-reserved seats in Parliament, and 13 were successful. It is important to note that two women (chief of the two leading parties of the country) among the 48 contested 10 seats (both contested five seats each) and were successful in 9 of it. Other than these two women, only six women were successful in elections for general seats. Among the rest of the candidates, only 10 women managed to get more than 15 percent of the total vote cast, while other candidates' figures were negligible. A subsequent by election brought in another woman legislator, bringing the total number of women members from non-reserved seats to seven (Bangladesh Election Commission, 2008). The scenario of the past six parliamentary elections was more vulnerable than the situation prevailing in 2001. Table 1 illustrates the vulnerable status of women in electoral politics in Bangladesh. A total of 22 female contestants, the highest number ever in the parliamentary history of Bangladesh, took their oath as lawmakers in the 11th parliament. It was similar in the 8th and 9th parliamentary elections

held in 2001 and 2008; a total of 39 women contested the polls in 2001 and 59 in 2008.

Table 1: Seats for women in several elections

| Election year | % for general seats of women |
|---------------|------------------------------|
| 1973 | 0.0 |
| 1979 | 0.7 |
| 1986 | 1.7 |
| 1991 | 1.7 |
| 1996 | 2.3 |
| 2001 | 4.33 |
| 2008 | 4.5 |
| 2019 | 6.3 |

Source: Husain, Shawkat Ara and Siddiqi, Najma (2002)

Women in Civil bureaucracy

Gender issue of public sector employment in most developing countries needed to be analyzed critically. Constitutional provisions usually declare equality between men and women and forbid any discrimination on the basis of sex or other considerations in the ground of recruitment and promotion of government employees. So far, different barriers like social, cultural, and

educational and security paves the way of women from enjoying fully their constitutional rights and agreements. Against this backdrop, equal participation has become a key concern. To increase the poor participation of the backward section of the society in the civil service, some developing countries have made some important arrangements. To minimize the drawbacks faced by those the constitutions of such countries have allowed reserving a specific percent of their posts in the public services for women. Bangladesh government was first promulgated Reservation of quota for women in public services under a notification of the government in 1976. With the declaration of 1975 as the International Year of women and 1976-85 as the UN decade of Women, it was a straight consequence of a greater national awareness created about the importance of women’s role in the development procedure. The order quotes as - “There shall be 10 percent quota for women candidates in all categories of vacancies subject to their fulfillment of basic qualification. This, however, will not apply in respect of recruitment to technical post, post in defense services and in such other post as may be considered unsuitable by the Ministry concerned” (Ferdous, 2014).

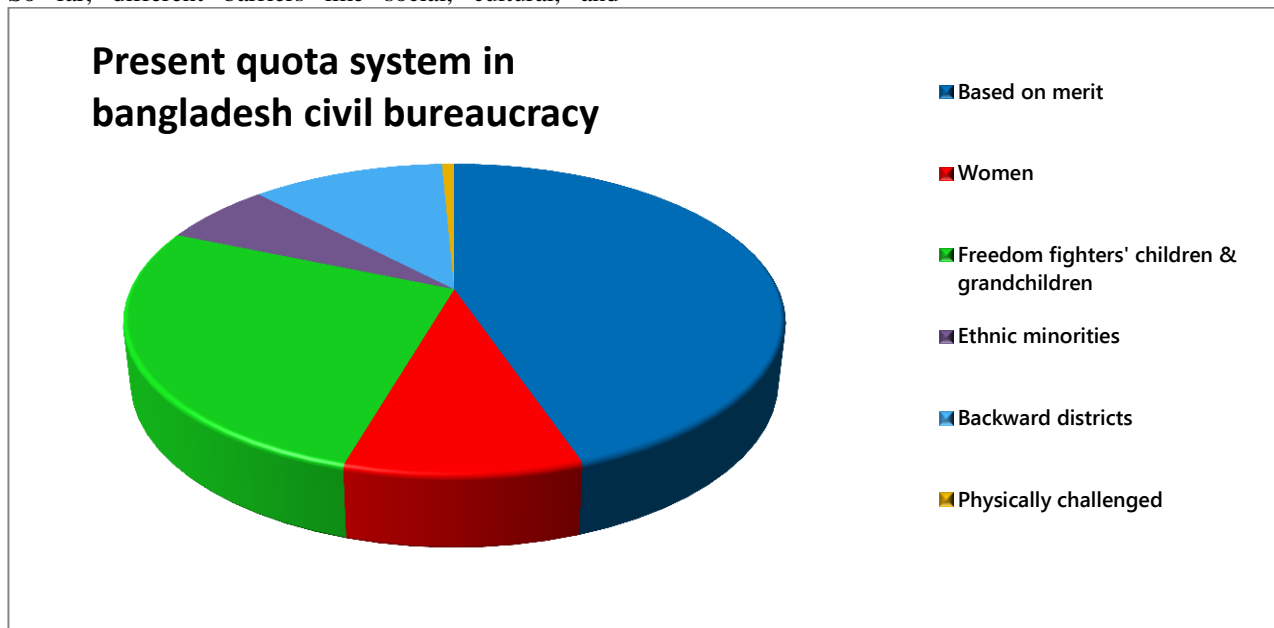


Chart: Present quota system in Bangladesh civil bureaucracy

Table 2. Number of Selected Male and Female Candidate in BCS (Ferdous, 2014)

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

However, it is observed that women’s representation at all levels of civil service is very poor. The table below reveals that, in these five BCS Examinations 29.17 percent female candidates were selected.

Factors Affecting the Prospects of Women in Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS)

The reason behind the inadequate representation of women in the civil service staff is multi-dimensional. Women cadre service officers, which arise both in the home and office facing multiple problems. Women’s sidelined position in the BCS could be seen as restricting from a difficult relationship of different issues, including historical, attitudinal, traditional, socioeconomic and

organizational also. Some influencing factors are debated below:

Insufficient Appropriate Policies

Policies and procedures regarding the recruitment and other facilities of female civil servants are suffering from inappropriateness. The existing policy is not friendly to women and discourages them not to join the civil service.

Negative Attitude of Male Colleagues

Our society is highly a male dominated. Society's values, norms, religious beliefs do not allow women to be in decision making positions. Men cannot accept women mentally as bosses and colleagues. Male colleagues have a tendency to dominate their female colleagues, and in many cases the distribution of unequal treatment women receives official duties. These experiences create negative impact on them.

Family Responsibilities

Due to our culture, many responsibilities lie on a woman. Sometimes she needs to be stick to her family leaving her career. She has to look after her office and the house, that's really a great burden. Full-time working women are not freed from their domestic responsibilities. Often they can't maintain a high standard of performance for these obstacles. Women are expected to play at home and office due to the multiple roles, it is difficult to perform efficiently.

Lack of Adequate Facilities and Services

Lack of adequate facilities and services like day care centers, separate washroom for female staff; amiable working atmosphere; transport and accommodation, etc. for working women are not duly considered and that discourages women to join the civil service.

Security Problems

Abuse and harassment is a very common problem in Bangladesh. Lack of proper security is a major cause for not to join the civil service. Though it is challenging job, security is a very vital issue for women.

Lack of Women's Participation in Policy Making

Women are absent in policy formulation, implementation and evaluation regarding women's advancement. A sufferer can make a solution of his or her problem the better. Involvement of women in policy making can advance them more, but lack of women's participation in this arena hinders the way of progress.

Non Cooperation of Family

Women face difficulty when posting them at remote place. Then they feel difficulty in performing the household activities, child care and other family commitments. In such situation, non-cooperating attitude of the husband and family members also act as an impediment in continuing and joining the job.

Education

Education makes women knowledgeable, skilled, and self-confident in their participation in the ongoing development process of the country. However, most Bangladeshi women are still illiterate. They lack information on the political process and do not know how to mobilize for policies that respond to women's interests, or even how and where to vote or who to vote for. They are often ignorant about their right to vote and contest elections and to become members of political parties and social networks. Consequently, they lose interest in participating in political activities. They

remain engaged in the informal economy or the subsistence sector at low wages or none it all, members of the low-skilled or unskilled labor force. The services that they offer remain invisible, unrecognized, and devalued and they are therefore unprotected by laws and legislation. Their incomes, however inadequate, are still seen by themselves and their families as an income to be paid to the family instead of spent as they themselves decide. In such a situation, women cannot afford the expenses that are required for participating in any development process.

Social changes brought for quota facilities of women

Now women are more powerful than ever. They are taking part in decision making inside and outside home. Male and female standing side by side direct the economy of a country. Independent and solvent women make good families and good societies. For all these development, quota for women is a crying need for a developing country like Bangladesh. If these quotas for women were not there, they might not go forward facing all the obstacles.

Discussion

Women are inferior and powerless human beings and this controversial idea has a positive impact on women's empowerment and gender equality. Despite the importance of symbolic representation, emphasizing the distinct female experience and voice in advocating for gender quotas occupies a danger of essentialism. If gender quotas exaggerate in sex and femaleness, therefore, decrease the significance of other vectors of power influencing a person's identity such as race, class and sexuality, then essentialism might be affected awkwardly. This propensity might result in the use of stereotypes and often serves to minimize the differences within the female group to the advantage of the dominant in-group within the group. Consequently, the precariousness of essentialism is the underlying notion that -any woman can represent all women. This uncertainty is revealed to be a very real one when examining the identities of female legislators in Bangladesh: indeed, the implementation of a gender quota has led to an increase in the number of female parliamentarians; this progressive change has predominantly been made due to the sex of the women and the legal requirements. Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that they are not only united by their sex, but also by other similarities such as having an excellent education and other necessary qualifications. This is not to say that all female legislators represent the same points of view since having a shared identity does not necessarily mean shared beliefs or opinions. However, the layout is more or less same for most of the women in Bangladesh. Therefore, it can be argued that women's symbolic representation matters. Since it represents the start of meaningful change for women because the presence of female bodies can lead to the increased presence of female issues, it is surely significant for their consequential development. However, it is definitely accurate to raise the argument that women have very diverse affairs like pregnancy, maintaining family and children etc. Still they are trying to shine eliminating all the bumping clouds. Women, now a day, are bringing

out the female issues of family, society, politics, job sectors which have the potential to relegate communal issues. It often calls attention to women's problems and thus, at least, enables a discussion. Gender quotas hence ensure the formation of a society which takes female topics more seriously and engages in a profound debate which might lead to meaningful policy outcomes for their betterment in the long run for sure.

Assuring women's involvement in the parliament is really important for the empowerment of women. How much important women quotas to increase their average proportion in the parliament, Millennium Development Goal (MDG) number 3 have foregrounded that. This study has manifested that in favor of these preserved seats for women they could multiply their numbers in the parliament of Bangladesh six times in just thirty-six years. In 1996 the quantity has been flattered more than double (2.3) from 1973 (0.0). The percentage of the general seats of women bounced again in 2001 when they got benefited by these quotas and it became 4.33% that is really creditable. Eventually in 2019 they could attain 6.3% seats in the parliament and still are striving to expand them likewise their male counterparts.

However, women's participation in Bangladesh Civil Service is not satisfactory. In 26th BCS exam female candidates' percentage was 33.87 that is literally half of the male candidates' percentage (66.13). It is frustrating that in the following years' females' participation did not increase. In the next exam (27th BCS) it was even lesser than the previous year that was 25.38%. From 26th -30th BCS exam total male participants was 70.83% while female candidates were 29.17% only. There are many significant factors behind this poor participation of women. Lack of appropriate policies is the first cause found here. Dearth of women's participation in policy making is responsible for it mainly. Besides this lack of adequate facilities and services and security problems are there. Moreover, women have many family responsibilities those are dragging them down. Noncooperation of the family adds more obstacles to their ways of development. However, among all these crisis, women are becoming more and more interested in civil services of Bangladesh day by day for these quota facilities.

Education is one of the important factors making women conscious regarding their rights and dignity. But like all other stumbling blocks in this patriarchal society, being educated is not easy. Therefore, again different incentives for girls' education are increasing their skilled rates. Tk. 8802 million is distributed as stipend among the students from class ix to degree level in which 75% are female (Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, May 2016). Besides this, girls are receiving many facilities for their education. However, it is remarkable to differentiate between symbolic and substantive representation if we consider how symbolic representation might lead to positive development for women. Substantive representation is relevant because symbolic representation alone, the mere presence of women in every sector, is a first step that can have a positive impact but is unlikely to result in meaningful change directly. In this sense, it is important to distinguish between two techniques, namely 'when

female legislators stand for women as a group' and 'when they act for women as a group.' Regarding substantive representation, it makes sense to use Franceschet's framework of process-oriented and outcome-oriented representation. Process-oriented representation occurs when a woman legislator performs activities on behalf of women and outcome-oriented representation refers to the kind of representation which effectively results in specific outcomes, like women-friendly policies. In Bangladesh, the introduction of a legislated candidate gender quota has resulted in the improvement of process-oriented representation because there has been a rise of proposed women's rights bills in the parliament, most of them being launched by female legislators. If we look at reproductive laws, 80% of the bills to legalize abortion between 1989 and 2007 were presented by females (Verge, T and de la Fuente, M 2014). In fact, it has been argued elsewhere that this increase happened not only due to the gender quota itself, but also thanks to the fact that a domestic constituency had mobilized in favor of the gender quota. This is important because when a group takes activities up to support the implementation of a gender quota as part of a bottom-up approach, female legislators elected under the quota are likely to experience the 'mandate effect', namely a greater responsibility to substantively represent women as a group. Although female legislators have successfully gendered the legislative agenda in Bangladesh and hence process-oriented representation has been achieved, it has not led to a strong outcome-oriented representation. Despite the fact that the efforts of women parliamentarians have resulted in the passage of three significant women's rights bills since the introduction of the gender quota law in 1991, these numbers are relatively low and legislators still struggle to ensure the passing of women's rights laws. For that reason, it should be highlighted that in the case of Argentina, the gender quota has helped to accomplish a change of parliament's agenda for the benefit of women's issues; however, it has not led to a higher number of women-friendly policies. While it is necessary to acknowledge that every situation regarding the passage of a women-friendly policy was presumably different and that there are other factors or actors which might hamper the processes such as the influence of the Catholic Church, institutional rules above all work against the passing of women's rights bills in Argentina. Institutional rules, referring to specific procedures and business practices such as party discipline and party leaders' agenda control, represent huge obstacles to female legislators' substantive representation. The evidence from the case study thus suggests that the gender quota itself will not be directly translated into meaningful change for women, if 'change' refers to actual outcomes in terms of policies (Broderick, E., 2014). Gender quotas will not directly alter institutional rules; however, one might argue that they could help to induce institutional change in the long-term. For instance, if party leaders' agenda control represents an obstacle, it could surely be argued that gender quotas and thus the increased presence of women and women's issues in parliament are likely to, at least, modify politicians' perception regarding these topics and make the passage

of women’s rights bills more likely in the future. However, over the last few years, it’s a fraught issue that there’s been much back-and-forth about whether quotas damage or promote women’s interests. It’s irritating to

see the same arguments trotted out again and again, so here’s a summary of some of the strongest in both directions:

| Pros: | Cons: |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Here’s a pretty strong one to start with: quotas are the quickest and most effective way to ensure more equal numbers of men and women on boards. 2. Quotas force the breakup of elite circles that might otherwise remain unchallenged. 3. If women are promoted into positions of power, they can act as positive role models for others. 4. Once on the board, women are more likely to hire more women. 5. Quotas are not discriminatory, they simply correct existing discrimination. Is there existing discrimination? Well yes, if you a) believe that there are as many competent potential female board members as their male counterparts and b) take stock of the current imbalance in numbers. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Quotas discriminate against the individual men who happen to be running against a woman for a seat. 2. If women are employed through quotas, they will be seen as “token”, will be less respected and will have less power. 3. Quotas set women against each other, competing for a certain number of “women’s seats”, which might destroy co-operation and unity. 4. Instating a quota might lend businesses to view them as a ceiling rather than a floor on the number of women, stalling progress on equality in the long run. 5. Quotas take the freedom of choice away from the voters |

Recommendations

Genuine participation by women in decision-making remains limited despite the introduction of quotas for them. The major causes of such poor representation of women have been sociocultural, political, structural, educational, and economic factors. These factors have restricted women's participation within the quota system. In such a situation, several improvements are required in order to ensure greater female representation at every sector in Bangladesh. First, cultural norms and perceptions have stereotyped women's role as limited to the family domain. It is essential to bring changes to such cultural norms by initiating appropriate cultural, educational, and informational policies. Discrimination against women should be made clearly unacceptable and educational curricula should be redesigned to highlight the significance of women's participation in development at all levels (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 1993). Television, radio, and newspapers should help policy-makers and administrators realize the importance of gender inequality and also work to stimulate women to reorganize their roles and affirm themselves as the equal partners of men in all sectors (Center for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics, 2000; Haque, 2003: 586). Second, it is the responsibility of the government to initiate further reforms in constitutional and legal provisions intended to ensure gender equality in every sphere. Additional legal measures need to be passed in order to implement enacted legislation effectively. The Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs must focus on issues of importance to women in every sector. Third, since women's representation in the legislative and executive bodies greatly depends on their representation in political parties, there is a need for the greatly depends on their representation in political parties, there is a need for the major political parties of Bangladesh to take appropriate initiatives to expand such party representation.

Finally, government-initiated policy measures intended to empower women cannot go beyond rhetoric if adequate funding, in the form of budget allocations, is not provided. In order to be effective, political will must be translated into both policies and resources. At the same time, in order to develop and strengthen women's capacity as political leaders, develop media relations, and help women generate their own resources, the government should work to ensure women's equal access to career patterns in Bangladesh.

Conclusion

Quotas as a strategy to ensure women's participation everywhere are as controversial in Bangladesh as elsewhere. But the fact is beyond doubt that where quotas have been implemented, the popular culture has gradually become more accepting of women taking part in those sectors. Women's issues have been nurtured well in emerging democracies in which the government has shown commitment to women's increased representation. In fact, enhanced representation of women depends more on the will of the government than on a nation's world economic standing or any other economic factor (Tripp, n.d.: 7). For instance, Mozambique, one of the poorest nations in the world, has made improvements in the field of female legislative representation beyond those of many advanced industrialized countries. Greater female representation in Uganda, Tanzania, South Africa, and several other African countries has been credited to the initiation of party quotas and reserved seats (Tripp, n.d.: 8). In South Africa, women made a noteworthy political advance through the introduction of quotas. The ruling African National Congress (ANC) has made remarkable advances: 89 of the 117 women in the National Assembly and the Senate are from the ANC and women now constitute 25 percent of the legislature in South Africa, a striking break from the previous apartheid regime, in which they comprised less than 3 percent of the legislature (Tripp, n.d.: 8). As in developing

countries, the women's movement has also gained momentum through the process of democratization in developed countries. In Turkey, women's rights and the diversity of women's voices gained momentum through the processes of economic transformation and democratization. Similarly, the emerging democracy of Bangladesh since the 1990 overthrow of autocratic rule has set the stage for the enhanced participation of women. Nevertheless, inequity against women in Bangladeshi society remains common. Along with sociocultural obstacles, structural deficiencies and attitudinal problems remain the major obstructions to their greater participation. Although the constitution guarantees equal opportunity for men and women in every sphere, the women of Bangladesh are still fighting to enter different sectors. Even the introduction of quotas for women in Parliament as well as in local government has increased the number of women in the political process, but has not yet ensured their genuine representation in the decision-making process. It is true that the battle for women's active participation in the development process has just started, and fostering women's participation in the development process, quota system is very much essential. Illiteracy and cultural restrictions must not prevent women from grasping the new opportunities offered to them. As they overcome these obstacles, they will create a strong ground for improving the lot of women in Bangladesh.

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