

Leadership

Development

Governance

-----*Good governance*

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Women leadership at decentralised governance in Bangladesh

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-----*Actual arrangement for women: Decade's perspective*

-----*Women in union parishad election (1973-2003)*

The present study highlights

Conceptual framework

In order to understand the study, it is important to clarify the key concepts used in this study including leadership, governance and development. Decentralisation of power will also be discussed with a special emphasis as Union Parishad, the lowest tier of present local government system in Bangladesh, which holds the women leadership at local level is direct outcome of devolution of power.

Leadership

It is really difficult to attempt a definition of leadership or in other words it is difficult to define what makes a person a 'leader'.

A simple definition of leadership is that leadership is the art of motivating a group of people to act towards achieving a common goal. Put even more simply, the leader is the inspiration and director of the action. He or she is the person in the group that possesses the combination of personality and skills that makes others want to follow his or her direction.

Leadership has been described as the "process of social influence in which one person is able to enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task.¹ A definition more inclusive of followers comes from Alan Keith of Genentech who said leadership is ultimately about creating a way for people to contribute to making something extraordinary happen.²

In the words of Millett, Leadership is often thought of as being primarily personal in character, as being founded upon individual pre-eminence or accomplishment in a particular field endeavor. Superior strength, superior cunning, superior intelligence, superior knowledge, superior determination-any or all of these may be means to the attainment of leadership.³ Seclker-Hudson

termed the leadership as influencing and encouraging people to work together in a common effort to achieve the purpose of the enterprise. ⁴

None can deny that these personal qualities do pay dividends but leadership is not all personal pre-eminence. It is something and something more and that “something more” are the essence of leadership. “It is the capacity to set new goals, to hold forth new and loftier expectations for the group, to embody moral and spiritual aspirations and to show the group, its nobler potentialities that make a man a leader”. Leadership has, therefore, double meaning. The dictionary meaning of the verb ‘to lead’ shows that the term is used in two different senses: (a) “to excel, to be an advance, to be prominent,” and (b) “to guide others, to be head of an organisation, to hold command.” In the former sense, leadership is identified with individual pre-eminence and the latter sense; it is identified with managerial talent or leadership.

In our study, we are discussing a kind of local based women leadership that develops depending on the lowest unit of local government system---Union Parishad. There are two types of leadership found at this level----men and women. All are elected by direct vote of local people. The women here are elected in two categories: **one:** through direct election in general seats, **two:** election in reserved seats. In Union Parishad, three seats are especially kept reserved for women. A union is comprised of nine wards. Nine members are generally elected from each ward. A chairman is elected from the entire union. Three women are elected from all nine wards, which are divided into three wards, called reserved wards. People in these reserved wards elect three women members. After being voted to power, the women leaders work together for rural areas as assigned.

The union parishad is very important organisation in the socio-economic matrix in Bangladesh that runs the state. It constitutes the base of the overall power structure which has been working in Bangladesh for a about one and half hundred years. In its long way, the system has worked as the primary staircase of entering into ‘leadership’ at local level. This is also using as a practical land for

learning about administrative process, political art and democratic norm for local leaders. The leaders here can take lesson through handling various local affairs that can ensure a qualitative development of them and obviously to turn into next higher leadership position in future.

Development

The dictionary meaning of development is largely teleological. Besides, as an idea it is the seed bed of debates in development studies. But it is true to say that there is no general agreement as to the meaning of development and which has developed with many different meanings.⁵ It is since the early 1940s when the idea of development in its current phase evolved. Moreover, despite different attempts by scholars for a long time considerable confusion remains as to define the concept of the term. Rather it is safe to say that the matter is still under search for newer definition, framework and idea. We can follow what says the Brandt Commission Report, “Development never will be and never can be defined to universal satisfaction”.⁶ Besides, in the words of Uphoff and Ilcman, “development is probably one of the most depreciated terms in social science literature, having been used more than it has been understood”.⁷

Simply, the term ‘development’ is seen as a condition of changes in the society. Jhon D. Montgomery denotes, development is the dynamic change of a society from one state of being to another without positioning a final stage.⁸ According to this definition development is always a running situation and it includes all kinds of change of a society, whatever is expected but this change never will be final. Some scholars defined development as a term of growth of ‘national economy,’ while others as ‘social improvement’ and still others in terms of increasing the capacity of the ‘political system.’ There’re some others who make no distinction between development and modernisation. Thus “development is a complex phenomenon comprising many dimensions—social, political, economic, administrative and so on.”⁹ Rosenstein Rodan thought the development

as a balanced economic growth. Arthur Lewis ¹⁰ and W.W. Rostow ¹¹ made similar arguments.

Edward Shills termed that the society is developed where urbanization and industrialization ushered high level, where the people are literate and dynamic and its political system is democratic. ¹² In his ward, Edward touches a progressive thinking about development where ‘democracy’ has been one of the conditions. It’s true that democracy is now evidence. Democracy has made a corner of devotion behind everything of a society. A true democratic country always works as a sprit for achieving development goals as people enjoy their rights there.

Development is the rational process of organising and carrying out prudently conceived and staffed programmes or projects as one would organise and carry out military or engineering operations, say Esman.¹³ To Colm and Geiger, “development means change plus growth” ¹⁴ Weidner defines it as a process of growth ‘in the direction of nation-building and socio-economic progress.’¹⁵ To T. N Chaturvedi development is a multi-dimensional process. It stands for transformation of society. It indicates qualitative, many sided and balanced change. It has futuristic orientation. It is equated with economic growth, social change and modernisation of society.¹⁶ United Nations defines development as a process, through which people can fulfill their will and desire. ¹

The aforesaid definition carries a near view that includes an overall change--- that means, transform of the society from one stage to another with a multi-dimensional orientation. These changes will ensure a balanced and qualitative economic and social growth that be distributed equally among the people.

Riggs, the most vigorous thinker on social science termed the development as a notion---which is prospective to all. According to Riggs development is a process of increasing autonomy among the social system—which is possible through developing its diffraction stage. Diffraction means ‘corresponding structure’ in the society to render specialized function.¹⁸ Riggs says, Development involves the ability to choose whether or not to increase outputs, whether or not to

raise levels of per capita income, or to direct energies to other goals, to the more equitable distribution of what is available, to aesthetic or spiritual values of the qualitatively different kinds of outputs.¹⁹

Henn-Been Lee defines development, as a process of acquiring a sustained growth of a system's capability to cope with new continuous changes towards the achievement of progressive political, economic and social objectives.²⁰ Al-Salem Faisal calls it, "qualitative and quantitative transformation from a less desirable state of affairs to more desirable state of affairs. This view was supported by several social scientists. Micheal Todaro points development as a multi-dimensional process involving changes in structures, attitudes and institutions as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and the eradication of economic poverty.²¹ Chi-Yuen Wu termed development as process of societal transformation from a traditional society to a modern society and such a transformation is also know as modernisation.²²

Development is a state of ideology and strategy. The distinctive quality of the development ideology is the agreement on the desirability of the joint goals of nation building and material progress combined with a sense of movement towards, fulfillment of a long delayed destiny, underlying which is a nagging uncertainty concerning the prospect for eventual success.

The following definition of development, ideologically, was in wide acceptance in the early 1980s:

Development is *integrated* : it is organic process involving a number of economic, social and cultural factors which overlap and constantly influence one another.

Development is *endogenous* : each country carries out its development according to its choice and in conformity with the real values, aspirations and motivations of the population.

Development is *global*: its objectives and problems are determined with relation to world problems and reflect the general nature of development.----The society in

which development is carried out is not isolated, but forms part of the network of relations and forces that cover the entire world, including the most economically advanced societies as well as those which from the economic point of view, are the most deprived.²³

It is clear that development does not indicate unilinear. Moreover, it is a complex phenomenon comprising of social, political, economic, administrative and cultural dimension. Development means equitable growth of these dimensions. A society may be considered as developed when all dimensions would be distributed with a scale of equity.²⁴

In conclusion we can say that different specified issues have developed evolving the term along with theories and ideologies and attempts are still on to make the term more sustainable and to use as comprehensive tool.

In this study, our aim is to find out the quantitative as well as qualitative development of women leadership at local level and their effective role in the process of rural development. Leadership is a major roller-pin of the society. A qualitative leadership development is a must for bringing the society to a desired goal. The study has considered to analyse the roles of elected women leaders of union parishad in rural development as target. As a lowest unit of central government, the union parishad holds the ground of various affairs related to national level policy. The elected women leaders can easily make them trained through handling the affairs as they hold the overall rural power structure. This study is intended to reveal the fact that if a qualitative as well as quantitative development of women leadership is ensured at local level, the rural development activities will be ascertained and the society will get a number of trained women leaders who will be able to lead the country in future.

Governance

The concept of 'governance' is an old term as the society. The term has been used in different norms, names and nomenclatures to serve the society for long. In its long route, the topic achieved a broad sense along with complexity. Recently the terms is being increasingly used in development literature and also considered as the crucial elements to be incorporated in the sustainable development strategy as well as one of the key ingredients for poverty reduction.

Governance is referred to as "study of good order and workable arrangement".²⁵ The two true senses have developed concerning the term. In simple sense 'governance' means: the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented), while in broadest sense, governance concerns performance of the government including public and private sectors, global and local arrangements, formal structures and informal norms and practices, spontaneous and intentional systems of control.

In a phase of development, the World Bank has been a crucial authority of governance and operates a tune concerning the term worldwide. M. Yasin et.al surveyed related literatures and shows that governance has been reborrowed for suiting an ideologically motivated world order. The ideological overtone of the concept emanates from the use of the term by Word Bank that may be 'as an alternative perspective to the disenchantment of the existing ideologically biased explanatory frameworks, in 1989. ²⁶ Ever since 1989, when the Bank described the current situation in Africa as a 'crisis in governance', the term 'governance' has been widely associated with the politics of development, and in particular, with development in the post-colonial world.²⁷ The World Bank defines governance as the exercise of political authority and use of institutional resources to manage the society's problems and affairs. . ²⁸

Antony Pagden stated that the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund operate with a tacit and frequently explicit, set of political and cultural

assumptions – if not a covert political agenda – which are inescapably western European.²⁹ By insisting that the Bank sponsors ‘fairness’, ‘justice’, ‘liberty’, ‘respect for human rights’, and ‘an efficient and corruption free bureaucracy’ and by insisting that these are the basic requirements for a modern state.³⁰ The Bank is certainly open to the charge that its objective is to impose modern Western democracy by means of economic incentives.³¹

The concept however, has been around in both political and academic discourse for a long time, referring in a generic sense to the task of running a government, or any other appropriate entity for that matter. According to UNDP, governance ‘is exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage country’s all affairs at all levels. It comprises machineries, process and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences.’³² Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary termed governance as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development.³³ In another definition Webster’s Third New International Dictionary has echoed indicating only that governance is a synonym for government, or the act or process of governing, specifically authoritative direction and control.³⁴ This interpretation specifically focuses on the effectiveness of the executive branch of government.

McCawley, one of the prominent thinkers in this area point out most important elements of governance. These are :

1. The process by which governments are chosen, monitored and changed
2. The system of interaction between the administration, the legislature and the judiciary.
3. The ability of government to create and to implement public policy
4. The mechanism by which citizens and groups define their interests and interact with institutions of authority and with each other.³⁵

The working definition used by the British Council, however, emphasise that 'governance' is a broader notion than government (and for that matter also related concepts like the state, good government and regime), and goes on to state: 'Governance involves interaction between the formal institutions and those in civil society. Governance refers to a process whereby elements in society wield power, authority and influence and enact policies and decisions concerning public life and social upliftment.'³⁶

Governance, therefore, not only encompasses but transcends the collective meaning of related concepts like the state, government, regime and 'good government'. Government is one of the actors in governance. Many of the elements and principles underlying 'good government' have become an integral part of the meaning of 'good governance'. Good governance is the term that symbolizes the paradigm shifts of the role of governments.³⁷ Moreover, governance is not only about the 'organs' or 'actors'. More importantly, it is about the quality of governance, which expresses itself through elements and dimension.

Good governance

John Healey and Mark Robinson define "good government" as follows : "It implies a high level of organisational effectiveness in relation to policy-formulation and the policies actually pursued, especially in the conduct of economic policy and its contribution to growth, stability and popular welfare. Good government also implies accountability, transparency, participation, openness and the rule of law. It does not necessarily presuppose a value judgment, for example, a healthy respect for civil and political liberties, although good government tends to be a prerequisite for political legitimacy" ³⁸

The UNDP in its report ³⁹ acknowledges the following core characteristics of good governance.

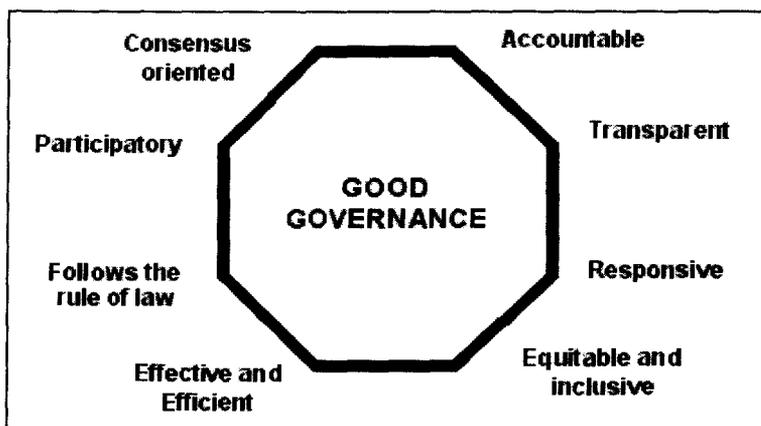
1. participation
2. Rule of law

3. Transparency
4. Responsiveness
5. Consensus orientation
6. Equity
7. Effectiveness and efficiency
8. Accountability
9. Strategic vision

ADB clarifies its concept of governance by identifying four elements in its publication 'Sound Development Management'⁴⁰ These are:

1. Accountability
2. Participation
3. Predictability
4. Transparency

The OECD e-book accounts eight characteristics of good governance⁴¹ :



Participation by both men and women is a key cornerstone of good governance. Participation could be either direct or through legitimate intermediate institutions or representatives.

Transparency means that decisions taken and their enforcement are done in a manner that follows rules and regulations.

Effectiveness and efficiency: Good governance means that processes and institutions produce results that meet the needs of society while making the best use of resources at their disposal. The concept of efficiency in the context of good governance also covers the sustainable use of natural resources and the protection of the environment.

Responsiveness: Good governance requires that institutions and processes try to serve all stakeholders within a reasonable timeframe.

Accountability is a key requirement of good governance. Not only governmental institutions but also the private sector and civil society organizations must be accountable to the public and to their institutional stakeholders.

Consensus oriented: Good governance requires mediation of the different interests in society to reach a broad consensus in society on what is in the best interest of the whole community and how this can be achieved. It also requires a broad and long-term perspective on what is needed for sustainable human development and how to achieve the goals of such development.

Equity and inclusiveness: A society's well being depends on ensuring that all its members feel that they have a stake in it and do not feel excluded from the mainstream of society. This requires all groups, but particularly the most vulnerable, have opportunities to improve or maintain their well being.

Rule of Law: Good governance requires fair legal frameworks that are enforced impartially. It also requires full protection of human rights, particularly those of minorities. Impartial enforcement of laws requires an independent judiciary and an impartial and incorruptible police force.

Actually the term governance is parallel as the government. But the term has been given something specialization in the way of alternative of 'good government' that is based on performance of the government.

Bangladesh continues to make efforts to improve its overall governance environment. Currently, efforts are underway to improve core governance systems in areas such as public procurement, financial management, fiscal reporting, and

watchdog institutions. Several reforms to improve sectoral governance are also underway.

Our study is confined to discuss about union parishad, the lowest unit of decentralised governance popularly known as local government in Bangladesh.

Decentralisation

Decentralisation has a long tradition. It is one of the most popular and popularized terms in the contemporary development discourse, particularly in the context of the developing countries.⁴² At the same time, the term also has given birth a lots of debates as a number of different objectives are put forward as part of the rationale for the Decentralisation ⁴³ and Mawhood rightly noted that the concept is indeed lack of precise meaning and consensus. ⁴⁴

During the early sixty, the concept of decentralisation was advocated for supplementing the theory and practice of development administration as a new approach to study administration of newly nation-state. ⁴⁵ Emphasis on the issue came on since 1970s when economic growth, growth-with-equity and basic needs of the grass root people was directly linked in the development discourse. It was afterwards of apparently failing to ensure the desired development through 'Trickle down and supervision theory' in sixties. ⁴⁶

Traditionally decentralisation was considered as a strategy to transfer authority to lower units within the organisation or to field units (i.e. decentralisation) and the transfer of authority to local bodies. ⁴⁷

A host of writers have dwelt up the decentralisation ---its concept and issues. Over the dealing, two schools of thought can be identified that music two notions of thinking-----classical liberal democratic notion and the notion oriented to development. It is however, to say that the latter is contrast of former. The classical liberal; democratic theorists like de Toqueville ⁴⁸ Mill ⁴⁹, Wilson ⁵⁰ Laski ⁵¹ dwelt with decentralisation as concept that point to the classical notion of

decentralisation. In their writings, they implicated decentralisation as local government that is beneficial to the political health of a nation and its economic health that is conditioned by political situation. Besides, writers such as Henry Maddick ⁵² Danish Rondinelli and G. Shabbir Cheema ⁵³ P. Mawhood ⁵⁴ Conyers ⁵⁵, Uphoff ⁵⁶ and Esman ⁵⁷ along with the international agencies such as United Nations Programme (UN) ⁵⁸, World Bank (WB) ⁵⁹ through its publication dwelt upon the subject as one of the contemporary issues related to development as they stressed the importance of decentralisation for social, economic, political and administrative change in the developing countries. ⁶⁰

Another survey of the intellectual discourse of decentralisation reveals two broad categories—normative theories and descriptive theories. ⁶¹

Decentralisation is generally a policy framework adopted by the government in the form of programme or legislative enactment to enable the people to participate in the political as well as decision-making process at the local level. In other words, a policy framework adopted by the government to empower people in the management of their own (local) affairs.

According to encyclopedia of social science, the process of decentralisation denotes the transference of authority, legislative, judicial or administrative power from a higher level of government to lower level. ⁶² Luis Allen opines that the transfer of power from the central to the lower of government unit is called decentralisation ⁶³ L. D. White says, the process of transfer of authority, from a lower to higher level of government is called centralization, the converse is decentralisation. ⁶⁴ According to the United Nation Organisation, a plan of administration which will permit the greatest possible number of actions to be taken in the areas, provinces, districts, towns and villages where the people reside. ⁶⁵ Maddick strongly opined in favour of the idea and shared same view ⁶⁷ Mawhood views decentralisation as a structure of government where bodies are created at the local level separated by law from the national centre in which local representatives are given formal power to decide on a range of public matters. ⁶⁸

Smith considers the phenomenon of decentralisation as a political issue which moves around the distribution of power between administrative and political machinery and also between different interest groups, classes and power structure.

⁶⁹ Rondinelli and Cheema ⁷⁰ and Uphoff ⁷¹ have shared this positive aspect. According to Rondinelli and Cheema, decentralisation is the transfer of responsibility for planning, management, and resource-raising and allocation from the central government to (a) field units of central government ministries or agencies; (b) subordinate units or levels of government; (c) semi-autonomous public authorities or corporations; (d) area-wide regional or functional authorities; or (e) NGOs/PVOs. ⁷²

If we add “private firms” to (e) and then we have a good general definition with which we can approach most theoretical and empirical issues.

Administration is a process of decision-making may be done at any stage of the system. Decentralisation denotes the process of decision making when it will be done at a certain stage of administration-----specially at the lower stage. It may be administrative or political. When power is transferred to create new form of government called political decentralisation and when it is delegated to lower administrative unit called administrative decentralisation.

Over the positive development, the issue however, has been a subject of scathing criticism by a number of scholars in recent years. The scholars viewed it as rhetorical. Of the scholars, Fesler ⁷³ Samoff ⁷⁴ Hyden ⁷⁵, Smith ⁷⁶ Rakodi ⁷⁷ Slater⁷⁸ and Heaphey ⁷⁹ demonstrated with empirical evidence saying that decentralisation had rarely facilitated development in the developing countries. Heaphey termed decentralisation as “obstacle to development” ⁸⁰. These scholars argue *inter alias* that decentralisation actually serves as an instrument to maintain or even strengthen the position of those who hold power. Observers of the decentralisation programmes that were introduced in African states in the 70’s and 80’s find that these were intended to serve the interests of the regimes in power ⁸¹ Mullard termed that decentralisation often “creates new political elites with no

forms of political accountability.”⁸² Though, Griffin advocates for decentralisation, he viewed that power at the local is more concentrated, more elitist and applied more ruthlessly against the poor than the center.⁸³

What says however, in the criticism, in the end of 1960s it was found that the economics in most developing countries were not growing fast enough and whatever growth was there, was in fact, worsening the distribution of income and assets against the poorer section of the community. This socio-structural phenomenon made inevitable the continuing dominance of rural elites.⁸⁴ The Hammerskjold Report of 1974 “What now ? ”-made the answer clear. The report emphasised on structural changes as a pre-condition for development with redistributive justice in developing countries.⁸⁵ But it got futile as in most developing countries neither the government in power nor their donors were interested in prompting fundamental structural reform.⁸⁶ But however, at the same time among the current debates, there was a broad-ranged literature on decentralisation, the role of local institution and institutional development where it was argued that decentralisation is a more efficient way of meeting local needs.

By the late 1970s, there was a new emphasis on people’s participation in administration and planning through effective devolution in decision making power in favour of the people at the grass. Mohabbat Khan stated that the growing interest in the concept of decentralisation is no accident. It grew as a result of disappointing experiences of the developing countries during the last decades in the field of development. the use of highly centralised planning and control mechanism, the increasing realisation of new and humane way approaching developmental policies and programmes (popular participation in administration at local level) and the tremendous expansion of governmental activities and the attendant complexities have pushed many developing countries to adopt decentralisation as a kind of creed encompassing social, political and economic spheres.⁸⁷

Over the realization, attitudes on development administration issue got a radical changed. The issue of decentralisation also got acceleration. Development countries of the Third World belonging to Asia, Africa and Latin America had gone for administrative decentralisation in the late seventies and eighties.⁸⁸

However, we can come to the conclusion. Yasin rightly pointed that in spite of the picture portrayed in different ways, decentralisation is still preferred for its theoretical, structural, functional and operational justification. Theoretically, decentralisation assumes that all those who are governed ought to take part in the governing process. Structurally, decentralisation brings the governing structures, institutions and processes nearer to the governed. Functionally, it makes the process of decision making and implementation functional in the sense of that people who know their problems better are entrusted with the task of solving those problems. And operationally, when people feel that they govern themselves instead of being governed, initiative, motivation and participation become spontaneous and effective what is lacking in the centralised governance from a pyramedic power base.⁸⁹

But the participation of people in the development effort is very vital. Both 'participation and decentralisation are joined with each other influencing the original success of it and in order to make the people's participation a success and meaningful at lower level of administration, the administration has to be decentralised to a considerable extent.'⁹⁰

Decentralised governance

Decentralised governance has been a major theme of the past decade or so in many parts of the world. Decentralised governance is popularly known as local government, local council, local authority etc. across the world. It is an 'organisation which is established by the government through legal provision as a part of the national political structure to enable the 'management of their own affairs by the people of a locality'. In other words, it is a governing system by

which people of a certain area can easily get their fundamental rights, power and resources in a democratic way as well as they can establish their own responsibility and accountability in entire management of others issues as a citizen. In a ward can say, it is an institution formed by the locally elected people's representatives. When government functions are decentralised that mean local government system is established that ultimate means decentralised governance is there.

Decentralised governance entails the empowering of sub-national levels of society to ensure that local people participate in, and benefit from, their own governance institution and thus a decentralised service is developed also there. Decentralised service delivery refers to the decision-making, management and provision of service such as education, healthcare, infrastructure, irrigation, sanitation, natural resource management to be developed to local government leveling to order to improve citizen participation and efficiency.⁹¹ Decentralisation improves governance and public service delivery by increasing :

0. *Allocative efficiency*---through better matching of public services to local preference
0. *Productive efficiency*-----through increased accountability of local governments to citizens, fewer levels of bureaucracy and better knowledge of local costs.

Mamataj Jahan writes decentralised governance as intra-sovereign government unit within the sovereign state dealing mainly local affairs, administered by the local authorities and subordinate to state government. ⁹²

In political term, it is concerned with the governance of a specific local area, constituting a political subdivision of a nation, state or other major political unit. In the performance of its functions, it acts as the agent of the state. In other wards, it is an integral part of political mechanism for governance in a country. Then, the body corporate with justice person, it represent a legal concept. ⁹³

In the recent decades, the phenomenon of globalisation, marketisation and liberalisation created a new impetus and imperative for strong and effective local democracy and local governance as opposed to private corporatism and corporate nature of the state. The modern states are divesting and ‘hiving off’ power, authority and responsibility at the local levels for efficient management of services. Local government institutions are being regarded as necessary stage between the common citizen and central state and also be treated as ‘local management’ mechanism for accelerating development efforts at all the receiving points. People at the grassroots also feel good by having opportunity for closer interaction with the ‘government at their door steps compare to central state.

Decentralised Governance in Bangladesh

Decentralised governance as asserted Philip Mawhood it, is a semi-dependent organisation. It has some freedom to act without referring to the center for approval, but its status is not comparable with that of a sovereign state. The local authority’s powers, and even its existence, flow from a decision of the national legislature and can be cancelled when that legislature so decides.⁹⁴

In Bangladesh there is more or less an effective field of Decentralised governance inherited by her as a member state of the Himalayan subcontinent. Dating back to the end of the nineteenth century, decentralised governance came into effect formally when the British rulers introduced Union Board as the lowest unit of local government system here. The today’s union parishad, the lowest tier of present local government system in Bangladesh is a precursor of Union Board. It is an honest symbol originated to give effect to decentralisation which denotes ‘transfer of the decision-making authority (power) to previously under-represented group at the grass roots’. It is all by the constitution of the Republic that provides the local government in a very administrative unit ‘shall be entrusted to bodies composed of persons elected in accordance with laws’.⁹⁵

Traditionally Bangladesh is inherited two-tier of local government-----Zila parishad in district level and union parishad at rural level. The former is kept as half-hearted pseudo institution without any elective part, while the later is an elected body with limited statutory functions. In between, another form of administrative system named *Thana Parishad* * was bureaucratically organised but subsequently turned into a “mix” body with elective and bureaucratic contents.⁹⁶

However, a very outcry for decentralisation was always in the country specially to improve the lot of rural people (85 percent) whom were denied for long to get the opportunity of standard life despite of their 80% contribution in GDP. Besides, there had a strong desire on the part of political elite to place public representatives at the apex of local government system as well.⁹⁷

Broad change on decentralisation into administration of the country was brought in 1983. The then military ruler formed a Committee for Administrative Reorganization and Reform (CARR) on April 1982 giving specified guideline for recommendation an appropriate administrative system based on the spirit of devolution and taking administration near to the people.⁹⁸

Over the report, government reorganised the entire local government set up and implemented a three tiers of decentralised local governance system-----Zila Parishad, Upazila Parishad (the then thana) and union parishad, while municipality for urban level was unchanged. Elected chairman would be the chief coordinator at all levels. To establish the new arrangement, all subdivisions were upgraded into districts and named Thana Parishad administration as Upazila-----that resulted in creation of 64 districts in previous 21 and 460 upazilas -----now total 476 upzilas are working in the country (1983-2009).

* A Thana comprises of varying numbers of union parishads depending on the size of the population. The Thana was originally local police station. During the Pakistan time, it was made the lowest level of government administration

Decentralisation and Development

Decentralisation can be related to several types of development goals; (1) the institutional goals that is related to increasing of government effectiveness. It is a common view that local administration has a better knowledge of specific local conditions, that they get immediate feedback and that the decision-making processes are less complicated at local level ; (2) political goal that is involved to (re) distribute the resources and power in favour of poorest and cornered parts of the population ; and (3) making administration to doorstep of rural masses means that “moving government closer to the people.”

CARR in its analysis pointed out some fundamental issues specially on effective decentralisation which was actually absence since the independent of the country in 1971. The committee termed the recommendation as decentralisation policy was to improve government performance and to facilitate the implementation of development programmes. The committee summed up the rationale and objectives for the decentralisation in Bangladesh :

- 0. improve of the socio-economic condition of the people;
- 0. involvement of the people in the constructive decision-making process;
- 0. creating of opportunities for cooperation and coordination among the decision makers, persons involved in implementation and local people, with a view to ensure a dynamic development process;
- 0. making government officials accountable to the people’s representatives and effective distributing various administrative responsibilities among the local level authorities;
- 0. preparation and implementation of projects in accordance with the needs of the local people;
- 0. making the judicial process easy; and
- 0. bridging gap between the people and administration.”⁹⁹

The then government appraised the CARR recommendation. It was reflected in Third Five Year plan in 1985-90 when government considered decentralisation through 'devolution' as one of the major elements in the poverty oriented development strategy. ¹⁰⁰ *Devolution* is a decentralisation directed towards local government, *Local government* being defined as local institutions comprised by or responsible to elected chairmen/members. *

As a decentralisation model, the form followed in Bangladesh may be categorized as "devolution" although the local government systems are not completely independent. It is also consistent with the practice of "delegation" which "involves the retention of central control, but assigns responsibility for case decisions to subordinate personnel." ¹⁰¹

The Constitutional Mandate of decentralised governance

A strong system of local governance styled 'local government system' is indeed enshrined in our constitution. The specific regulations about local government are mentioned in the article no. 9, 11, 59 and 60 of the constitutions:

Article 9:

The state shall encourage local government institution composed of representatives of the areas concerned and in such institutions special representation shall be given, as far as possible, to peasants, workers and women.

Article 11:

The republic shall be a democracy in which fundamental human rights and freedom and respect for the dignity and worth of the human person shall be guaranteed and in which effective participation by the people through their elected representatives in administration at all levels shall be ensured.

*. **Iben Nathan**, "*Decentralisation, Development and Mobilisation of Local resource in Lakshmipur*", in Harry W. Blair (eds) *Can Rural development be Financed From Below* (Dhaka: Dhaka University Press Ltd, 1989.), p-49.

In the two articles, 59 and 60 in the 3rd section of 4th part of the constitution mentioning local administration and that is-

Article 59:

(1) Local Government in every administrative unit of the republic shall be entrusted to bodies, composed of person elected in accordance with law.

(2) Everybody such as is referred to in clause (1) shall, subject to this constitution and any other law, perform within the appropriate administrative unit such functions as shall be prescribed by act of parliament, Which may include functions relating to –

(a) Administration and the work of public officers;

(b) The maintenance of public order.

(c) The preparation and implementation of plans relating to public services and economic development.

Article 60:

For the purpose of giving full effect to the provisions of article 59 Parliament shall, by law, confer powers of the local Government bodies referred to in that article, including power to impose taxes local purpose, to prepare their budgets and to maintain funds.

Tiers of decentralised Governance

Bangladesh is legally having a system of three tiers rural and single tier urban local governance. In rural area, the systems working are -----union parishad, Upazilla Parishad and Zilla Parishad. The upazila system, however, has got function in 2009 after 15 years of suspension. In urban area, Municipality (pouroshava) and City Corporation are working. Municipality works in districts and upazila headquarters and City Corporation in division level. Beside three Hill tract Districts (Rangamati, Bandarban, Khagrachhari) inhabited by indigenous people have three District Council and a Regional Council according to Peace Treaty 1997.

Institutional structure

Union Parishad

At present, the union parishad is governed by Local Government (Union Parishad) Ordinance, 1983. A union is comprised of nine wards. Nine members are generally elected from each ward. A chairman is elected from the entire union. Three women are elected from all nine wards, which are divided into three wards called reserved wards. People in these reserved wards elect three women members through direct vote. After being voted to power, the women leaders work together for rural areas as assigned. A Secretary recruited by the government for responsible to perform the administrative activities of Union Parishad. The union also has three to five Chowkidars/Dafadars to help the parishad. At present the total number of union parishad is 4598.

Upazilla Parishad

Introduced in an ordinance in 1982 by the then military ruler in efforts to decentralise power, the first election to upazila parishads was held in 1985 and the second in 1990. Later, the system was suspended in 1991 during democratic government. After coming to power, another government initiated to run the system but failed. The government however, enacted fresh law for the upazila in 1998. According to the law, Chairman of Upazilla Parishad will be elected through direct vote. All the Chairman of Union Parishads and Pourosova under the Upazilla will be the member of Upazilla Parishad. Later, the caretaker government in 2008 formed a Local Government Commission (LGC) and brought some significant reforms in the local-government laws regarding its formation and

functions to ensure decentralisation of power.(*). As per the fresh position, one chairman, one vice-chairman and one female vice-chairman will be elected by direct vote the people of the upazila. The upazila chairman will be the head of the upazila administration. Upazilla Nirbahi Officer (UNO), a civil service cadre officer of the government will bear the responsibility as a secretary of the Upazilla Parishad.

The upazila holds branches of different Ministries and Departments of the government. Now total 34 branches of different Ministries and Departments are working at upazila level. The election was held on January 22, 2008.

Woman vice-chairman: It is the first time when women have got opportunity to enter into the upazila system by direct vote of the people after its inception in 1983. After the new development, a large number of women leaders (480) have been enrolled into the body as elected representative.

Now they are one of vital members of the decision making body in the parishad. This has originated another new trend of women leadership at the upazila level, the next higher stage of union parishad. It is another significant step of development of women leadership at local level and to participate in rural development process. It will also to mitigate purposefully the needs of the women. Presently total 482 upazilas are running in the country.

Zilla Parishad

According to Zilla parishad law 2000, a Chairman, 15 members and 5 female members for reserved seat in Zilla parishad will be elected by the electoral college consist of the Mayor and Commissioner of City Corporation (if any), Chairman of Upazilla Parishad, Chairman and Commissioner of Pouroshava and Chairman and Members of Union Parishad under the district.

*Local Government Commission Ordinance, 2008 was approved by the President in May, 2008. Consequently, a three-member Local Government Commission (LGC) has been constituted on October 22, 2008. Former Secretary Fayzur Razzak has been appointed Chairman while former Secretary Hedayetul Islam Chowdhury and former Professor of Chittagong University Tofail Ahmed have been made members of the Commission for a three year term. This commission had resumed its office from November 2008. But it seems to be that the commission is virtually inactive after new government took over power in 2009.

The Government will recruit a Chief Executive Officer as the same rank of Deputy Secretary, a Secretary and other officials for Zilla Parishad. There are 64 Zilla Parishad in across the country.

Municipality (Pouroshava)

According to Pouroshova Ordinance, 1977 each and every Pouroshova have a Chairman and Ward Commissioners are elected by the direct voting of people under the Pourashava. Each and every Pouroshova will be divided into nine (9) or more Wards determined by the government. According to the amendment of 1998 the Pourashava female Commissioners will be elected by the direct voting for a reserve seat, consist of three wards as like as Union Parishad female members are elected. Government can recruit a Secretary and one or more Chief Officers for Piuroshava. In an amendment in 2008, the designation of chairman of the Pouroshava will be Mayor. Total 307 municipalities are running in the country.

City Corporation

Individual laws for each City Corporation are prevailed for the 6 city corporations of Bangladesh. On the basis of area of City Corporation Government selected wards are different in number from each other. A Mayor, a Commissioner in every single general ward and a woman member for a reserve seat consists of three wards is elected by direct voting. Total 6 City Corporations are working in the country.

Union parishad a unique in character of decentralised governance in Bangladesh

However the changes in decentralised governance system in different times, union parishad, the long routed lower tire of the system at rural level was unhindered. On the basis of necessity there some changes in functionaries and

authorities were brought in different times but the basic character---‘elected representation’ never changed.

After establishment upzila parishad, the union parishad was placed to work under the supervision of upazila, after which the control was largely transferred to the District Commissioner. But however, relation between the union and upazila parishad remained very close. One important relation for this is that the majority of the voting members of the upazila consisted of the union parishads chairmen. Besides, the upazila development plans is prepared on the basis of projects submitted by the unions.¹⁰²

However, the situational condition, union parishad is still fundamental and essential tire of rural local government structure. It is treated as the ‘public institution’ as well as the first stair of democracy. As the nearest institution of common people, the role and nature of union parishad is totally different than any other administrative unit. As a local institution, union parishad is the central point of all development activities of union concerned. The common people elect their desirable representatives through direct vote after a certain period. The present union parishad is mandated to carry out different significant works at local level. All the works are related to rural development and welfare to the rural masses. At the sense of local administration, union parishad is still a hope of local people. Though the elected representatives are to carry out their activities with a large scale of limitation but they are the key persons to patient hear the local people.

Women leadership in decentralised governance in Bangladesh

Studies on the gender dimension of decentralisation are relatively recent and because of this it is limited both in quantity and scope. Women’s participation as political representatives in decentralised government is a growing field of study in south Asian literature on decentralisation where state sponsored affirmative action and opened up the theoretical possibility for women’s participation.

The issue has reached in a certain stage of development in Bangladesh so far. Women leadership in decentralised governance means the women who are elected entity of the body to lead or take part in the expected activities that highlights of addressing the problems related to backwardness and socio-economic development of the people of certain areas and to offer suggestions for solving the problems. They are important parts of decision making of the body to lead local development activities with the male representatives. Now this is a formal process with a broad arrangement. They are part of 'formal leadership' at local level that is a new reflection on the traditional socio-political and socio-economic background in the context of rural power structure of Bangladesh breaking the decade old ornamental entity of women. Now they are a new social 'agent of change' ¹⁰³ (*) working for mitigating the needs of women that constitute half of the total population in the country.

The constitution of People's Republic of Bangladesh has ensured their inclusion giving special emphasis and equal right. But it was ignored for long time. One of kind of symbolized inclusion of women into the body was introduced in 1976. After long twenty one years, the organised arrangement was introduced in 1997.

State of women into the decentralised system

Constitutional node

The constitution of People's Republic of Bangladesh recognizes the basic and fundamental rights of the citizens irrespective of gender, creed, cast, religion and race. It also makes provisions for promoting causes of the backward sections of the population. ¹⁰⁴

We can examine the related articles of the constitution addressing the women issue.

* Change agents are those who assist people to initiate self-development. The principal task of the change agent is to evolve an alternative interaction mode which treats the people as subject of change

Article 9 :

The state shall encourage local government institution composed of representatives of the areas concerned and in such institutions special representation shall be given, as far as possible, to peasants, workers and women.

Article 10 :

Steps shall be taken to ensure participation of women in all spheres of national life.

Article 19 (1) :

The state shall endeavor to ensure equality of opportunity to all citizens.

Article 27 :

All citizens are equal before law entitled to equal protection of law.

Article 28 (1)

The state shall not discriminate against any citizens on grounds of only religion, race, cast, sex or place of birth.

28 (2)

Women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the state and of public life.

28 (4)

Nothing in this article shall prevent the state from making special provision in favour of women or children or for the advancement of any backward section of citizens

The constitution of Bangladesh is in favour of women empowerment at decentralised governance. The nation did not put any barrier on gender equity in all walks of life.

Actual arrangement for women : Decade's perspective

Discrimination of gender equality was a far cry in case of local governance system in the Indian sub continent. The then British rulers introduced the local government system at union level in 1870 giving entire handling of the system in hands of 'male' only. Even the universal adult franchise was denied. It seems that inclusion of women into the body was beyond of thinking. The women had given no voting right. Right to vote was preserved for those 'male people' had educational qualification, possessed properties and ability to pay tax. As a result, women having been devoid of property and educational opportunities were

automatically left out. After ending of the British regime through dividing the sub-continent into two parts -----Pakistan and India, the women got opportunity to cast their vote for first time when election was held on the basis universal adult franchise in Pakistan in 1956. ¹⁰⁵ Voting powers of women was established lawfully. But their role play through leadership arrangement into the body was still a very remote.

After independent of Bangladesh from Pakistan in 1971, women took part in election of the local body as universal entity what was granted by the constitution of the newly Republic. The election was held in 1973. And one woman was elected as chairman and emerged in the leadership position at the union parishad body. ¹⁰⁶ In 1976, the first ordinance regarding the local government was promulgated. In the ordinance, the existing local governance system underwent changes and the provision was made to 'select' two women in the union parishad body as 'member' only. The government in a circular nominated two women at each UP. The then Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO) nominated them. Later, in another circular, the number of women was increased into 3 from 2 in 1983 when local governance system brought into a massive change. The then Upazila Parishad made this nomination. In 1993, Government proposed amendment the earlier provision and provided the union parishad with the power of nominating the women members. It also proposed to divide the union into nine wards instead of existing three. But the proposal did not get functional. ¹⁰⁷ Later, significant changes were made on women participation in union parishad through the Local Government Ordinance passed in the parliament in 1997. The then government formed a Commission aiming to re-structure the local government. ¹⁰⁸

As proposed by the commission, an amendment Act was passed to re-structure the Union Parishad giving provision for direct election to the reserved seats for women. The election was held in December 1997. Total 12,828 women were elected as member by direct vote of people of concerned union parishad.

Total 20 women elected in the top position of the union-----in the post of chairman. Total 110 women were elected member in general seats contesting with male opponents. ¹⁰⁹ Later another election was held in 2003 that hailed the same situation. In that election an overwhelming number of women voters (80%) cast their vote. This amendment brought about a radical change in the role of women at decentralized governance and their participation in rural development. It was also a step of empowering women politically that ushered a hope of development of women leadership at local level in Bangladesh It was also a milestone for rural women to participate in political process and rural development works. An Asian Development Bank report termed it as a milestone in the history of empowerment of women in Bangladesh. ¹¹⁰ At present the total number of union parishad is 4598.

Women in union parishad election (1973 -2003)

A total seven elections were held with the union parishad since 1973 to date. The feature of women participation into the local body is as follow:

Election	Year	Women candidate		Elected account		Total Number of UP
		Chairman	Member	Chairman	Member	
First	1973	3	13	1	-----	4352*
2nd	1977	19	19	4	7	-----
3rd	1984	-----	-----	6	----	4401
4th	1988	79	863	1	---	4401
5 th	1992	115	1135	8	20	4401
6th	1997	102	43969/456**	20	12828/110**	4479
7th	2003	232	39419/617**	22	12684/79**	4479

*. It was the total union parishad.

**.. Women contested and elected in general seats

Sources : Compiled by the researcher from various source

In categorically, inclusion of women into union parishad was gradually increased. Though the constitution gives special emphasis on initiative to ensure women role in local government institutions specially union parishad. But successive experiences were not better in this regard. Before enacting the 1997 Act women were enrolled into the union parishad on selection basis. After the act, the Government reserved three seats for women in the union parishad where women members are elected from each of the three respective wards. Apart from the reserved seats women can also contest for any of the general seats. Previously, the process of selection of the women representatives was on the basis of nominations and/or indirect election. Around 12,828 women were elected as members from reserved seats in the 1997 local level elections. A total of 20 and 110 women were elected as chairpersons and members, respectively, for general seats. The largest election in the country's local government history was held 2003. The election started on January 25 and ends March 16, 2003 consecutively in 4234 out of 4492 unions. In this election, 232 women candidates contested for the post of chairman and 617 women contested for general seats. 22 women were elected as chairman and 79 won in the general seats. Total 12684 women elected in reserved seats.

The Government has already issued different executive orders to ensure women members' participation in various decision-making committees. The women leaders have been asked to attend into the parishad meetings regularly. The local authority has been also asked to ensure the women leaders to 25% of the total fourteen committees. The female representatives usually involved themselves with mass education, family planning, immunization, handicrafts, relief activity, and *Shalish* (mediation in the village court). The women representatives have the potentials to become change agents for rural women and various NGOs. A few government institutions such as the National Institute of Local Government (NILG) are training women on various development-related issues, legal aid, and

organizational structure of local bodies and their roles and functions to enable them play their role effectively.

The present study highlights

In this study, elected women members of decentralised union parishad have been termed as ‘women leadership’ at local level in Bangladesh. The subject is very significant specially considering as a process the development of women leadership at local level in Bangladesh where half of the population is women.¹¹¹ Moreover, their roles have already attracted in different sectors in the country and even appreciated in across the world. So there is enough ground to become hopeful about effective role of women in development at rural area through decentralised governance where local people in general elect them through direct vote and empowered there. It has a socio-political and socio-economic background in the context of rural power structure of Bangladesh. With the development of local government (municipality in urban and union parishad and upazila parishad in rural areas), channels have opened through, which leadership can grow in the local areas.

Moreover, as a process of leadership development, local government was always an evidence of key pin. The local-government offers many opportunities for the training of men and women who may later lead the country in bigger affairs of nation and world politics’.¹¹² ‘Until any one learns to govern his local people, it is futile to expect that he could successfully govern the far off people.’¹¹³ ‘Local representative government forms a valuable training ground for the elected leaders at the higher level or representative government’.¹¹⁴ ‘In a society, a few may be gifted with certain qualities of leadership, but many are capable of doing the functions of a leader if they are given opportunities. It is natural that a member of the union parishad aspires to become its chairman; and a chairman aspires to be

the chairman/ member of higher local bodies (upazila/ municipality) or members of parliament'.¹¹⁵

Local level leadership is very important especially in the socio-economic and socio-political perspective of Bangladesh. The development activities have to be started from lower level where majority of the people live. Concept of women leadership at local level is more important in the sense of engaging women in mainstream development activities who are about half of the population. In this perspective, women leadership can make significant role in running rural development activities in the country. Their empowerment, capacity building and overall development in the sense of equity (both male and female) are the other important factors. Participation of women in local level institutions has been considered as the most effective instrument to remove the inequity, inability and powerlessness of women.¹¹⁶

A country needs good leadership for its progress and local level leadership is another important factor to promote rural development. Bangladesh has a better chance of rural development where representative institutions—i.e Union Parishad—have been working for long. And both male and female are conducting development activities together there. On the other hand, another prospect of development of local level women leadership is also open in this process where the leaders can achieve experience through handling various development activities. It is a channel through which women leadership can grow at the local areas which is also a part of the overall rural power structure and helps increase the ability of coordination between various dimensions of the society. The entire process will also help develop a qualitative as well as quantitative women leadership at local level

We want to let into the end of theoretical argument saying that in a developing country like Bangladesh, the role of local self-government can not be only theoretical; it is an important process of national development. Regarding this, union parishad can be very instrumental considering its several positive

values like-----proximity and people's participation, contextualized framework and autonomous characteristics. Moreover, such institution is also being considered as more prospective than any other institution in development of decision making process, planning and its implementation. It has been pointed out that local organisations can perform three major functions. The first is the facilitation of public services by providing government agencies with more accurate information on needs, priorities and capabilities of local public and more reliable feed back on the impact of government initiatives. The second is the undertaking of mutual assistance by collective action. The third task of the local organisation is the improvement of the local people, equipping them with the voice and capacity to make credible demands on the government and on others who control resources.¹¹⁷

On the other hand, such local based system can also be used as a practical land for learning about administrative process, political art and democratic norm for local leaders that also may turn into 'landing ground' of leadership'. Because, the leaders here are elected by the local people on the basis of universal adult franchise and quality of the leaders. The leaders also here can take lesson through handling the various local affairs this one side ensure qualitative development of them and the other side turn them into next higher level leaders. If we notice in previous, we will also see the primary stage of the provincial leadership during the British era had been developed from such local level institutions.¹¹⁸ In later Bangladesh, various case studies also revealed that a good number of leaders had come out as national level leaders who became skilled from local level institutions. (*)

* This researcher also found such development of leadership under this study

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