

Women From Members of Parliament to Leaders of Parliament: A Comparative Analysis of India and Bangladesh

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Empowerment is defined as a social action process that promotes participation of people, organizations, and communities in gaining control over their lives in their community and larger societies. Part of the problem stems from the unidentified interests of the women due to their under representation in the political institutions which marked their low level of mobilization and as well of their empowerment. It is generally said that mobilization of women depends on their identification of interests which may vary due to class structures of the society, but on the other hand, autonomous state apparatus had provided a space for the mobility to both privileged and under-privileged to get their targets. The issue of empowerment is being conceived in the perspective of gender related development which has been checked due to inequality in the socio-cultural patterns of the society and it inherited some of the cultural constraints before partition. This paper will analyze the steps of transformation of women from members of parliament to leaders of parliament in India and Bangladesh.

Keywords: women empowerment, participation, mobilization, socio-cultural patterns

Men and women are equal in status and are not identical. They are a peerless pair being complementary to one another, each helps the other so that without the one, the existence of other cannot be conceived and therefore, it follows as a necessary corollary from these facts that anything that will unfair the status of either of them will involve the equal ruin of both.

Such an idea of non-detachable existence of men and women is echoed in the aforesaid words of Mahatma Gandhi. It is not something newly introduced in the society that has mostly played the role of a patriarchal nature globally. There have been numerous examples of patriarchal structure of a society, state, and ruling system throughout the world.

Ever since the formation of society, the workplace has always been thought to be a man's domain, as always considered woman, a weak and less skilled living being on the earth. Although woman has represented in several fields of society, she is still intended to be kept in the nutshells of the social traditions and hard rules of detention herself in the boundaries of a house.

Representation, in general, is the action of a person or group that speaks or acts for or in support of another person or group. In other words, representation of any person in any area belongs to the actions of his concerned group indirectly, like women in some areas are representing their gender. Although women constitute a half of the total population of the world, they have hitherto not gained any significant position in the social phase. The work place has always been thought to be a man's domain, and woman is considered to

survive marginally everywhere either at home or outside.

Representation is the next step of participation of woman on behalf of others that comes after the empowerment of her. Women empowerment is a current global issue and discussion on women right is at the forefront of many formal and informal campaigns worldwide. Empowerment is possible only when women rights are secured and provided equally on the front of society and its all areas of development.

Finally, the representation can be construed as the mean of consolidation of equality. Empowerment is a process that enables women to gain access to and control of material intellectual and human resources. Empowerment is the redistribution of power that challenges the patriarchal ideology and male dominance.

Representation of women is triggered by the empowerment of them in all the fields of life. Remarkably, nowadays, women are extending their area of acquaintances in the wide circles of society that helped them to come out of their households which veiled them under the traditions. But even today comparison to man and woman is very difficult. Cause of women's relative powerlessness or low status arises from their illiteracy where man from early childhood has been considered to have open and unlimited access to all the resources of the family and the society, believed to be the bread earner of family and further the power holder of society.

Since ancient times, women are supposed to be under the protective control of someone or the other male member of the family. In their childhood, girls are under the control of their father, in their youth, they are in the hands of their husbands and later in the old age, used to be dependent on their sons. What can be analyzed is only the patriarchal stream-flowing the women in its thrust throughout her life. As a result, this lifelong slavery down the ages, women lost their self-confidence and gone habitual to live such a trodden life. This practice has smashed the individuality of women.

Today, more women are leading governments, business enterprises, and non-governmental organizations than in previous generations. But this is not the complete picture and provides no indication of the women status around the world.

Women representing in the workplace have not yet been treated equally in the sense of prestige and wage value. Commonly women have to work twice as hard as men, with a payment half of them. In the words of Shulamith firestone

Despite the talk about business women, how many business women do you ever see? How many women in any managerial or decision making position? How many professionals? 95% of all professionals are still male. Academic opportunities are shrinking, not growing; even the women's colleges and magazines are run by men. Not does anyone mention the fact that future prospects look even dimmer. The routine jobs that were granted to women a lollipop to appease their hunger for real and important work will be the first to go, come automation. Perhaps men will have their way after all and all women will go back to home they never should have left.

Therefore, patriarchy values male dominance as a natural inalienable right, thereby enforcing the inferiority and subordination of women. This value promotes the tendency of institutional discrimination against girls in education, health matters, in labor resulting in restricted opportunities lower wages for work and relative economic, social, and political deterioration.

About 50% population of the world is of women especially in Asia. The male domination on women is one of the socio-economic and psychological problems in patriarchal society, not only at the household level but also in every other sphere where women have to face these problems.

Even developed countries despite their advancement in higher education, women still face major barriers when they attempt to use their educational achievements to advance in the work place. For example, women

rarely hold more than one to two percent of top executive positions (Schaefer, 2006). Women almost always work in occupations with lower status and lower pay scale than men, decided by the patriarchal society. Thus, the employed women are not independent in real sense though they have liberty of movement and social interaction.

Even in relatively more egalitarian society of the west, women's subordination is "institutionally structured and culturally rationalized, exposing them to conditions of deference, dependency, powerlessness and poverty" (Nader, 1986, p. 383).

Therefore, under such circumstances, if the patriarchal structure remains prominent and continue for years the 50% human resource (women) will be unskilled and unutilized in the mainstream of development.

In the South Asian societies, male dominance, as a complex ideological, psychological, socio-economic, and political system of power and control, manifests in a number of both overt and covert ways. Unequal and unfair distribution of resources between men and women, poverty and deprivation rarely occur due to the scarcity of resources, but rather due to a person's lack of entitlement to the basic necessities of life (Sen, 1981).

Women in this region are surrounded by such a shield of conservative traditions and their rigid rules that cause inadequate entitlement to food, health care, and other family resources. Limited opportunities for outside employment and earnings characterize the status of South Asian women. A person's lack of entitlement to basic necessities of life can cause disabilities that make a picture of under privileged and discriminated class of such people. Likewise, women in the societies of this region are weak in nature psychologically and physically further more they are the victims of seclusion by the means of veiled faces and controlled in the households.

Most women are in poverty stricken areas in South Asian countries, like India and Bangladesh, the focus areas of this paper. They are malnourished due to economic as well as social or gender factors. Women are subject to unequal distribution of food due to certain socio-cultural values and practices that reflect the preference for and prestige of males over females. Usually adult male members of the family are fed first and served the best food, while women eat last often the leftovers. This tendency causes the less health status of women and female in the sense of Anemia, low immunity, high maternal mortality, and infant mortality. High infant mortality leads to poor health of mother due to the super imposition of early and frequent childbearing on high levels of nutritional deprivation (Kabeer, 1994)

Malnutrition and multiple pregnancies in the absence of adequate maternal care result into maternal mobility, birth of malnourished, underweight, and diseased babies.

Women have many impacts on its existence, like gender difference and inequality, caste, religion that reveals the complexity of the social relations regarding women.

Joan W. Scott (1986) opined that if equality and difference are paired dichotomously, they structure an impossible choice. If one opts for equality, one is forced to accept the notion that difference is antithetical to it; if one opts for difference, one admits that equality is unattainable.

There is no use of the question of equality vs. difference rather the need of providing equal status socially, economically, and politically. Marx believed that women's oppression lays in their exclusion from the control over the means of production and their confinement to the family and society (Heidi Hartmann, 1976, p. 139).

South Asia Portraying Women Representation

One of the significant characteristics of South Asian politics is that the highest positions in government and several private sectors of many South Asian countries has or have been occupied by women. Some of the

classic examples are Indira Gandhi, Pratibha Devi Singh Patil, Sonia Gandhi in national front of India and Mayawati, Mamta Banarjee, Jayalalitha, Vasundhara Raje Sindhiya in the state politics as well as most vibrant women of the time are Sushma Swaraj, Nirmala Sitaraman, Smriti Irani, Uma Bharti, Harsimrat Kaur, and Menaka Gandhi on most significant cabinet ministry offices. Present Council of Ministers consists of nine female ministers, of whom six hold the rank of Cabinet Minister (at <https://www.india.gov.in/my-government/whos-who/council-ministers>). This is the highest number of female Cabinet Ministers in any Indian government in history. The only other government to appoint more than one female Cabinet Minister was the first United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government from 2004 to 2009, which had three female Cabinet Ministers.

According to a new report from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), prepared in collaboration with the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) Institute of Governance and Development in Bangladesh, women have made progress in various aspects of health, education, and work, but still face sizable gender gaps,

The report, *Bangladesh Gender Equality Diagnostic of Selected Sectors*, aims to guide the design of gender features of ADB-supported projects in four key sectors—skills, vocational, tertiary education; energy; transport; and urban development. According to the report, over the last two decades, Bangladesh has made progress in women's participation in the labor force, gender parity in primary education, and women's political representation. Areas of concern include the high prevalence of violence against women, obstacles to women's access to resources and assets, unequal terms of their labor engagement, and impact of their overwhelming responsibility for care work. The Government of Bangladesh has made policy commitments toward gender equality and established an institutional framework to fulfill these (ADB Report, 2018).

The government of Bangladesh has been working on a number of initiatives to enhance women empowerment. This includes one of major steps by The Education Trust Act which has started stipend scheme for girls at secondary level, so that the literacy rate could increase in rural areas. This will lead to gender equivalence at both primary and secondary level nationwide.

National policy for women development has been adopted by Bangladeshi government. That has increased the number of women elected to parliament to 20%. The National Social Protection Strategy works for the social safety in consultation with United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to promote provisions for women empowerment.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), like the Friends in Village Development Bangladesh and Nari Udyog Kendra, focus on variables, like participatory decision-making, awareness-building, capacity-building, and increasing economic solvency to contribute to women empowerment in Bangladesh.

Overall, the government is working persistently to encourage the development of women. In fact, Bangladesh ranks eighth in the global political empowerment of women. Bangladesh government is also committed to implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and has achieved the Millennium Development Goal of securing gender parity in education. The contribution of women in every sphere of life has become significant, ranging from agriculture to politics. Bangladesh has identified the critical importance of addressing inequality and making women's empowerment in Bangladesh a priority in its new post-2015 development agenda (The Women Journal, 2018).

As of 2018, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, the speaker of parliament, the leader of the Opposition, and the Foreign Minister were women. Bangladesh has also not elected a male as Prime Minister since 1988 (at <https://cabinet.gov.bd/site>).

The vast majorities of South Asian women are illiterate in poor health, invisible in the system of national accounts and suffer legal, politics, economic, and social discrimination in all steps of life. South Asian women have the lowest rates of participation in their government and have the lowest rates of participation in their governance structure as compared to many developed nations (Khadija Haq, 2000).

Table 1

India and Bangladesh at a Glance

Country	Population	Population growth (%)	Population female (%)	Fertility rate	Literacy rate		
					Total	Male	Female
Bangladesh	152,862,431	1.1	49.3	2.2	74.4	82.1	65.5
India	1,221,156,319	1.3	48.3	2.5	59.82	62	53.4

Note. Source: The World Bank Data (2011).

Status of Women Representation in the India

In Indian society, the status of women has changed from time to time. Indian women enjoyed equal status with man in all fields of life in the ancient period. She received the same education and importance in the means of “Ardhangini” of her husband. In medieval period, her status went down and was considered to be inferior to man. New customs of pardah, sati, child marriages, and restrictions on widow marriage penetrated in the society. They have been the factors responsible for the injustice done towards women. In modern India, women status has changes considerably. Her position is equal to that of men socially, economically, politically, educationally, and legally. Her suffering from sati, child marriages do no longer exist (Dalvi Mahananda, 2010, p. 37).

After a long journey of several social reforms and acts implemented by the British government on the movements of Indian reformers, like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Vivekanand, etc. Today, the Indian womanhood is marching towards liberty and equality after the eradication of social evils through the various social legislation means. The social reform movement from the mid-19th century prepared the base for women’s awakening and their entry in the movement later on. These movements resulted the ban of the practice of sati, female infanticide, plight of the widow, child marriage, polygamy, etc. affecting their consequently, the campaign against child marriage of child widows were incorporated by women despite strong opposition from the Orthodox who defined it as an attack on religion.

Women in India participate in voting, claim their positions in public offices and political parties. Political activism and voting are the areas of women political representation but these areas were not promoted since years because of lack of education and awareness. A few number of women stepped out of their boundary walls to represent.

India Gandhi has been the archetype for women who are trying to obtain political representation as well as place in the power structure in post independence India. This represented the symbol of the women’s ascent to power, however, her rise to power movement than to a combination of other factors, such as back ground in the nationalist movement and the congress (I)’s need for a compromise candidate. The Constitution of India in 1950 officially granted universal suffrage enshrined in Article 326. Initially women participation as voters and candidates was very less as compared to men but it was improved by the time through various measures taken by the government of India. Women’s representation has gradually increased in the Lok Sabha. In the first-ever election, only 5% of the House was comprised of women parliamentarians. Now, that has improved to 14%.

The Lok Sabha polls in 2019 had seen the largest number of women being elected with their tally standing at 78 that reflected the status of more power sharing of women in India than ever before. India also has seen the highest voter turnout in history of Indian Parliamentary elections in 2019 (at <https://yourstory.com/herstory/2019/05/women-politicians-lok-sabha-2019>).

Table 2

Women Representation in Lok Sabha of Indian Parliament

No.	Year	Number of women MPs	Percentage of women MPs (%)
1	1951	22	4.50
2	1957	22	4.45
3	1962	31	6.28
4	1967	29	5.58
5	1971	28	5.41
6	1977	19	3.51
7	1980	28	5.29
8	1984	43	7.95
9	1989	29	5.48
10	1991	39	7.30
11	1996	40	7.37
12	1998	43	7.92
13	1999	49	9.02
14	2004	45	8.2
15	2009	59	10.87
16	2014	66	12.15
17	2019	78	14.58

Note. Source: Data compiled by Faculty team from the statistical reports of the Election Commission of India.

The average representation of women MPs (14.58%) is higher than the national average of women MLAs in state assemblies, which stands at a dismal 9%. While the numbers have increased over the years, the percentage of women that make up the Lok Sabha even today is not a figure to be proud of, especially when the ideal number should be at 33% at least. There are 28 women members in Rajya Sabha from different states of India till July 2020 (at <https://rajyasabha.nic.in>), 30 women governors in the states since 1947, and 16 chief ministers in different states. In 2018 there are nine ministers out of these six cabinet and three state ministers (at <https://www.india.gov.in>). We still have a long way to go.

Power Shares of Women in Bangladesh

The women's movement has a long history, beginning with the anti-colonial nationalist struggle against Britain and Pakistan (Jahan, 1995). There had been many women organizations varied, ranging from village based Samities to vast national organizations, such as the Bangladesh Mohila Parishad (1970), Naripokkho (1983), and Women for Women (1973). The women's organizations conceptualize empowerment with the greatest sophistication with respect to awareness of the working of political power and complexities of women's lives and the overlapping and multiple nature of discrimination. They emphasized bringing about collective change that would benefit all women. In order to build a society based on quality, the family, society and state need to be rid of violence (Naripokkho, 2003), and the practices of familial discrimination against women and girls in terms of education, early marriage, dowry and unequal rights in marriage, divorce, and

inheritance. Moreover, most girls and women in Bangladesh also lack entitlement to medical care due to the discrimination they face in utilizing existing health care facilities. There is some empirical evidence of gender bias with respect to accessing health care in developing countries including Bangladesh (Sabir & Ebrahim, 1984). The high rate of maternal mortality and morbidity in Bangladesh is also associated with undernourished mother's inadequate access to basic maternal and obstetric care. Therefore, the role of civil society organizations and NGO's increased to the level of educating women more about their health. Women's own agencies which are fighting for ensuring equal social and political rights for women have been important factor that led the government of Bangladesh to bring changes in policies regarding women's representation. The emerging democracy of Bangladesh had its drive begin in the end of 1990 with the overthrow of autocratic rule by a mass movement. Since then, democratization of local government units has become a priority for the government. Women's organization creates a pressure on the government to initiate policy in favor of ensuring equal participation but also organizes several training programs for women members with a view to creating awareness among them. Bangladesh stands eighth in Asia with women representing 20 percent of seats in the parliament.

Women Representation in Bangladesh Parliament

Table 3

Women Representation in Bangladesh Parliament

No.	Year of election	Women elected among all elected MPs (%)	Reserved seats for women (%)	Total women in parliament (%)
1	1973	0	5*	4.8
2	1979	0.7	10**	9.7
3	1986	1.7	10	10.6
4	1988	1.3	-	1.3
5	1991	1.7	10	10.6
6	1996	2.3	10	11.2
7	2001	2	-	2
8	2009	5.4	14***	20
9	2014	5.5	14	19.1
10	2018	7	50	23

Notes. * In 1973, the reserved seat was 5 percent; ** From 1979 onwards, it was 10; in 2004, the reserved seats were 13 percent; *** In 2009, the reserved seats were 14 percent.

In 2014, there were a total of 297 seats of which only 19 women were elected and two were from reserved seats. In the current parliament, there are a total of 71 women lawmakers, 50 of whom occupy reserved seats. The reserved seat MPs are not accountable to any constituencies like the elected MPs are, and they do not have a direct role in policy-making and legislative processes (Farhin, 2018).

The parliament passed a Constitution (17th Amendment) Bill (2018) to extend the tenure of the 50 parliamentary seats reserved exclusively for women for 25 more years. As per the constitution, the parliament shall consist of 300 members to be elected directly and 50 reserved seats for women to be allotted to parties based on their proportional representation in the House (Farhin, 2018).

In such an inclusive state, constitution also had played a great part by providing reserved seats time to time.

Conclusion

Empowering women and girls is vital in order to achieve our twin goal: ending extreme poverty by 2030 and boosting shared prosperity.

Public and private policies and actions can promote equality over a life time.

The above analysis shows us very clearly that women are comparatively in a poor state of economic, social, political empowerment, then how could the representation be strong enough in any area of life. The human development index ranking speaks volumes about our stand. Women form a significant proportion of our population and represent a source of untapped potential—a cause and consequence of the countries slow progress. These countries of South Asia have a long history of women's welfare and rights but still there is a need to walk for a long distance.

This point is implacable to all other women of south Asian countries, like Bangladesh and Srilanka. Women should be empowered in all respects to assure the representation in every field. If any nation wants to improve the standard of living then it should provide equal opportunities for both the genders. Some steps may be considered:

- There is need to find out the reasons behind women's truancy and creating the necessary means for women to get the greatest possible share of education, especially technical education.
- Women's empowerment in a cross cutting agenda and gender mainstreaming is the responsibility of the entire governance machinery.
- It is required to involve women in planning, training, implementation, and evaluation of technical projects and productive activities.
- The need for strategic measures to establish justice and fair partnership between men and women, enabling women to realize their full potential and strengthening women participation in sustainable development.
- Women need to change the entire mind set regarding their position in society through counseling by different women organizations.
- Political leaders must be committed and help mobilize individuals and institutions at all levels of government and within international bodies.
- Women' groups, civil societies, and government agencies need to push for change in the rules, structures and processes that specify how resources are allocated and how responsibilities and values are assigned in institutions and society more broadly.

Mahatma Gandhi declared some years ago that the salvation of women lay in their own hands; but it has required a free nation to give Indian women the opportunities that they have so richly deserved. Changes are definitely occurring although at a different place in different demographic, socio-economic, and cultural groups, which are in improving women status in society. She has also become a strong economic factor in the process of high economic growth of the country. Still there is a long way to go.

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