

## CHAPTER 7

### POLITICAL WOMEN: CAREER, EXPERIENCE AND POLITICAL ASPIRATIONS

The objective of this chapter is to analyse the careers and political experiences of political women in Bangladesh. For this purpose it specifically seeks to explore certain factors linked to political women's careers and experiences, such as, recruitment to the party organisations, length of political party involvement, experience in holding party offices, electoral participation and future political aspirations. The discussions and evaluations of these variables are expected to broaden our understanding of the status, career and experience of women who are active at national level politics in Bangladesh. Moreover, the present chapter also attempts to estimate the extent of gender-differences in these respects.

This chapter first presents an analysis of the process of recruitment of political women to the party organisations which may shed light on the types of experiences they bring into their party careers. It will also indicate in what way their recruitment manner is different from their male counterparts. Then the chapter will deal with the longevity of political women in party politics, the extent of previous and current party and public office holding experience and their participation in national elections. It may indicate the nature of their political participation and styles of political career. Moreover, a focus upon the political ambition of political women which is the driving force of an ascendant political career may be effective in indicating if there exists any gender-gap in political ambition. It may implicitly indicate the potential problems of political participation of women and facilitate our understanding of this aspect in the following chapter. However, it has been noted that, although the female respondents of this study were partially selected from the public office such as the fifth parliament

of 1991, all belong to the party organisations. Thus the focus on variables related to party organisation would be relevant to the analysis of the political career and experience of political women.

## 7.1 Organisational Involvement Before Joining Political Party

Political recruitment has been defined as the “process through which individuals or groups of individuals are inducted into active political roles.”<sup>1</sup>

According to Dwaine Marvick:

“Political recruitment is ..... with a special eye to how the participants got there, where they came from and by what paths, and hence what ideas and skills and contacts they acquired or discarded on the way.”<sup>2</sup>

In Chapter 6, it was discussed how political women became politicised and motivated to be active in politics. It was found that some stimulants pushed them across the threshold of politics. Now, under the above title it is proposed to present a picture of the organisational involvement by respondents before becoming active in the party organisation. The implication of such a discussion lies in the fact that the organisational involvement prior to party activism might act as the springboard for recruitment to party organisation.

It is, however, mentioned at the outset that one of the objectives of this chapter is to explore how political women in Bangladesh come to be in the party organisation. What is their channel and does it differ from that of the men? Keeping these in mind

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<sup>1</sup> Meshe M. Czudnowski, “Political Recruitment”, in Handbook of Political Science, eds., Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby, (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley, 1975), p.155.

<sup>2</sup> Dwaine Marvick, “Continuities in Recruitment Theory and Research: Toward a New Deal” in Elite Recruitment in Democratic Politics, eds. Heinz Eulau and Moshe M. Czudnowski, (New York: Sage Publications, 1976), p.30.



respondents were asked if they had been active in any organisation before deciding to join a political party. The respondents tend to show, on the one hand, gender-difference together with some differences among political women themselves in their path to politics. It is to this that we now turn.

The data, as shown in Table 7.1, indicate that the largest percentage of political women (37.2 percent) entered party organisations from voluntary social work. The second largest percentage (34.9 percent) of political women were recruited from student organisations. Among the rest, 18.6 percent indicating "other" category were involved in cultural organisations and voluntary party work prior to becoming a party member. Only 9.3 percent entered party politics without any sort of past experiences. Thus, the data suggest two main routes for political women to become active in party politics - the community involvement route and the student activists route. The majority of the political women (72.1 percent) used these two channels. They will be discussed in more detail later on in this section.

TABLE 7.1  
ORGANISATIONAL PARTICIPATION BY RESPONDENTS  
PRIOR TO BECOMING PARTY MEMBERS

Organisational involvement	Male (N=40)		Female (N=43)		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Student organisation	24	60.0	15	34.9	39	47.0
Women's organisation <sup>a</sup> and voluntary social work	6	15.0	16	37.2	22	26.5
Other <sup>b</sup>	9	22.5	8	18.6	17	20.5
No experience	1	2.5	4	9.3	5	6.0
Total	40	100.0	43	100.0	83	100.0

$$\chi^2=8.38, \text{ d.f.}=3, p<0.05$$

Notes: a. Only applicable to the female respondents.

b. Other refers to involvement in trade union, cultural organisations and voluntary party work.

It is evident in the same Table that, for male respondents the most frequently used channel was student organisations, which alone contributed to 60 percent. Among the rest, 15 percent were recruited from voluntary social organisations and 22.5 percent, indicating "other" category, were involved in trade unions, voluntary party work and cultural activities before entering party politics. Only 2.5 percent joined party politics without any sort of prior experiences. Thus, for the majority of the male respondents, student organisations appear as the main recruiting ground.

However, significant difference appears between political women and male respondents in their pre-party experiences. A significant association between the gender and pre-party experiences is indicated by a high  $\chi^2$  value of 8.38, significant at 0.05 level of significance, which implies that gender is an important factor in determining the means of political recruitment of the respondents. It is evident from the findings that the function of student organisations as a recruiting ground was more prevalent for male respondents than for political women. A substantially larger percentage of male respondents than political women (60 percent and 34.9 percent respectively) was accommodated in the party organisation through student organisations. Compared to men, political women were more likely to be found to use the voluntary organisations (15 percent and 37.2 percent respectively). Moreover, a comparatively smaller percentage of men than political women (2.5 percent and 9.3 percent respectively) joined party politics without prior involvement in any form of organisation.

However, as there exists marginal difference between the percentages of political women for voluntary social work and student activism, we will first consider those who were recruited from the student organisations. The reason is, recruitment from student organisations may bear more weight, as they are in themselves political organisations. It provides one to some extent with political experiences prior to party

involvement. Moreover, the above data indicates the importance of student organisations as stepping stones to party politics, since approximately half of the respondents used them. It should be, however, logical to present here a brief account of student politics in Bangladesh in order to understand its relevance and significance as a recruiting ground.

The students (particularly university and college students) of Bangladesh have a long history of organised activity and political participation.<sup>3</sup> Like many developing countries, students are the catalysts for political and social change.<sup>4</sup> During the Pakistan period, students provided leadership and support for the various political movements undertaken by the political parties. They were integral to the Language Movement in 1952, to the electoral defeat of the Muslim League in 1954, to the mobilisation against the military dictatorship of Ayub Khan in the 1960s and its downfall in 1969, to the victory of the Awami League (AL) in the 1970 elections and in fighting the Liberation War in 1971. They continued this tradition in the anti-autocracy movement in the 1980s which eventually led to the downfall of the Ershad regime in December 1990. Thus the student activists worked closely with the political parties and provided its major source of strength.

In East Pakistan, however, the students had been mobilised mainly by leftist and nationalist parties - namely the National Awami Party (NAP) and the AL.<sup>5</sup> The two major student organisations of the province were the East Pakistan Student League (EPSL, formed in 1948) and the East Pakistan Student Union (EPSU, formed

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<sup>3</sup> For details, Talukder Maniruzzaman, *The Bangladesh Revolution: And Its Aftermath*, (Dhaka University Press Limited, 1980), Chapter 4. Also see the same researcher's "Political Activism of University Student in Pakistan", *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies*, 9, (November 1971): 234-245.

<sup>4</sup> For cross-cultural works on student political activism, Seymour M. Lipset and Philip G. Altbach (eds.), *Student in Revolt*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1969), Philip G. Altbach (ed.), *The Student Revolution: A Global Analysis*, (Bombay: Lalvani Publishing House, 1970).

<sup>5</sup> Rounaq Jahan, *Pakistan: Failure in National Integration*, (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1973), p.134.

in 1952)<sup>6</sup> who were affiliated with the AL and the NAP respectively. The EPSU was formed by the left wing students and it gradually became one of the largest student organisations in East Pakistan.<sup>7</sup> The EPSU and the EPSL had the largest membership and provided the main dynamism in the political movements of the past.<sup>8</sup>

However, the formation of EPSU was followed by the formation of another important student organisation - Islami Chhatra Sangha (student's organisation, ICS) affiliated to Jamaat-i-Islami. These political platforms virtually became the principal bases for contesting university and college student union elections. However, student organisations provided the bulk of the workers for their parent political parties and the student activists were later recruited to these parties. Thus, in 1968-69 about half of the members of the Working Committees of the AL, NAP and the Jamaat-i-Islami were former leaders of the EPSL, EPSU and ICS respectively.<sup>9</sup> It is to be noted here that even now the majority of the top and second-ranking leaders of most of the parties in Bangladesh were former student leaders and activists.<sup>10</sup>

The present study also indicates that the majority of males and the second largest proportion of political women were recruited from student organisations to party politics. They were mostly active in the student movements of the 1960s. Table 7.2 demonstrates the positions held by these respondents in student organisations. Among 15 political women who were student activists, five (33.3 percent) held leadership positions, such as president, vice-president, general secretary, etc., of the Central and District committees of the respective organisations. Six (40 percent) held

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<sup>6</sup> Maniruzzaman, *op.cit.*, 1980, pp.53-54.

<sup>7</sup> Talukder Maniruzzaman, Radical Politics and the Emergence of Bangladesh, (Dhaka: Bangladesh Book International Limited, 1975), p.7

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p.35. Also, Jahan, *op.cit.*, 1973, p.134.

<sup>9</sup> Maniruzzaman, *op.cit.*, 1980, p.59.

<sup>10</sup> Gulam Hossain, General Ziaur Rahman and the BNP, (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1988), p.47.

various key positions in different branches of the respective student organisations and the remaining four (26.7 percent) were active as members. Thus we can say that a majority of the political women (73.3 percent) who were recruited from the student organisations were intensively active in student politics.

TABLE 7.2  
POSITIONS HELD BY THE RESPONDENTS IN THE STUDENT ORGANISATIONS

Position	Male		Female		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Leader <sup>a</sup>	14	58.3	5	33.3	20	40.8
Other important position <sup>b</sup>	6	25.0	6	40.0	11	30.6
Member	4	16.7	4	26.7	8	28.6
Total	24	100.0	15	100.0	39	100.0

Notes: a. Leader refers to president, general secretary and other posts of the Central and District Committees of the respective organisations.

b. It refers to key positions in different branches of the respective organisations.

Out of 24 male politicians who were involved in student politics, 14 (58.3 percent) held leadership positions in their respective organisations. Another six (25 percent) held key positions in different branches of the respective organisations and four (16.7 percent) were active as members. It seems that, the great majority (83.3 percent) of male respondents who were recruited from student organisations were deeply involved in student politics.

However, almost all of the above respondents of both sexes belonged either to the EPSL or to the EPSU in the early to late sixties. They were mostly active in the Dhaka University campus and only a few were active at district level.

Another most frequent mode of entry to party organisation for political women was voluntary social work and women's organisations. The largest proportion of

political women switched from social works or women's organisations to party organisation and confirmed the scholars' insights into the close connection between membership in voluntary organisations and participation in politics.<sup>11</sup> Although organisational affiliation does not translate automatically into political participation, it does serve as a potential source of political recruitment. The argument is, as stated by Olsen:

"Social participation mobilizes an individual political activity as it brings him into contact with a wide range of people and new social relationships that broaden his sphere of activities, and give him experience in dealing with organisational activities and teaches him participation skills and norms."<sup>12</sup>

The above notion is further reinforced by the bulk of research conducted in various countries which suggests social organisational participation as a main avenue to politics for women.<sup>13</sup> Kirkpatrick in an earlier mentioned study of forty - six women state legislators, found that more than 80 percent of them had been active in voluntary organisations before joining politics.<sup>14</sup> But the political women in Bangladesh only partially resemble the female politicians of other societies in their recruitment pattern. The proportion of political women recruited from social organisations is not substantially as great as mentioned by Kirkpatrick. Unlike their Western counterparts, many political women in Bangladesh followed different paths to politics. They became active in student organisations, and later graduated to their

<sup>11</sup> Numerous studies on this respect listed by Lester W. Milbrath in his, Political Participation (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1965). Also important, Norman H. Nie, G. Bingham Powell and Kenneth Prewitt, "Social Structure and Political Participation", American Political Science Review, 63 (June 1969): 361-378, 808-832.

<sup>12</sup> Marvin E. Olsen, "Three Routes to Political Participation", Western Political Quarterly, 29 (December 1976): 554.

<sup>13</sup> For example, Jo Ann F. Avel, "Political Participation of Women in Latin America", Western Political Quarterly, 158 (March 1981): 156-173; Ingunn N. Means, Women in Local Politics: The Norwegian Experience", Canadian Journal of Political Science, 3 (September 1972): 363-388; R. Darcy and Sunhee Song, "Men and Women in the South Korean National Assembly - Social Barriers to Representational Roles", Asian Survey, 26 (June 1986): 670-687; Edmond Costantini, "Political Women and Political Ambition: Closing the Gender Gap", American Journal of Political Science, 34 (August 1990): 741-70; Jean J. Kirkpatrick, Political Women, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1974).

<sup>14</sup> Kirkpatrick, *Ibid.*, PP.61-69.

respective parent parties. Thus, they entered party politics in the same manner as their male colleagues with some previously earned skills and competency.

On the other hand, the other political women of this study who were recruited from voluntary social organisations, entered the political sphere with less political expertise, since their community activities were not directly relevant to their attaining political skills. It is to be noted that, of 16 women with past nonpolitical organisational involvement, three had been active in All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA), the most important and largest women's organisation during the Pakistan time; three in women's clubs, 10 were in different co-operative societies and other consciousness - raising and income-generating groups.

It is noteworthy that voluntary social work in women's organisations is a socially accepted hobby of the affluent middle- or upper-class housewives in the urban areas of Bangladesh. Traditionally, women's organisations here carefully keep their distance from formal political areas and maintain an apolitical attitude. Most of these organisations do voluntary work, manage sewing and handicraft courses for women and other income generating activities. Only a few organisations, e.g., the Mohila Parishad (Women's Council), Bangladesh Mohila Somity (Bangladesh Women's Association), etc., are involved in organising and mobilising women in and around the women's issues and legal aid programmes. However, political women who were recruited from women's and voluntary social organisations, were mostly concerned with the former types of activities, i.e., voluntary social work. This type of work were less likely to provide them with skills for political roles. Thereby it can be anticipated that for these women, the competence and skills necessary for political office might have to be acquired as a result of party activity itself. Thus they differ considerably in previous political experience from those who came from student organisations. The latter might have an initial advantage in coming from the political sphere in adjusting and dealing with partisan activities.

## 7.2 Political Career and Experience

In order to describe the political careers and experiences of political women, information was collected on the length of their involvement in political parties, experience in assuming party and public offices and their participation in electoral contests. All these factors are considered related to the degree of professionalism an individual attains in politics.<sup>15</sup> This section will analyse the above factors to provide specific ideas about the intensity of the political involvement, political status and experience of the women political elites in Bangladesh.

### 7.2.1 Length of Political Party Involvement

The length of political involvement can be considered an important factor related to the present position of the political elites. It is the means by which political activists acquire political experience and gain their identity and seniority to go up the party's hierarchical stairs. Table 7.3 shows the distribution of respondents according to their length of party involvement since they were enlisted as members.

TABLE 7.3  
LENGTH OF POLITICAL PARTY INVOLVEMENT  
SINCE ENLISTING AS PARTY MEMBERS

Length of involvement	Male (N=40)		Female (N=43)		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Less than 4 to 10 years	4	10.0	11	25.5	15	18.0
11 - 20 years	15	37.5	17	39.5	32	38.5
21 years and more	21	52.5	15	35.0	36	43.5
Total	40	100.0	43	100.0	83	100.0

$$\chi^2=4.29, \text{ d.f.}=2, p>0.10$$

<sup>15</sup> Naomi Lynn and Cornelia Butler Flora, "Societal Punishment and Aspects of Female Political Participation" in *A Portrait of Marginality*, eds., Marianne Githens and Jewel L. Prestage, (New York: David McKay Company, 1977), P.146.



As can be observed, the largest percentage (39.5 percent) of political women have been party members for 11 to 20 years with the second largest percentage (35 percent) for 21 years or more. 25.5 percent fall into the less than 4 to 10 years category. Thus it appears that, the political women of Bangladesh tend to be seniors who have long been associated with the party politics; 74.5 percent of them can be classified as being in this sphere for one to two decades and more, although the modal category is 11 to 20 years. This length of time is generally in tune with their belonging to the country's political elites.

However, among the male respondents, 52.5 percent have been in party politics for 21 years or more, 37.5 percent for 11 to 20 years, and 10 percent for less than 4 to 10 years. The modal category for male respondents is 21 years and more, indicating that the majority of them are quite senior in politics.

However, some differences are evident between male and females in the above variable. If we take membership for 21 years or more, only 35 percent of the women fall in this category, whereas 52.5 percent of the male respondents claim that. In sum, compared to 74.5 percent of the political women, 90 percent of the male respondents are to be seen having involvement in party politics for one or two decades and more. Moreover, male respondents are less likely than political women (10 percent and 25.5 percent respectively) to have shorter periods (less than 4 to 10 years) of political involvement.

In spite of apparent gender-difference, three-quarters of political women share a similar length of time in party involvement with their male counterparts. However, the result of chi-square ( $\chi^2 = 4.29$ ,  $p > 0.10$ ), as shown in Table 7.3, indicates that there is no significant association between the sex of respondents and their length of party involvement. Thus the difference in total experience in party involvement between

male and female respondents is not statistically significant. Therefore, there are not enough grounds to conclude that male politicians of this study have a longer record of partisan activities than their female counterparts.

However, the majority of the respondents' long party career seems to be the logical consequences of the fact that a larger proportion of them were recruited from student organisations with an early start. Bangladesh's history as an independent state dates back to 1971. Those respondents in this study, irrespective of sex, who began their party lives in the late 1960s or early 1970s are likely to have more than 20 years of active participation in party organisations on their record. Thus, it appears from the data that more than half of the male politicians and 35 percent of the political women possessed approximately a quarter - century of political involvement. It is also to be noted that, both male and female respondents, who were recruited from the EPSL and the EPSU to their parent parties, have naturally longer partisan experiences.

Information was further collected about the length of respondents' present party involvement to get a more accurate idea about their longevity in party politics. It is important to note here that change of party loyalties by the politicians is a common phenomenon in Bangladesh politics. Such acts of party hopping happened more frequently in the late 1970s and in the 1980s, when all major and minor parties were fraction-ridden. As Hakim states:

"Since the military takeover in 1975, almost all major parties have experienced rifts in their rank either because of ideological or personality conflict or, in some cases, because of the irresistible desire of some self-seeking politicians to have a taste of power."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> M.A. Hakim, Bangladesh Politics: The Shahabuddin Interregnum, (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1993), pp.1-2.

Thus the incidents of changing party affiliation were most evident at the time when the military regime-backed political parties like the BNP and the JP were launched in 1978 and in 1986 respectively. However, of present respondents, only seven (16.3 percent) political women and nine (22.5 percent) male politicians reported their changing party affiliations.

As shown in Table 7.4, 46.5 percent of the political women have been active in their present parties for 11 to 20 years, 18.6 percent for 21 years and more, the same percentage for 4 to 10 years and 16.3 percent for less than 4 years. Thus the largest percentage of political women have been involved with their present parties for one to two decades.

TABLE 7.4  
LENGTH OF MEMBERSHIP IN THE PRESENT PARTY

Length of membership	Male (N=40)		Female (N=43)		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Less than 4 years	5	12.5	7	16.3	12	14.5
4 - 10 years	8	20.0	8	18.6	16	19.3
11 - 20 years	13	32.5	20	46.5	33	39.7
21 years and more	14	35.0	8	18.6	22	26.5
Total	40	100.0	43	100.0	83	100.0

$$\chi^2=3.35, d.f.=3, p>0.30$$

The data also show that the largest percentage (35 percent) of male respondents have been active in their present parties for 21 years or more while 32.5 percent have been involved for 11 to 20 years, 20 percent for 4 to 10 years, and 12.5 percent for less than 4 years.

The large magnitude of male respondents with longer association with their present parties clearly indicates that they are more likely to be ahead of political

women in terms of seniority. Of political women only 18.6 percent compared to 35 percent of males have been associated with their present parties for 21 years and more. The greater proportion of political women (46.5 percent) have records for 11 to 20 years of affiliation. Compared to them, a smaller number of male respondents cluster around that amount of time period. However, a marginal difference is evident between the percentages of political women and male respondents (34.9 percent and 32.5 percent respectively), who possess less than 4 years to 10 years affiliation with their present parties.

It is mentioned earlier that, seven out of 43 political women have changed their partisan identities. All of them have been active in party politics for 21 years and more. Due to changing party affiliations, their length of involvement in their present parties is relatively shorter. The smaller percentage of political women for 21 years or more longevity in their present parties than the corresponding percentage of total length of party involvement may be attributed to this fact.

Despite above gender differences in data, what is important is that, political women do not appear markedly disadvantaged in terms of the extent of present party affiliation, when in aggregation 65.1 percent of political women followed by 67.5 percent of the men have been active for one to two decades or more. The  $\chi^2$  value being 3.35, with  $p>0.30$  also indicating no significant gender difference in the length of present party affiliation as there is no significant association between gender and this variable. Overall then, if the quantity of political experience is counted in terms of the extent of longevity in politics, political women appear as many as men with more experience resulting from their long involvement in politics.

However, the concentration of political women in 11 to 20 years involvement with their present parties may be attributed to the fact that women leaders of the BNP

(included in the present sample) mostly have been attached with the party for 11 to 16 years. Some of them joined the party when it was launched by President Zia in 1979. Most of the political women of BNP came from voluntary social work or women's organisations with no previous political experience. Only a few have past experience in student politics.

Political women, however, from other parties in the sample are more likely to have longer attachment with partisan affairs. It seems consistent with the fact of their larger recruitment from the EPSU and the EPSL and joining party organisations immediately or few years after independence. Some entered party politics through voluntary party work and cultural activities. Most of these political women claim two decades or more longevity in politics.

Thus, overall, the findings presented so far on the length of party involvement indicate that like male politicians many political women were enabled to pursue and sustain their political career for a long period, which indicates their deeper involvement in Bangladesh politics.

### 7.2.2 *Age at Which Became Party Members*

The study also investigates the age at which political women became party members for the first time. The result of this enquiry may substantiate the findings of their length of political party involvement.

Table 7.5 shows that, many political women, like their male counterparts, started party involvement at a younger age - 25.6 percent of them were under 25 years compared with 30 percent of the males, and 32.6 percent of the political women compared to 45 percent of the men were in their mid-twenties to mid-thirties at that time. In sum, 58.2 percent of the political women are early starters in politics,

although the percentage for males in this respect is greater (75 percent).

However, marked gender difference appears in the case of those who had a later start, 41.8 percent of the political women contrary to one-quarter of men, started their party careers in their mid-thirties or at an older age. Still, in terms of age, the two genders do not seem to diverge greatly as the majority of the political women conform with their male counterparts in starting their party careers early. The  $\chi^2$  value being 2.72,  $p>0.30$  does not suggest a significant association between the gender and the age of starting political career. Based on this it can be suggested that there is no significant difference between the two sexes in this respect. The finding regarding the age, however, substantiates the earlier mentioned finding that the majority of the political women hold long political careers. It might be due to their starting party careers at a young age.

TABLE 7.5  
AGE AT WHICH RESPONDENTS BECAME PARTY  
MEMBERS FOR THE FIRST TIME

Age	Male (N=40)		Female (N=43)		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Below 25 years	12	30.0	11	25.6	23	27.7
25 - 35 years	18	45.0	14	32.6	32	38.6
36 years and more	10	25.0	18	41.8	28	33.7
Total	40	100.0	43	100.0	83	100.0

$$\chi^2=2.72, d.f.=2, p>0.30$$

It is interesting to find that 58.2 percent of the political women had started their party activities when they were between below 25 and 35 years old (see Table 7.5). This is the period during which women in Bangladesh society are intimately involved in child bearing, rearing and home-caring. Not only do political women

above differ from the general women in Bangladesh they also differ from their female counterparts in other societies who were found by researchers to be considerably older when they entered party politics.<sup>17</sup> The possible explanation for this can be, first, nearly half of the political women of this study had intensive exposure to politics at an early age, as shown in Chapter 6, which might have prompted many of them to make an early start. Second, political women who held party memberships through student activism might have started their party careers at a young age. They might have earned strong motivation and abilities from student activism to carry forward and to expand their participation to a wider reality. Third, an early start might also have resulted from the fact that nationalist movements in the then East Pakistan propelled many political women to partisan activities. All these factors seem unique in yielding different findings for political women in Bangladesh.

### 7.3 Experiences in Holding Party Offices

The political career can be analysed by the type of party office held by the respondents. The important indicators of political status - power and influence - are conferred by the parties themselves.<sup>18</sup> Thus the extent of attaining such status ingredients largely depends on one's position within the party hierarchy. Not only does the party position indicate one's political status, it also indicates his/her credibility in politics. It was stated at the outset that one of our interests is to know the experience of political women in the party organisation which may implicitly indicate their position and strength in the political arena. The focus on their present and previous positions in the party organisation and their experience in running party offices may throw some light in this respect.

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<sup>17</sup> See Review of the Literature in Chapter 2.

<sup>18</sup> Maurice Duverger, Political Parties, (Great Britain 1959), p.4.

### 7.3.1 *Present and Last Position in the Party Organisation*

Information was collected on the respondents' present and previous party positions and the length of experience in serving party offices. The dispersal of respondents among the various positions necessitated the convenient categorisation of present party positions, which are shown in Table 7.6.

The first category denotes the position in the central party organisation and the following category refers to the position in the women's wing exclusively for those female respondents who only hold offices either in the Central or District Committees of the women's wings of their respective parties. The first category includes those who belong to the higher party echelons at the national level such as the members of the Central Committees (CCs). Many of these respondents simultaneously hold other party positions, but since they all belong to the Central Committees they naturally fall into the first category.

TABLE 7.6  
PRESENT POSITIONS OF THE RESPONDENTS  
IN THE PARTY ORGANISATIONS

Position	Male (N=40)		Female (N=43)		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Position in the central organisation <sup>a</sup>	40	100.0	26	60.5	66	79.5
Position in the women's wing <sup>b</sup>	-	-	17	39.5	17	20.5
Total	40	100.0	43	100.0	83	100.0

Notes: a. Member of party Central Committee.

b. Leader of Central or District Committee of women's wing.

As an outcome of the sampling procedure used in this study, there exists gender-difference in the present positions of the respondents in the party organisation. Since the male sample of this study had been drawn from the CCs of the selected parties, naturally all of them currently belong to this higher echelon of their respective



parties (Table 7.6). The divergence in the present position is evident in the case of political women who were chosen from the different offices, i.e., party and public offices.

However, it can be observed that 60.5 percent (26) of the political women currently belong to the CCs of their respective parties. The remaining 39.5 percent (17) either are members of the Central Committees of the women's wings or hold key positions such as president, vice-president or secretary of its District Committees. However, according to the information provided by respondents in the questionnaire, among the 26 women who are members of the higher echelon of the main party organisation at central level, only four belong to the highest decision-making body of their respective parties. They constitute 15.3 percent of the total 26. On the other hand, 15 of the 40 male politicians (37.5 percent) belong to the highest decision-making body of their respective parties.

Additionally, not only are the earlier mentioned 17 women completely relegated to the women's wings, of the above 26 who belong to the main organisation, 11 are the leaders of women's wings at the central level and five of them again are the women's affairs secretaries of the central party secretariate. Thus, in aggregate, 28 out of 43 political women (65.1 percent) are more or less mainly responsible for women's affairs and running women's wings. It implies that women politicians in Bangladesh are mostly engaged in limited roles and activities among women.

However, information on the respondents' positions prior to their present positions presented in Table 7.7 shows that the largest proportion (44.2 percent) of political women occupied positions in the women's wings at district and central levels, 34.9 percent previously held different positions in the central party organisations and were also members of the Central Committees of their respective parties. The

remaining 20.9 percent held key positions or were members of the District Committees of their party organisations.

TABLE 7.7  
LAST POSITIONS HELD BY THE RESPONDENTS  
IN THE PARTY ORGANISATIONS

Position	Male (N=39)		Female (N=43)		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Member of Central Committee	27	69.2	15	34.9	42	51.2
Key position <sup>a</sup> or member of the District Committee	12	30.8	9	20.9	21	25.6
Leader or member of Central or District Committee of women's wing	-	-	19	44.2	19	23.2
Total	39 <sup>b</sup>	100.0	43	100.0	82	100.0

Note: a. President, vice-president, general secretary and other secretarial posts.

b. Excludes one male respondent who was directly recruited to his present position.

Of the male respondents, a majority (69.2 percent) of them previously belonged to the CCs. Moreover, 30.8 percent of the male respondents held key positions, such as, president, vice-president, general secretary, other secretarial posts and membership in the District Committees of their respective parties.

It appears that, the majority of the male respondents were associated with the central organisations previously as well as presently. It seems less true for political women. Table 7.8 shows that, the last party positions of 13 (50.0 percent) out of 26 political women who presently belong to the CCs, were in the central organisations and they also were members of the CCs. Eight out of 26 (30.8 percent) were the members of District Committees of their respective party organisations and five (19.2 percent) were the leaders of women's wings at central and district levels before they reached the present positions in the central organisations. Thus, 13 out of 26, are to be found with previous and present involvement with the CCs. In sum, 21 out of 26

political women were involved in the main party organisations prior to getting their present positions in the central organisations. Only five women moved from the women's wings to their present positions in the CCs in their respective parties.

TABLE 7.8  
LAST AND PRESENT POSITIONS OF POLITICAL  
WOMEN IN THE PARTY ORGANISATIONS

Last Position	Present Position					
	Member of Central Committee		Leader of women's Wing		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Member of Central Committee	13	50.0	2	11.8	15	34.9
Member of District Committee	8	30.8	1	5.9	9	20.9
Leader of women's wing	5	19.2	14	82.3	19	44.2
Total	26	100.0	17	100.0	43	100.0

However, the last party positions of 14 (82.3 percent) out of 17 political women who currently exclusively belong to the women's wings of their respective parties, were likewise in the women wings. Only two (11.8 percent) of them reported that they were members of the CCs previously and one (5.9 percent) was a member of a District Committee. Thus, it appears that the movement of 14 political women out of the above 17 from their last to present positions was mainly confined to the women's wings. All of these 17 political women, however, were elected for the reserved seats in the fifth parliament in 1991.

From the above data, it can be concluded that the experience of functioning in the main organisation attributes more weightage to the recruitment for the higher party offices. The experience acquired within the women's wings may have less bearing in this respect. This becomes more evident from the low circulation of political women from women's wings to the central organisations. The majority of the

political women who presently hold party offices at central level achieved that by their previous creditable involvement with the main party organisations.

### **7.3.2 *Length of the Experience in Holding Party Office***

From the information on the last position of political women in the party organisations, it appears that all of them previously held some sort of party offices. Although there exists differences in their ranks or in the level of organisations, but all of them were previously as well as currently active as party officials regardless of their positions in the women's wings or the main organisations. To be more specific, they can be identified as party officials. It also holds true for male respondents. Thus it seems feasible to find out the length of experience as party officials for both groups of respondents.

For this purpose, respondents were asked to mention the length of time they have held the present party offices. In order to obtain information on the total length of experience as a party office-holder, the respondents were further asked to mention the length of time they had held party offices since assuming any sort of party office for the first time. The data obtained from these inquiries are presented in Table 7.9. It shows the distribution of respondents according to the length of time they have held present party positions and their total length of experience in running party offices.

It can be observed that the largest percentage (32.5 percent) of political women have been holding current positions for less than one year to 2 years, 23.2 percent have been serving for 3 to 5 years, 21 percent for 6 to 10 years and the same percent for 11 to 15 years. Only 2.3 percent have been in their positions for 16 years or more. Thus it appears that, 55.7 percent of the political women have been occupying their present positions for less than 1 year to 5 years, and the rest (44.3 percent) for 6 to 16 years and more.

TABLE 7.9  
LENGTH OF EXPERIENCE IN HOLDING PARTY OFFICE

Length of present party office	Male (N=40)		Female (N=43)		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Less than 1 to 2 years	6	15.0	14	32.5	20	24.0
3 - 5 years	4	10.0	10	23.2	14	16.9
6 - 10 years	15	37.5	9	21.0	24	29.0
11 -15 years	5	12.5	9	21.0	14	16.9
16 years and more	10	25.0	1	2.3	11	13.2
Total	40	100.0	43	100.0	83	100.0
$\chi^2=19.03$ , d.f.=4, $p<0.001$						
Total experience in holding party office						
1 - 5 years	6	15.0	15	34.8	21	25.3
6 - 10 years	4	10.0	9	20.9	13	15.7
11 - 15 years	13	32.5	12	28.0	25	30.1
16 years and more	17	42.5	7	16.3	24	28.9
Total	40	100.0	43	100.0	83	100.0
$\chi^2=17.06$ , d.f.=3, $p<0.001$						

Among the male respondents, the largest percentage (37.5 percent) falls in the 6 to 10 years category. The second largest percentage (25 percent) is concentrated in the 16 years or more category while 12.5 percent are concentrated in 11 to 15 years. Fifteen percent of the male respondents have been holding their present positions for less than 1 to 2 years and 10 percent for 3 to 5 years. Thus, it appears that 25 percent of the male respondents have been occupying their present positions for 1 year to 5 years while 75 percent for 6 to 16 years and more.

The data showed that men have been more frequently holding their present positions for a longer period than political women. For three quarters of the male respondents the term ranges from 6 to 16 years and more compared to 44.3 percent of the political women. One quarter of men have been occupying their present positions for 16 years or more, followed by only 2.3 percent of the political women.

Moreover, compared to men, political women are more likely to have assumed their present positions recently, as 32.5 percent of them compared to 15 percent of the men have been serving their present offices for less than 1 year to 2 years. Obviously, however, male politicians are more advanced than political women in serving present party offices for a longer period. The result of the chi-square test also confirms a significant gender-difference in the length of holding present party offices by the respondents. There is a significant association between the sex of the respondents and this variable as shown by  $\chi^2$  value being 19.03 significant at 0.001 level of significance.

As a logical consequence, as shown in the same Table, male respondents also have longer total experience in running party offices than their female counterparts. It can be observed that the largest percentage (34.8 percent) of political women possess only 1 to 5 years total experience compared to 15 percent of the male respondents. Moreover, 20.9 percent of the political women compared to 10 percent of the men fall in the 6 to 10 years category. For 28 percent of the political women the length of their total experience ranges from 11 to 15 years and for 16.3 percent it ranges from 16 years to more. The corresponding percentages for men are 32.5 and 42.5 respectively. Thus the largest percentage of men (42.5 percent) claim the longer period (16 years and more), while the largest percentage of political women (34.8 percent) hold the shorter (1 to 5 years) length of total experience in running party offices. In summary, three quarters of the males possess a long record (11 to 16 years and more) of serving as the party elite, whilst 44.3 percent of political women command that. The  $\chi^2$  value being 17.06 with  $p < 0.001$  also shows that gender is significantly associated with respondents' party office holding experiences. It confirms the significant difference between men and political women in the extent of their experience as party office holders. Thus, it implies that in terms of party office holding experiences male respondents are far ahead of political women.

However, the findings on the respondents' total length of party involvement and their experience as party elites provide some important characteristics of the position of women in the Bangladesh political arena. Although it was found that political women closely follow their male colleagues in deserving a longer period of party involvement, for many it did not necessarily lead to holding party office for a long period as it did for males.

For example, when we compare the data of the respondents' total length of office holding experience with the data of their total length of involvement in party politics (Table 7.3), it appears that, of a total of 43 political women, 74.4 percent have been active in party politics for 11 to 20 years and more, but 44.2 percent of the total number of political women possess a longer record (11 to 16 years and more) of holding party offices. Conversely, the proportion of male respondents for the above length of party involvement is 90 percent, but their proportion for the longer length of party office holding experience is 75 percent. The difference between both variables for political women is 30.2 percent, while for male respondents it is only 15 percent.

Thus, the general assumption that the greater the length of party involvement, the greater the likelihood of being a party professional does not completely hold true for political women. It seems that, more political women than their male counterparts might have been active as apprentices or general members for a longer time. An apprenticeship is considered necessary for a prospective leader so that he can learn the organisational processes and other aspects of the party and demonstrate that he possesses the required abilities and the necessary commitment to the party's ideas and policies.<sup>19</sup> However, when we consider the percentages of total length of party

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<sup>19</sup> Henry Valen and Daniel Katz, *Political Parties in Norway*, (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1967).

involvement (Table 7.3) and total period of party office holding experience (Table 7.9), it appears that many of the men might have been directly recruited to the party offices without serving as a general member. Even if they had served, they might have done it for a shorter period. In fact, during the interviews many male respondents disclosed to the researcher that they directly joined the party offices at national or district level, but only a few political women had done the same thing. It may result from the fact that male politicians mostly had the advantage of leadership status from student organisations. They joined the party organisation with the resulting experience, leadership training and national fame. They might have been directly recruited or co-opted by the leaders to the party offices. In addition, it has been noted earlier in Chapter 5 that male respondents have a greater advantage in educational attainment and occupational experiences. As such, they might be more acquainted with their first party contact, and they seemed to have brought more expertise to their parties at the time of their entry and quickly acquired party offices. This might be one of the possible reasons why most of the male respondents possess long experience as party officials.

However, another fact can be mentioned here with regard to the office holding experiences of political women. Most of the political women who were to be found with party offices in the central organisations, with a few exception, might have gained that position without any competition with their male colleagues. According to the information provided by these political women during the interviews, they were either recruited as women's affairs secretaries of the central organisations or were co-opted due to the respective parties' need to provide some female representation. They held positions specifically reserved for women by virtue of being the leaders of women's wings or members and female leaders of party organisations at district level.



#### 7.4 Electoral Participation and Public Office Holding Experiences

Here the discussion will turn to the another dimension of the careers of political women - electoral participation. Up to this point we have concentrated on their intra-party positions and experience. Now the focus is shifted to their public office seeking behaviours and activities. Electoral participation is one of the means of pursuing and gaining power - a natural corollary of elite political participation. Motivationally politicians are distinguished by an unusual need for power,<sup>20</sup> or "natural greed for power".<sup>21</sup> Besides that, electoral participation eventually leads one to be concerned with the decision-making in the extra-party bodies. Thereby a professional politician always emphasises gaining power<sup>22</sup> and moulds his behaviour and career towards achieving that. Here the question is, what can we say about the office seeking behaviour of political women? And to what extent do they aspire to run for public office? The analysis will be limited here to political women's participation in the national or parliamentary elections due to several considerations:

First, none of the respondents are reported to have previously participated in other than parliamentary elections.

Secondly, the obvious place to look for women's real position in politics at the national level is in Parliament.

And finally, the present sample of political women consists of those who have been either able to attain higher positions in the party hierarchy through intensive political participation or achieve elite position by holding public offices at national level. Thus it seems feasible to investigate their past behaviours in seeking legislative

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<sup>20</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *The Comparative Study of Political Elites*, (New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1976), p.73.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Michels, *Political Parties*, (New York: Dover, 1959), P.205.

<sup>22</sup> James Q. Wilson, *The Amateur Democrat*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), P.4.

office and also to discover how far they are apt to pursue power through achieving elective public office in future. All information regarding participation in national parliamentary elections by political women and their legislative office holding experiences have been presented in Table 7.10.

TABLE 7.10  
DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF CONTESTING NATIONAL ELECTIONS  
BY RESPONDENTS AND LEGISLATIVE OFFICE-HOLDING EXPERIENCE

	Male (N=40)		Female (N=43)		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Member of the fifth Parliament (1991-1995)	22	55.0	28	65.1	50	60.2
Not held	18	45.0	15	34.9	33	39.8
Total	40	100.0	43	100.0	83	100.0
Previously held <sup>a</sup>	18	45.0	8	18.6	26	31.3
Not held	22	55.0	35	81.4	57	68.7
Total	40	100.0	43	100.0	83	100.0
Participation in electoral contest						
Has ever contested	29	72.5	11	25.6	40	48.2
Never contested	11	27.5	32	74.4	43	51.8
Total	40	100.0	43	100.0	83	100.0
Frequency of previous candidacy	Male (N=29) <sup>b</sup>		Female (N=11) <sup>b</sup>		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Once	10	34.5	7	63.6	17	42.5
Twice	9	31.0	4	36.4	13	32.5
Thrice and more	10	34.5	-	-	10	25.0
Total	29	100.0	11	100.0	40	100.0
Winning record						
Once	7	24.1	4	36.4	11	27.5
Twice and more	18	62.1	-	-	18	45.0
Never won	4	13.8	7	63.6	11	27.5
Total	29	100.0	11	100.0	40	100.0

Note: a Legislative offices held by the respondents before the fifth parliament (1991-1995).  
b Number of male and female respondents who have ever contested.

It shows that, 28 of 43 political women (65.1 percent) and 22 of 40 male respondents (55 percent) were members of the fifth Jatiya Sangsad (JS, 1991-1995), which was in operation during the period of field work for the present study. The

evidence presented in the same Table shows that only eight of 43 political women (18.6 percent) previously sat in the Parliament before entering the fifth JS. The rest numbering 35 (81.4 percent) had no experience in this respect before the fifth JS. The corresponding numbers for men are 18 (45 percent) and 22 (55 percent) respectively.

The respondents were further asked if they had ever been candidates for legislative office. The number of positive responses shows the percentage for males is 72.5 percent and 25.6 percent for political women. In contrast to 27.5 percent of the men, 74.4 percent of the political women have never contested for legislative office. Thus, marked differences appear between political women and male respondents in previous participation in electoral contests.

The data gathered in the same table, demonstrate the frequency of the respondents' previous candidature. Glaring differences are evident between political women and male respondents in this respect. Out of 11 political women who have ever contested in general elections, seven (63.6 percent) contested once and the remaining four (36.4 percent) contested twice. On the other hand, out of 29 male respondents who previously appeared in election contests, 10 (34.5 percent) contested once, nine (31 percent) contested twice and 10 (34.5 percent) contested thrice and more. Their winning record is also glaring. Out of 29 who have ever contested previous elections, 18 (62.1 percent) won twice and more, seven (24.1 percent) won once. Only four (13.8 percent) could not ever manage to get elected whereas, out of 11 political women who have ever contested, four (36.4 percent) won once, and the other seven (63.6 percent) had never won.

Thus, it seems that the drive for elective office and achieving it is markedly evident in the case of male respondents. They are much more likely to enter electoral contests and more likely to succeed in them than political women. Political women

remain at a greater disadvantage in these behaviours which are considered "keys to power within the parties"<sup>23</sup> and also in the wider sphere. Although the majority of them were members of the fifth Parliament, it can not cover the recurring gap, when only a few women resemble males in pursuing elective office. Only two political women out of 28 were directly elected by popular votes from single member territorial constituencies. The rest were elected by the sitting members of the Parliament for seats constitutionally reserved for women (it will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter).

The data analysed above reveal the more professional attitude of the male respondents towards politics. According to certain political scientists, the professional politician conceives politics in terms of winning an election or in terms of party interests and finds extrinsic rewards of power, income, status, or the fun of the game.<sup>24</sup> The frequent seeking of elective office and the glaring winning record of the male respondents may be suggestive of their professionalism and commitment to politics. It is only slightly pronounced among political women as only 11 (25.6 percent) of 43 have ever sought legislative office and four of them (9.3 percent) fought twice but managed to win only once. All these might lead us to deduce that women political elites in Bangladesh less often fashion a political career around the goal of public office.

However, more detailed information on women who have ever contested in elections indicates some other important aspects. Of four women who have ever won elections, two of them could not win their first elections. For example, they contested in the 1986 and 1991 parliamentary elections but managed to win the latter one. Of

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<sup>23</sup> M. Kent Jennings and Norman Thomas, "Men and Women in Party Elites: Social Roles and Political Resources", *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, 12 (November 1968): 469-492.

<sup>24</sup> Moshe M. Czudnowski, "Aspiring and Established Politicians: The Structure of Value Systems and Role Profile" in *Elite Recruitment in Democratic Politics*, Eulau and Czudnowski, op.cit., P.49.

the other two, one won her first election in 1979 but failed in 1986. The other woman contested and won the seat reserved for women in the East Pakistan Provincial Assembly in 1954, when the reserved seats (RS) for women were to be directly elected by the female voters of the municipality areas. However, she again unsuccessfully contested in 1979. All these four women have long-standing political experiences and are influential leaders of their respective parties. Still, it is important to mention here that except for one the other three started their parliamentary participation through assuming the RS for women who are indirectly elected by the sitting members of Parliament. Subsequently they fought for general seats to be directly elected by the voters.

Another important aspect of the political women's electoral participation is, they were more likely to appear in electoral contests only recently despite their longer involvement in partisan politics. For example, of eleven women with past candidature, eight contested in the 1991 parliamentary elections and only two won. However, of 28 political women who served in the fifth Parliament, only six had the experience of more than one or two legislatures. For example, one held Reserved Seat in 1970 and 1973 and was elected for general seat in 1991. Another one entered Parliament through assuming reserved seat thrice in 1973, 1979 and 1991. She also unsuccessfully contested for a general seat in 1991 and later on was nominated by the ruling party for RS. The remaining four women also came into Parliament through RS in 1979 and in 1991. Besides these few women, the majority (22) entered JS for the first time in 1991. However, women who entered JS through reserved seats all belonged to the party in power in the respective election year.

Based on the discussion above, it can be deduced that although the political women of Bangladesh constitute a part of the most politically active segment, except in terms of longevity in politics, they are the unequal partners of men. It may be the

reflection of women's generally lower status in every sphere of life in Bangladesh. Their lower rate of participation in electoral contests and success in them indicate women's more vulnerable position even at the elite level. It may explain the fact, why for most political women, a long involvement with partisan affairs does not necessarily produce a successful electoral career.

## 7.5 Political Ambition

The slender electoral participation of the political women does not necessarily indicate that they do not aspire to do better so in future. In recent years, the study of elite recruitment and political careers is increasingly paying attention to the political ambition and the decision to seek office. The students of political leaders have come to recognize that the study of political ambitions provides valuable insights into the dynamics of elite political behaviour.<sup>25</sup>

Here, an attempt will be made to examine political women's intention to achieve legislative office through participating in direct elections in the near future. It will indicate how far their ambition is different from men in this respect. If women among political elites appear less ambitious for election participation than their male counterparts, the paucity of women at the electoral contest may be a consequence of an "ambition gap" among women and men. It is true that wanting power is not a guarantee of its achievement nor an ambition necessarily a precondition for achieving that goal. Various intervening factors, especially "opportunity structure" and risk taking propensity<sup>26</sup> play their part in the unfolding of a electoral career. Nevertheless, it is asserted by the researchers that what political activists want from politics affects what

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<sup>25</sup> Pauline T. Stone, "Ambition Theory and the Black Politician", *Western Political Quarterly*, 33 (1980): 94-107. Joseph A. Scieszinger, *Ambition and Politics*, (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1966).

<sup>26</sup> Gordon Black, "A Theory of Political ambition: Career Choices and Role of Structural Incentives", *American Political Science Review*, 66 (1972): 144-59.

they get, that those with little or no desire for power and preferment are unlikely to achieve them.<sup>27</sup> The argument behind this assertion is, as Prewitt and Nowlin state:

“There is an “unfolding” element to the political career. An incumbent’s expectations of, and/or aspirations for, the future are relevant at a given stage of his career for his behaviour at that stage. Thus, the way in which he anticipates or hopes to structure his future constraints current behaviour.”<sup>28</sup>

The rationale of examining political ambition lies in the fact that ambition may drive one to prepare oneself for future goals. However, since the women in the present sample hardly contested in general elections for public office, an examination of their aspirations for future candidacy, on the one hand, may indicate their future goals and, on the other hand, their attitudes and beliefs in their own abilities and perceptions towards prospective opportunity. It may facilitate our understanding of the problems of women’s electoral participation in the following chapter.

Political ambition is generally defined in terms of the pursuit of public office. Past studies have defined ambition as aspiration for a higher political office and indicate as ambitious those who want to run for a different office than that they currently hold.<sup>29</sup> In this study the term ambitious refers to those who have aspirations for future candidacy in the national parliamentary elections. In the perspective of Bangladesh, electoral candidacy can be considered as an ambitious plan or desire for women as they have little tradition in this aspect. For male respondents also, desire for electoral contests may constitute political ambition as a successful candidature may

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<sup>27</sup> Costantini, *op.cit.*, P.741.

<sup>28</sup> Kenneth Prewitt and William Nowlin, “Political Ambitions and the Behavior of Incumbent Politicians”, Western Political Quarterly, 22 (June 1969): 299.

<sup>29</sup> Susan Carroll, “Political Elites and Sex Differences in Political Ambition: A Reconsideration”, Journal of Politics, 47 (1985): 1231-1243. Barbara J. Burt-Way and Rita Mac Kelly, “Gender and Sustained Political Ambition: A Study of Arizona Elected Officials”, Western Political Quarterly, 45 (March 1992): 11-25.

provide him with more credibility for greater achievement. Additionally, legislative office may broaden and facilitate the way for higher political recruitment.

A close-ended question was used to ascertain whether the respondents aspire to participate in direct elections for single member territorial constituencies. The responses provided for this question were "yes, definitely", "probably", and "no interest". In creating the ambition index, the respondents were coded "ambitious", "potentially ambitious" and "unambitious" according to their responses. Responses were classified as "ambitious" if the respondent declared an unequivocal intention to participate in electoral contests. Conforming with Prewitt and Nowlin's<sup>30</sup> typology, the middle category - the potentially ambitious - includes those who responded "probably". The third answer was classified as "unambitious" when these responses state no intention in unequivocal fashion.

The task of this analysis is to discover the extent of divergence in the political ambition of respondents. As shown in Table 7.11, the largest percentage (46.5 percent) of political women were found to be unambitious. They do not aspire for or have no interest in candidacy. However, 28 percent of the political women expressed that they would do so if the opportunity comes. The lowest percentage (25.5 percent) of political women has been categorised as ambitious. Thus, the data suggest political women's low aspirations for future candidacy, even though they have more likelihood to sustain such an intention as part of the national political elite.

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<sup>30</sup> Prewitt and Nowlin, *op.cit.*, P.301.



TABLE 7.11  
LEVEL OF RESPONDENTS' POLITICAL AMBITION

Level of political ambition	Male (N=40)		Female (N=43)		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Ambitious	24	60.0	11	25.5	35	42.2
Potentially Ambitious	9	22.5	12	28.0	21	25.3
Unambitious	7	17.5	20	46.5	27	32.5
Total	40	100.0	43	100.0	83	100.0

$$\chi^2=11.42, \text{ d.f.}=2, p>0.01$$

Moreover, the data shows that the ambition of political women is markedly more timid than that of men while men exceed political women by 60 percent to 25.5 percent in their intention for electoral participation. Less than one quarter (22.5 percent) of male politicians expressed an equivocal intention, followed by a significant minority (17.5 percent) with no ambition. The result of chi-square test also confirms a significant ambition gap between male and female. The  $\chi^2$  value being 11.42, with  $p<0.01$  suggest the sex of the respondents is significantly associated with their political ambition and hence political ambition varies according to gender.

However, what is evident from the findings above is that political women in Bangladesh have difficulty even imagining themselves as future candidates for the national elections as they are to be found largely not interested or with ambiguous intention. The other possibility is, they may be as ambitious as men but decline to express that because of perceived barriers or the less encouraging conditions surrounding them.

The ambition theory points to the previous or present office holding as a factor that is likely to influence political ambition.<sup>31</sup> It posits the importance of office

<sup>31</sup> Schlesinger, op.cit., P.9; Prewitt and Nowlin, op.cit., P.309; Carroll, op.cit.; Burt-Way and Kelly, op.cit., P.15.

holding experience in shaping additional office holding aspirations. The present data, as shown in Table 7.11, however, offer no support for such a proposition for political women of Bangladesh, and shows a substantial gender gap in ambition. Although 28 out of a total of 43 political women were Members of Parliament and the rest (15 women) have belonged to the higher party echelon during the survey, these office holding statuses do not reduce marked distinction between male and females in their aspirations for future electoral participation. Thus, contrary to what one might expect, political women are not motivated to seek candidacy even by virtue of having experienced office holding status.

It is to be noted that, out of 11 ambitious political women, as shown in Table 7.11, four have past experience in fighting in and winning elections. It seems that women may be ambitious if once they have achieved the basic threshold of election to a public office. It has been mentioned earlier that except for two, the rest of the female legislators of the present female sample entered Parliament through occupying reserved seats. In fact, women who entered the Parliament through reserved seats, often lack an extensive political base and have no experience in facing and overcoming the rigours and uncertainties involved in election contests. Thus, they may find themselves with less propensity for future candidacy. The concentration of political women among the unambitious category is also understandable as many of them are relegated to women's wings which are less likely to be considered as political stepping stones for election nomination for general seats. Moreover, existing examples of women's candidature and winning records are so meager that women can not be as ambitious as their male counterparts. During the course of the interviews political women opined that certain conditions prevent them from seeking nomination, which will be discussed broadly in the following chapter.

## Conclusion

This chapter tries to explore the political careers, experience and aspiration of political women by dealing with the process of their recruitment to the party politics, their longevity in politics, the extent of their experience in running party and public offices, their record of electoral candidacy and their aspiration for the pursuit of power through achieving elective office. The findings suggest some characteristics that distinguish political women of Bangladesh from female political elites of other societies. The distinguishing factors for political women of Bangladesh are their partial recruitment from political organisations to party organisations and their early entry and glaring longevity in politics. In all these respects they resemble their male counterparts. But salient differences appear among male respondents and political women in political status. In this respect political women conform with the past findings on women's disadvantaged position in politics.

The findings which so far have been presented in this chapter, suggest that, even at the elite level women of Bangladesh bear unequal status with men. If longevity in politics is considered an indication of political maturity and experience then they conform with men but in terms of other ingredients of political experience political women appear to markedly lag behind the male politicians of this study.

Although the majority of the political women currently belong to the Central Committees of their respective parties, they are found to be less experienced in terms of holding party or public offices. Compared to the male respondents, political women tend to have held less higher positions previously in the party organisations at the central level. They tend to have shorter lengths of experience in running party offices. They also less appear to have been contenders for a legislative office and succeeded in their endeavour. Overall, in terms of party position and drive for elective office, their political status seems lower than their male counterparts.

In addition, it is found that, of political women who currently belong to the Central Committees of their respective parties, a major proportion are either the leaders of women's wings or women's affairs secretaries of central party organisations. Moreover, the rest of the political women who do not hold any position in central organisations are completely relegated to women's wings and apparently are detached from mainstream party activities. Consequently, the majority of the political women are more or less involved in running women's wings and perform limited roles and activities among their own community. Thus, overall, political women are less likely to pursue their careers with close attachment to the main party organisations and their activities. It might be reflected in their lesser extent of experience in running higher party and public offices.

Perhaps the most important point to be noted is, although political women could sustain their political careers for a long period and many have ascended to the higher political ladder, they are less likely to show expectations for future candidacy. Political women's low desire for electoral candidacy in part, may be a reflection of their attitudes and belief in their own abilities. Such an attitude is considered an important factor which might affect the ambition to seek elective office.<sup>32</sup> However, their attitude reflects little of the competitive zeal for battle generally presumed to be a characteristic of the able politician. It may be, very few of them have reached their elevated status after keen competition with other contenders for the honor. Moreover, political women's aspiration may be thwarted by inherent limitations tied to their relatively weaker political position and relegation to the limited roles and activities in party organisations. As Schlesinger has argued, political ambition develops only within

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<sup>32</sup> Burt-Way and Kelly, *op.cit.*, PP.20-23.

specific contexts and the ambitions of any politician flow from the expectations which are reasonable for a man in his position.<sup>33</sup>

Schlesinger also attributes almost total importance to the structure of political opportunities as the cause of differentiation in political ambitions.<sup>34</sup> Political women's differing orientations are likely to be a result, in part at least, of their position in politics, from where they may view differently the opportunity structure for the realisation of their aspirations. However, the virtual absence of women candidates for all elective offices in Bangladesh may be suggestive of the fact that the opportunity structure is not equally open to males and females. Thus similarly, political women may find more impediments and fewer opportunities to realise aspirations and this is likely to depress their desire for electoral participation. It is therefore, important to identify the factors and the circumstances responsible for women's lower inclination to electoral contests. The next chapter will be devoted to dealing with this.

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<sup>33</sup> Schlesinger, *op.cit.*, P.9.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p.11.