

## CHAPTER 5

### POLITICAL WOMEN IN BANGLADESH: PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS

In most studies on political elites, the analysis of socio-economic background is instrumental in throwing the light into the nature of the composition and patterns of recruitment of elites.<sup>1</sup> The present study while focusing on the different aspects of political women in Bangladesh, also looks at their personal characteristics and socio-economic background. The background study of political women is of interest for the reasons that it may enable us to understand the profile of women actively engaged in Bangladesh politics at national level. It is interesting to know the type of women who are active in a field where few women enter. Moreover, a socio-economic background study is expected to broaden our understanding of whether political women in Bangladesh operate in the political sphere with advantages or disadvantages due to their demographic and socio-economic states.

Thus, one of the main objectives of this chapter is to describe the composition of and resource attributes possessed by political women in Bangladesh. To be more specific, this chapter intends to ascertain the distinctive personal characteristics and socio-economic background of political women as a group of women political elites in Bangladesh. Based on past findings we would expect that the often cited privileged socio-economic background of political elites would be pronounced in their cases. It can be assumed that the women political elites of Bangladesh are likely to belong to a higher socio-economic stratum with more urban backgrounds, higher education and affluence.

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<sup>1</sup> See, Donald R. Matthews, The Social Background of Political Decision-Makers, (New York: Random House, 1954); Henry Valen and Daniel Katz, Political Parties in Norway, (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1967); Robert D. Putnam, The Comparative Study of Political Elites, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976).

Another objective of this chapter is to determine the differences that emerge in relation to the backgrounds and characteristics of political women as compared to their male counterparts. Thus the chapter aims to test whether or not women political elites are different from male political elites in the demographic and socio-economic attributes.

Keeping the objectives in mind, the four main demographic and socio-economic factors to be examined here are:

- (1) Marital status,
- (2) Age,
- (3) Regional origin and background - the place of birth, the place of upbringing and residence;
- (4) Socio-economic status.

These factors will be studied under two heads:

- (a) Personal characteristics of political women.
- (b) Socio-economic status of political women.

In the analysis of the above factors, the expectation is that some of the backgrounds and characteristics of the political women of Bangladesh would be similar to those of female elites found in prior research elsewhere. Moreover, the differences or similarities in terms of backgrounds and characteristics between political women and male respondents of the present study are clearly discernible in the data generated by the questionnaire. The results of the pertinent findings are discussed below.

## **5.1 Profile of Political Women in Bangladesh - Personal Characteristics**

### **5.1.1 Marital Status**

Table 5.1 shows the marital status of the respondents. The most significant number of political women are married accounting for 83.7 percent of the female



sample. Widows account for 14 percent of the political women. Only one political woman (2.3 percent) is found to be single. Thus, the data suggest, including the widows, all political women but one are married. All the widowed political women except one were in their late fifties at the time of the survey. The only 'single' political woman in the female sample, was in her late forties and belongs to a well-off family with a well known deceased politician father. She is also the only one among political women reported to be lawyer.

TABLE 5.1  
MARITAL STATUS OF RESPONDENTS

Marital Status	Male (N=40)		Female (N=43)		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1. Single	2	5.0	1	2.3	3	3.7
2. Married	38	95.0	36	83.7	74	89.1
3. Widowed	-	-	6	14.0	6	7.2
Total	40	100.0	43	100.0	83	100.0

$$\chi^2=15.79, \text{ d.f.}=1, p<0.001$$

The chi-square value 15.79, with  $p<0.001$  confirms a significant association between the sex of the respondents and their marital status. There exists significant difference between political women and male respondents in their marital status. It can be observed that 95 percent of the male respondents are married compared to 83.7 percent of the political women. Moreover, two male respondents (5 percent) as against one political woman (2.3 percent) are single. No male respondent was found to be a widower in contrast to six widowed political women. However, between the two groups of respondents there were no divorcees.

### 5.1.2 Age of Political Women

Table 5.2 demonstrates the age pattern of political women. We find the largest number of political women clusters in the over 50 age group, constituting 48.9 percent

of 43 political women. Among the rest, 20.9 percent are aged between 46 and 50 years, and 30.2 percent of the political women are 45 years old or below. Thus the data indicate that about 70 percent of the political women are between the ages of 46 and over 50 years with a greater proportion of them (48.9 percent) representing the older-age group (over 50). It suggests a prominence of older females among the women political elites in Bangladesh on whom the present study is based.

TABLE 5.2  
AGE OF RESPONDENTS

Age	Male (N=40)		Female (N=43)		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
45 years or below	6	15.0	13	30.2	19	22.9
46 - 50 years	8	20.0	9	20.9	17	20.5
Over 50 years	26	65.0	21	48.9	47	56.6
Total	40	100.0	43	100.0	83	100.0

$$\chi^2=6.19, \text{ d.f.}=2, p<0.05$$

As shown in Table 5.2, political women and male politicians differ significantly in their ages. The  $\chi^2$  value 6.19,  $p<0.05$  also points to a significant association between the sex and the age of the respondents. It can be observed that while 85 percent of the male respondents are 46 to over 50 years of age, the same is true for only 69.8 percent of the political women. The proportion of males (65 percent) in the older-age category (over 50 years) is considerably higher than political women (48.9 percent). The opposite is true in the younger age category. Contrary to the second largest proportion of political women (30.2 percent), the smallest percentage of male respondents (15 percent) is seen to be 45 years or below. About the same proportion of political women (20.9 percent) and their male counterparts (20 percent) are in the age group of 46-50 years. Based on the above data, it can be said that the majority of the male respondents are older than

their female counterparts. The mean age, however, for political women is 49.6 and for male respondents 51.9 showing that the political women are younger than the male respondents.

Some inferences can be drawn from the data in Table 5.2 which indicates that a greater proportion of political women are advanced in age but are generally younger than their male counterparts.

The larger concentration of political women in the over fifty category can be explained by the length of their career patterns and their dependence on seniority. It implies that seniority and age are important factors to attain higher positions in the party organisation or for recruitment to public offices in Bangladesh. Higher political positions require substantive political knowledge and experience and these can be acquired as one grows older. It would be seen in the subsequent chapter that most of the political women tend to hold a long record of political involvement, which conforms with their age pattern. The age-pattern of political women is comparable to Matthews<sup>2</sup> and Lehman<sup>3</sup> who noted that the ages of political elites averaged between the late forties to the early or mid-fifties.

Another significant finding is that they tend to be younger than their male counterparts. It does not coincide with the finding offered by a large number of past studies that women politicians are somewhat older, on the average, than their male counterparts. Kirkpatrick,<sup>4</sup> Costantini and Craik,<sup>5</sup> Jennings and Thomas<sup>6</sup> found women

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<sup>2</sup> Donald R. Matthews, U.S. Senators and Their World, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960) p.13

<sup>3</sup> Harvey C. Lehman, "The Age of Eminent Leaders: Then and Now", American Journal of Sociology, 52 (January 1947): 342-356.

<sup>4</sup> Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, Political Women, (New York: Basic Books, 1974), p.38.

<sup>5</sup> Edmond Costantini and Kenneth H. Craik, "Women as Politicians: The Social Background, Personality, and Political Careers of Female Party Leaders", Journal of Social Issues, 28 (1972): 222.

<sup>6</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): 476-477.

political elites in the U.S., to be older than their male counterparts. Similarly, Camp also suggested the same trend for Mexican female politicians.<sup>7</sup>

The disparity between the past and present findings on the age of female political elites can be explained by the fact that some of the political women of Bangladesh may be new comers to politics compared to their male counterparts. This will be dealt with in the subsequent chapter.

### 5.1.3 *Regional Origin and Background*

In the behavioural studies on social background and elite socialisation, regional origin (determined by the place of birth and upbringing) has been treated as one of the important variables because region and localities are frequently suggested by the social scientists to be having some bearing on the political development of a person.<sup>8</sup> Here we attempt to explore the regional origin of political women. It will indicate which section of the female population of Bangladesh is represented by them. In addition, knowledge about their regional origin will facilitate our understanding of the political socialisation of women under study in the following chapter.

It is mentioned at the outset of this chapter that we would expect to find urbanised characteristics in political women. There are some reasons for this expectation. In Bangladesh, there exists a large disparity between rural and urban life-styles. Cities and towns are the generators of the modern patterns of life. Urban women, rather than their rural counterparts, enjoy greater freedom from the traditional norms of female behaviour and, perhaps more importantly, get greater exposure to alternative patterns of behaviour

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<sup>7</sup> Roderic A. Camp, "Women and Political Leadership in Mexico: A Comparative Study of Female and Male Political Elites", *Journal of Politics*, 41 (1979): 426-429.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1958), p.64; George Kahin, Guy Pauker and Lucian Pye, "Comparative Politics of Non-Western Countries", *American Political Science Review*, 69 (December 1955): 1025-27.

and to nontraditional roles, i.e., public roles, for women. Therefore, they have a higher likelihood of taking up an outlet like politics than their rural counterparts.

To elicit information about their regional background, respondents were asked to mention their place of birth, place of upbringing and place of residence. The data obtained from the respondents in these respects are discussed below.

### 5.1.3.1 Place of Birth

Table 5.3 shows five birth locales for respondents: Dhaka City - the capital and the largest city in Bangladesh, Chittagong City - the major port-town and the second largest city, district town, outside Bangladesh which refers to the cities of the undivided Indian subcontinent before 1947 and lastly rural areas. The birthplaces of respondents have been categorised into urban and rural areas, as shown in Table 5.3. Urban birthplaces include the first four locales.

TABLE 5.3  
PLACE OF BIRTH OF RESPONDENTS

Place	Male (N=40)		Female (N=43)		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Dhaka city	2	5.0	6	14.0	8	9.7
Chittagong city	2	5.0	2	4.6	4	4.9
District town	10	25.0	17	39.5	27	32.5
Outside Bangladesh	3	7.5	4	9.3	7	8.4
Rural area	23	57.5	14	32.6	37	44.5
Total	40	100.0	43	100.0	83	100.0
<u>Area of Birthplace</u>						
Urban	17	42.5	29	67.4	46	55.4
Rural	23	57.5	14	32.6	37	44.6
Total	40	100.0	43	100.0	83	100.0

$\chi^2=5.22$ , d.f.=1,  $p<0.05$

Table 5.3 indicates that the majority of the political women (67.4 percent) were born in urban areas while 32.6 percent were born in rural areas. Of those political women born in urban areas, 39.5 percent were born in district towns, 14 percent in Dhaka City, 4.6 percent in Chittagong City and 9.3 percent stated the cities outside of Bangladesh as their birthplace. Thus a substantially higher percentage of the political women perceived themselves as having been born in an urban area.

When we consider the male-female break up, glaring differences become evident in the figures representing the birthplaces of political women and male respondents. It is obvious that substantially more political women than males were born in urban areas constituting 67.4 percent of the former and 42.5 percent of the latter. Like the political women, however, a larger proportion of urban born males (25 percent) reported district towns as their birthplaces. Although more political women (14 percent) than their male counterparts (5 percent) were born in Dhaka City only a marginal difference exists between them in the other categories of urban birthplaces as 4.6 percent and 9.3 percent of the political women compared to 5 percent and 7.5 percent of the males respectively were born in Chittagong City and other places outside of Bangladesh.

A substantial difference, however, is evident between the percentages of political women and male respondents who were born in rural areas. More male respondents (57.5 percent) were born in rural areas compared to their female counterparts (32.6 percent). The data clearly show that the majority of the former group originate from a rural background while the preponderant majority of political women hail from urban background. The  $\chi^2$  value 5.22,  $p < 0.05$  suggests a significant association between the respondents' sex and area of birthplace. It thus points to a significant regional disparity in birthplaces between both groups of respondents, confirming the fact that political women are more likely to be born in urban areas than their male counterparts.

### 5.1.3.2 The Place of Upbringing

The respondents were further asked to mention the place where they grew up. The political women again show a predominantly urban orientation in this respect. Table 5.4 indicates that the preponderant majority (83.7 percent) of them grew up in urban settings - 21 percent in Dhaka city, 2.3 percent in Chittagong city and 11.6 percent in Calcutta city and Murshidabad town in West Bengal, India. The remaining approximately one half (48.8 percent) grew up in the district towns. However, only 16.3 percent of the political women were brought up in villages.

TABLE 5.4  
THE PLACE WHERE RESPONDENTS GREW UP

Place	Male (N=40)		Female (N=43)		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Dhaka city	6	15.0	9	21.0	15	18.0
Chittagong City	1	2.5	1	2.3	2	2.5
District town	11	27.5	21	48.8	32	38.5
Outside Bangladesh	3	7.5	5	11.6	8	9.7
Rural area	19	47.5	7	16.3	26	31.3
Total	40	100.0	43	100.0	83	100.0
<u>Area of Upbringing</u>						
Urban	21	52.5	36	83.7	57	68.7
Rural	19	47.5	7	16.3	26	31.3
Total	40	100.0	43	100.0	83	100.0
$\chi^2=9.39$ , d.f.=1, $p<0.01$						

On the other hand, 47.5 percent of the men were brought up in a rural setting. The rest, constituting 52.5 percent, grew up in urban areas, of which 27.5 percent were in district towns and 25 percent in the other cities and towns including the capital city.

However, the computed chi-square value 9.39 with  $p<0.01$  indicates a significant association between the sex of respondents and the area of upbringing which implies that

political women and male political elites differ significantly in terms of regional background. The proportion of political women (83.7 percent) with an urban upbringing is substantially higher than that of male respondents (52.5 percent). More male (47.5 percent) than their female counterparts (16.3 percent) came from rural backgrounds.

However, when we compare Table 5.3 with Table 5.4, some disparities appear between the distribution of respondents in places of birth and places of upbringing. We found that 32.6 percent of the political women were born in rural areas but only 16.3 percent grew up in their village homes. Similarly substantial differences can also be observed in the case of male respondents as 57.5 percent of them were born in a rural setting but only 25 percent grew up there.

The possible explanation for this incongruence may be that in the 1940s and the 1950s onwards the former East Pakistan (present Bangladesh) was rural in character with growing urbanisation. The urban Bengali middle class largely emerged from rural rich and middle class peasantry.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, it can be assumed that many of the respondents' parents belonged to that urbanised section of the rural rich peasantry, who started to live in the sub-divisional and district towns for their occupations or sent their children there for better education. Some of the political women said that although they were born in villages, they started to live in the urban areas from their early ages as their fathers worked there. Further, some of them stated that they were sent to towns for schooling, because of the scarcity of girls' schools in rural areas. Since village society rigidly disapproved of coeducation they had to go to girls' schools in town. Moreover, in the 1940s and '50s the urbanised strata of the then East Pakistan had maintained close contact with the rural society.<sup>10</sup> Many East Pakistanis who moved to the towns were

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<sup>9</sup> M.B. Nair, *Politics in Bangladesh* (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 1990) p.117.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*



more likely to return to their villages. On this point, the disparity between the data of the respondents' birthplace and the place where they grew up may have some rationale.

However, what is evident from the above discussion regarding the birthplace and the place of upbringing is that the political women are predominantly composed of those born and raised in urban areas. Moreover, it is also obvious that they are more likely to have urban origins compared to their male counterparts. Urban origins implicitly indicate the likelihood of their having urban based privileged family backgrounds which would be observed in the following chapter.

### 5.1.3.3 Residence

The data on place of residence of political women as shown in Table 5.5 further confirm their urban character as all of them are found to be urban dwellers. Moreover, about two-thirds (72.1 percent) of them are residents of Dhaka. The rest of the political women (27.9 percent) reside in district towns.

TABLE 5.5  
RESIDENCE OF RESPONDENTS

Place	Male (N=40)		Female (N=43)		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Dhaka city	37	92.5	31	72.1	68	82.0
District town	3	7.5	12	27.9	15	18.0
Total	40	100.0	43	100.0	83	100.0

$$\chi^2=5.83, \text{ d.f.}=1, p<0.02$$

Thus Table 5.5 discloses the fact that political women of Bangladesh are not only concentrated in the urbanised segment of the population, but also over represent the capital. It seems more obvious when political women are compared with the population

in general. Table 5.6 demonstrates that, only 19.6 percent of the total population of Bangladesh belong to the urban communities and 3.3 percent of them live in the Dhaka Municipality. In addition, only 18.5 percent of women in the general population live in urban areas, of which 3 percent live in the Dhaka municipality area. In contrast to these facts, 100 percent of the political women are urban dwellers and 72.1 percent reside in the capital city, Dhaka. In the light of these facts it can be argued that at the national level, the women political elites in Bangladesh mainly composed of urbanised and Dhaka based females who belong to a small segment of the population. This compares favourably with Camp,<sup>11</sup> Tapales<sup>12</sup> and Barry<sup>13</sup> who also found capital orientation among female political elites in Mexico, the Philippines and in the United Kingdom respectively.

TABLE 5.6  
DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION IN BANGLADESH

Area	Male (%)	Female (%)	Both Sex (%)
Rural areas	79.3	81.4	80.3
Urban areas	20.6	18.5	19.6
Dhaka Municipality	3.7	3.0	3.3

Source: Calculated by the researcher from Statistical Pocketbook of Bangladesh, 1993, (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 1993), pp.81,84.

Male respondents also show a predominantly capital oriented propensity (see Table 5.5). All of them are found to be urban dwellers - 92.5 percent of them are residents of Dhaka and only 7.5 percent live in district towns. Table 5.5 shows a significant difference between political women and male respondents in their place of residence. The  $\chi^2$  value being 5.83 with  $p < 0.02$  confirms significant association between

<sup>11</sup> Camp, op.cit., pp.431-432.

<sup>12</sup> P.D. Tapales, Women in the Philippines Bureaucracy. Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation (Northern Illinois University, 1985), pp.122-130.

<sup>13</sup> Jim Barry, The Women's Movement and Local Politics, (Aldershot: Avebury, 1991), pp.90-92.

this variable and the respondents' sex. More men (92.5 percent) than political women (72.1 percent) are found to be Dhaka-based. Compared to males (7.5 percent) more political women (27.9 percent) reside in district towns. It may be noted here that male-female difference in locality of residence mainly emerges because of the sampling procedure of females for this study (discussed in the research methodology section). The inclusion of female Members of Parliament to the female sample accounts for this difference as some of them live in their constituencies.

Despite the above gender-difference, the data in short, suggest the trend of Dhaka-orientation among both groups of respondents who are active in national politics. We have found that of those political women and male respondents who originated from the urban segment, a major proportion was born and brought up in urban places other than Dhaka city. But the findings of residence suggest a reverse trend when the larger majority of both groups of respondents are seen to be residents of Dhaka. This may be a natural consequence of capital based political activities in Bangladesh. All political parties are centered in Dhaka. Therefore, political activists who are the residents of this city might have more opportunities to find a place in the central leadership. Another reason may be that historically Dhaka has always been the centre of all kinds of political activities. The nationalist leadership originated in Dhaka city and all previous movements were organised and directed from there. For this reason there has always been an obvious trend toward Dhaka orientation among the political aspirants. Thus a heavier migration of male and female political elites from other parts of the country to Dhaka city becomes evident from our findings.

## 5.2 Socio-economic Status of Political Women

It has been mentioned earlier (in the review of literature) that in studies on social composition of elites, their socio-economic status (SES) has been treated as a major

variable. The discussion of SES may serve two purposes, first it will indicate the socio-economic background of political elites and secondly it shows the extent of resource attributes possessed by them. As such, socio-economic status is considered an indicator of resources - such as time and money - important for political activism. It also provides verbal and management skills - which permit the performance of political roles.<sup>14</sup> All these resources are more commonly associated with income, educational attainment and occupational experience - which are generally conceived as major components of socio-economic status.

Social scientists suggest that these three components are themselves highly intercorrelated, but they are sufficiently different to warrant measuring them separately.<sup>15</sup> Although using an "objective" index of class or status based on the above mentioned three components is common in social science research, here we will examine each component separately. We have found it difficult to construct a combined index of SES on the basis of respondents' education, occupation and income, when the majority of the political women were found to be housewives. We felt that an "objective" index might not be effective in assigning political women to a socio-economic level since, in Bangladesh, the socio-economic status of married women, particularly the economic position of their family, is largely determined by their spouses' occupation and income. Thus instead of using an objective index of SES, separate analysis of each of the components would be more useful to have a knowledge of SES of political women. Our assumption is that people who have more access to and achievement of these resources such as education, occupation and income, are members of higher socio-economic groups. This assumption is on the account that in Bangladesh society, the greater

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<sup>14</sup> Staryne Merritt, "Winners and Losers: Sex Differences in Municipal Election", American Journal of Political Science, 21 (November, 1977): 734.

<sup>15</sup> Lester W. Milbrath, Political Participation (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1965).

achievement of these resources is still confined in a small segment of the population as the opportunities are not available to all.

Moreover, it can be argued that each of the components mentioned above has both a social and an economic aspects which may indicate one's social and economic position in society. Since the educational opportunities are not open to all in a less developed society like Bangladesh, education becomes a social value which can separate a person from the rest. Moreover, in this society, education provides the skills that facilitate the acquisition of wealth which in turn confers status and power to a person. Occupation places one in a social hierarchy and determines the extent of economic resources, position of prestige and social esteem. Similarly income also can be considered an indicator of both social and economic position. Based on these facts it is our intention to examine and discuss each of these components separately so as to serve the purposes as stated earlier.

### 5.2.1 *Educational Background*

Education is an important dimension of social stratification that is considered highly correlated with political status both in developed or developing countries.<sup>16</sup> As Coleman points out, in all societies education has become the main, if not the sole, key to political mobility into elite status.<sup>17</sup> This is particularly more true for developing societies. In discussing political stratification in developing countries, Suzanne Keller concludes - "Formal education is the single most important entrance requirement into the higher circles."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See Putnam, *op.cit.*, pp.26-29.

<sup>17</sup> James S. Coleman. "Introduction: Education and Political Development" in Education and Political Development, ed., James S. Coleman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), p.26.

<sup>18</sup> Suzanne J. Keller, Beyond the Ruling Class: Strategic Elites in Modern Society, (New York: Random House, 1963), p.121.

In studies of women in politics too, education has been indicated as one of the strongest predictors of women's participation in politics.<sup>19</sup> A knowledge of the educational attainment of political women thus seems useful to understand to what extent they possess one of the most important attributes to attain an elite position in politics.

In the light of the above, the expectation is to find that political women of Bangladesh are likely to have a higher level of educational attainment. The respondents were asked to indicate the highest level of formal education they had completed. There was a total of six categories ranging from "below Matriculation" to "master's and other degrees" in the questionnaire. The last category refers to those who have received other degrees or diplomas besides master's degree. Table 5.7 presents the educational attainment of respondents.

TABLE 5.7  
HIGHEST DEGREE OBTAINED BY RESPONDENTS

Highest Educational Attainment	Male (N=40)		Female (N=43)		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Matriculation <sup>a</sup> and Higher Secondary <sup>b</sup> degree	2	5.0	12	27.9	14	16.8
Bachelor's degree <sup>c</sup>	13	32.5	11	25.6	24	29.0
Master's degree only	16	40.0	15	34.9	31	37.3
Master's plus other degrees	9	22.5	5	11.6	14	16.9
Total	40	100.0	43	100.0	83	100.0

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

- Note: a. High school graduate (after ten years of school education)  
b. Two years college graduate (after twelve years school education)  
c. B.A., B.Com., B.Sc., etc.

<sup>19</sup> See, Virginia Sapiro, *The Political Intergration of Women: Roles, Socialization and Politics* (University of Illinois Press, 1984), pp.89-92, 136-138; Kent L. Tedin, David W. Brady and Arnold Vedlitz, "Sex Differences in Political Attitudes and Behaviour: The Case for Situational Factors", *Journal of Politics*, 39 (1977): 448-456; Stephen Earl Bennet and Linda L.M. Bennet, "From Traditional to Modern Conceptions of Gender Equality in Politics", *Western Political Quarterly*, 45 (March 1992): 93-111.

It appears from Table 5.7 that political women are generally highly educated while 46.5 percent of them have attained a master's degree and 25.6 percent hold bachelor's degrees (B.A., B.Sc., B.Com.). About three-quarters (72.1 percent) of political women have received bachelor's to graduate degrees. Only 27.9 percent of the political women are reported to have had matriculation or higher secondary degrees. Thus the data suggest that the female political elites of Bangladesh tend to be highly educated.

The educational breakdown by sex for samples reveals differences as found in earlier studies. More men possess bachelor's degrees (32.5 percent) or have gone beyond that (40 percent) than their female counterparts, while 25.6 percent of the women are bachelor's degree holders and 34.9 percent have gone to graduate school for master's degrees. Further, more men have pursued their education beyond the master's degree or have attained other degrees than the political women while the percentage of men is 22.5 compared to 11.6 percent for political women. Taken together, the proportion of male respondents (62.5 percent) in higher educational categories (master's degree only and master's plus other degrees) is substantially larger than that of political women (46.5 percent). The reverse occurs in the category of lower levels of educational achievement (below bachelor's degree) as 27.9 percent of the political women compared to 5 percent of the men possess less than a bachelor's degree.

There is a significant association between the sex of the respondents and their educational attainment as shown by the chi-square value being 8.38 with  $p < 0.05$ . Thus this is to say that a significant difference does exist between political women and male respondents in their educational attainment. Therefore, there are enough grounds to conclude that political women are less frequently to have had higher education than their male counterparts.

The findings above, however, tend to confirm what the gender-difference in educational attainment in elite level cited in the previous studies (see review of literature) holds true for Bangladesh. Nevertheless, what is to be noted here that in comparison to past studies, the present study finds a relatively higher number of highly educated women political elites for Bangladesh. In terms of educational achievement political women do not rank strikingly low, as 72.1 percent conform with males in having had a higher education.

The educational attainment of political women, however, is especially significant in a society like Bangladesh where women enjoy little opportunities for higher education. In terms of their average education not only do they belong to the educated elite among women in general but among the entire population. It has been discussed earlier in Chapter 3 that the general educational development among the population of Bangladesh is low, which is again abysmally lower among females in general. Political women are, in fact, much better educated compared to people in general and hold an elitist character in terms of their average educational level.

Now we again turn to consider the other aspect of the educational background of the respondents. Table 5.8 shows that those political women who attained bachelor's and graduate degrees are predominantly university educated since 71 percent of them graduated from the universities and the rest from the colleges. Among university educated political women, the majority (58.1 percent) received their education at the Dhaka University - the premier and the oldest university in Bangladesh. Only 12.9 percent of the political women attended other universities and one of them went overseas for graduate courses.



TABLE 5.8  
INSTITUTIONS ATTENDED BY RESPONDENTS FOR  
BACHELOR'S/GRADUATE DEGREE

Institution Attended	Male		Female		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Dhaka University	24	63.1	18	58.1	42	60.9
Other universities <sup>a</sup>	5	13.2	4	12.9	9	13.0
College	9	23.7	9	29.0	18	26.1
Total	38	100.0	31	100.0	69	100.0

$$\chi^2=0.25, \text{ d.f.}=2, p<0.70$$

Note: Excludes 14 without bachelor's degree.

a. One male and one female respondent attended foreign universities.

However, marginal differences do exist between the figures for political women and men in the above variable. The value of chi-square  $\chi^2=0.25$ ,  $p<0.70$  does not suggest a significant association between the sex and the educational institutions attended by the respondents. As such there is no significant difference between political women and men in having had a university education. Table 5.8 shows that a slightly larger proportion of the men (76.3 percent) than political women (71.0 percent) went to universities for graduate degrees. Among them, 63.1 percent of the men and 58.1 percent of the women graduated from the Dhaka University. However, 13.2 percent of the men attended other universities and one of them attended a foreign university. Slightly more political women (29 percent) graduated from the colleges than their male counterparts (23.7 percent). Many of the women graduating from colleges stated that they came from district towns to attend Eden Girls' College in Dhaka city - the most prestigious residential government college in their time for higher secondary and graduate courses. Thus the political women of this study are from educational elite group, going to prestigious colleges and universities for graduate courses.

What appears from the above table is that Dhaka University was mainly the centre for higher learning among the respondents. However, men exhibit a greater

mobility, since most of them were born in rural areas but attended Dhaka University in large numbers. For political women, urban origin might have given them a greater opportunity to pursue higher education in university. Further, if we consider their age, it seems significant that most of them attended the university at a time when not only higher education was restricted for girls but social opposition against coeducation for girls was also much more acute than today.<sup>20</sup> It is noteworthy that in 1947-50, only 2.49 percent students were female in the Dhaka University.<sup>21</sup> In 1960-61, 8.76 percent were female students in the universities and only 12.9 and 13.4 percent in 1963-64 and in 1969-70 respectively.<sup>22</sup> Even in 1991, female students constituted only 22.6 percent of the total number of university students.<sup>23</sup> Contrary to these figures, 71 percent of the political women who have taken bachelor's and graduate courses attended universities. This would give an idea of their socio-economic status, thereby indicating their relatively liberal and progressive family backgrounds (which will be focused on in the following chapter). As has been noted in a study, in the late 1950s and 1960s onwards, the educated classes largely emerged from the narrow base of middle and upper-middle classes in society of East Pakistan.<sup>24</sup> Even today, university education for females in Bangladesh is elitist in nature compared to that of males.<sup>25</sup>

Another important point is nearly equal proportion of men and political women went to the same university and encountered the same environment. It might be relevant to their politicisation that the Dhaka University campus has been well known for student activism for a long time. Historically, it was and is still the main centre of student politics (it will be dealt with in subsequent chapter). Further, it can be assumed that, from

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<sup>20</sup> In Bangladesh, all universities are coeducational.

<sup>21</sup> Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh, (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 1992), Table 12.02, p.484.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Nair, op.cit., p.113.

<sup>25</sup> See the Educational Status of women in Bangladesh in Chapter 3.

the experience of university life, political women might be accustomed to working with the opposite sex. These shared experiences might have influenced their political involvement.

### 5.2.2 Occupational Background

Another important factor that determines the socio-economic status of the political elites is their occupation. Moreover, it is presumed to correlate positively with more elite forms of political participation.<sup>26</sup> It is further argued by the researcher in the context of women in politics that:

“Employment is a manifestation of social integration that may both reflect and contribute to the sort of self-confidence from which political women benefit as they contemplate activities more typically associated with political men.”<sup>27</sup>

TABLE 5.9  
OCCUPATIONS OF RESPONDENTS

Occupation	Male (N=40)		Female (N=43)		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Business	10	25.0	3	7.0	13	15.6
Legal profession	11	27.5	1	2.3	12	14.5
Politics	18	45.0	3	7.0	21	25.3
School and college teacher	1	2.5	12	27.9	13	15.6
Housewives	-	-	24	55.8	24	29.0
Total	40	100.0	43	100.0	83	100.0

$$\chi^2=57.13, \text{ d.f.}=4, p<0.001$$

Table 5.9 demonstrates the present occupation of the respondents. It shows that political women are evenly split between working and non-working, 24 out of 43 political women (55.8 percent) are housewives without any employment outside the

<sup>26</sup> See, Milbrath, op.cit., pp.124-127.

<sup>27</sup> Edmond Costantini, "Political Women and Political Ambition: Closing the Gender Gap", *American Journal of Political Science*, 34 (August, 1990): 757. Also see for good argument, Susan Weleh, "Women as Political animals? A Test of Some Explanations for Male-Female Political Participation Differences", *American Journal of Political Science*, 21 (November, 1977): 724; Kristi Anderson, "Working Women and Political Participation, 1952-72", *American Journal of Political Science*, 19 (August, 1975): 439-53.

home while 19 political women (44.2 percent) are occupationally active. The data again show that most of the working political women are in the teaching profession from school to college level, constituting 27.9 percent (12), and the remainder (16.3 percent) are dispersed in business (7.0 percent), the legal profession (2.3 percent) and politics (7.0 percent).

It is also interesting to note a glaring difference that is evident between political women and their male counterparts in occupational status. The result of chi-square test is  $\chi^2=57.13$ ,  $p<0.001$ . Thus this is to say that there is a significant association between the gender and the occupational status of respondents. This implies that there is a significant difference between political women and male respondents in occupational status. Males are frequently represented in the professions from which male politicians are traditionally drawn, such as law and business,<sup>28</sup> 27.5 percent of the men are engaged in the legal profession and 25 percent in business, whereas political women are vastly underrepresented in these fields, constituting 2.3 percent and 7 percent respectively. Moreover, in contrast to 27.9 percent of the political women only 2.5 percent of the males are in the teaching profession. Compared to political women (7.0 percent) a substantially larger percentage of males (45 percent) reported politics as their profession.

Thus the table makes it clear, for the most part of the working political women, the occupations mentioned above are not considered important in a political career.

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<sup>28</sup> Several studies show a linkage between certain professions and more active forms of political participation. Lawyers, especially, and businessmen are also likely to seek office and be active in other ways in politics. For details and a discussion of the literature on this area see, Milbrath, op.cit., pp.124-127. Also see Heinz Eulau and John Sprague, *Lawyers in Politics* (Indianapolis: Bibbs-Merril, 1964), Marianne Githens, "Spectators, Agitators, or Lawmakers: Women in State Legislatures" in *A Portrait of Marginality*, eds. Marianne Githens and Jewel L. Prestage (New York: David McKay, 1977). This trend is also evident in Bangladesh politics. Lawyers and Businessmen are the dominant and most politically active groups in society which largely provide leadership to the political parties and membership to the Parliament. For examples, see Nair, op.cit., p.117; Talukder Maniruzzaman, "The Fall of the Military Dictator: 1991 Elections and the Prospect of Civilian Rule in Bangladesh", *Pacific Affairs*, 65 (Summer, 1992): 203-224; Talukder Maniruzzaman, *The Bangladesh Revolution and Its Aftermath* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1988), pp.22-23, 28-33; Golam Hossain, *General Ziaur Rahman and the BNP* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1988), pp.47-48, 116.

Jacob has pointed out in detail the role certain occupations play in providing training in skills which are useful in politics.<sup>29</sup> One of the most repeatedly cited professions is the legal profession that imparts politically useful skills such as bargaining skill.<sup>30</sup> Thus one of the most important sources of political activists in most of the countries including Bangladesh is the profession of law.<sup>31</sup> Table 5.9 shows that more than half of the male respondents are engaged in the legal profession and business which imparts politically relevant resources whereas only four political women were in jobs (business and law) that could be said to provide skills that can be transferred to politics. This is not the distinctive characteristic of the political women of Bangladesh only as numerous past studies also suggest such occupational disadvantages for female political elites in other countries.

Another important finding to be explained is that the majority of the political women (55.8 percent) were found to be housewives. It does, indeed, seem to conform to the findings evident in earlier studies. A number of past studies indicate the predominance of unemployed housewives amongst women at the more active level of political participation.<sup>32</sup> The picture is not different in Bangladesh. Available sources suggest that 60 percent of the women legislators in the Jatiya Sangsad (national Parliament) of 1973 were full-time housewives with no employment experience.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, other sources suggest that 65.6 percent of the women members in the Jatiya Sangsad of 1979 were housewives<sup>34</sup> and in the 1991 parliament their proportion was

<sup>29</sup> Herbert Jacob, "Initial Recruitment of Elected Officials in the U.S. - A Model", *Journal of Politics*, 24 (1962): 710.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> See footnote 28.

<sup>32</sup> See Emmy W. Werner, "Women in Congress: 1917-1964", *Western Political Quarterly*, 19 (March 1966): 22-24; Ingunn N. Means, "Political Recruitment of Women in Norway", *Western Political Quarterly*, 25 (September 1972): 506-8; Jennings and Thomas, op.cit., pp.475-77.

<sup>33</sup> Rounaq Jahan, "Women in Politics: A Case Study of Bangladesh", in *Asian Women in Transition*, eds. Sylvia A. Chipp and Justin J. Green (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1980), p.230.

<sup>34</sup> Calculated by the researcher from *Bangladesher Jatiya Sangsad Shodoshader Jiban-Britanta* (Life-sketches of Members of the Jatiya Sangsad (National Parliament), (In Bengali), (Dahka, March 1981).

82.3 percent.<sup>35</sup> The reason for this fact may be employment outside of the home contributes to women's dual work burden, which can scarcely leave them time or energy for the more demanding forms of political participation. Only housewives could be said to have flexible schedules and free time for political activities.

The data suggest another noticeable finding that is, 45 percent of the men listed politics as their occupation at the time of interview as compared to a mere 7 percent for the political women. Most of the men of this category stated family business, rentals from real properties, etc., as their secondary source of income. Thus, it seems that a large number of men are likely to be self-employed. The significance of self-employment for political activism is explained by Jennings and Farah in these words:

"Self-employment does not automatically confer high status, but it does have clear implications for control over one's time a valuable resource that can be converted into political advantage."<sup>36</sup>

It can be argued that male respondents might largely find a pathway to political achievement by utilising their self-employed jobs, such as business or legal profession. On the contrary, political women are far less likely to be found in these, as the avenues for self-employment are not wide for women in Bangladesh society. Thus, the gender-difference in occupational status as seen in the present study can be partly explained by the fact of the different occupational roles of women as compared to men in society at large.

It has been noted before in Chapter 3 that women in Bangladesh generally lag behind men in professional (i.e. law) and technical education. These disciplines are

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<sup>35</sup> Calculated by the researcher from Ahmadullah ed., *Pancham Jatiya Sangsad Shodosh-Pramannva Grontho* (Members of Fifth Jatiya Sangsad - The Life-sketches) (In Bengali), (Dhaka: Shuchai Publications, 1992).

<sup>36</sup> M. Kent Jennings and Barbara G. Farah, "Social Roles and Political Resources: An Over-Time Study of Men and Women in Party Elites", *American Journal of Political Science*, 25 (August, 1981): p.467.

traditionally considered suitable for men. Moreover, certain occupations - such as marketing and trade - are culturally prohibited for women. That is why, political women are generally underrepresented in those occupations (i.e., legal profession, business, etc.), which are widely assumed as compatible with political careers. Another possible explanation is, women who are employed in the professional and other prestigious occupations in Bangladesh, may be unwilling to become politically active because of their dual burden as homemakers and working women. Political activism causes much stress or triple burden which many career women may not be willing to accept. The above facts may explain the occupational disparity between political women and male respondents and the prominence of housewives among the political women of this study.

### 5.2.3 *Income*

As part of the enquiring socio-economic status of political women respondents were asked to indicate their monthly family income. Information obtained from them is presented in Table 5.10. It shows that the largest percentage of political women (37.3 percent) have family incomes ranging from Taka 16,000 to 20,000 per month, closely followed by 34.8 percent having a monthly income of Taka 25,001 and above, while for 4.7 percent it ranges from Taka 21,000 to 25,000. The same proportion (11.6 percent) of political women cluster in Taka 5,000 to 10,000 and Taka 11,000 to 15,000 income categories. Thus the data suggest, more than three-quarters (76.8 percent) of the political women have monthly incomes of Taka 16,000 and over, the remainder (23.2 percent) were reported to have family income of Taka 15,000 and less than that. Thus the findings suggest that the preponderant majority of the political women come from higher income groups.

Judged by the economic status of the general population, political women belong to the economically privileged group in society. In Bangladesh, the average per capita

income is Taka 8,800 (US\$220),<sup>37</sup> and the legal maximum for salaries is fixed at Taka 12,000 a month. Against this background, this study found that 76.8 percent of the political women have monthly income of Taka 16,000 and more; among them 34.8 percent have that of Taka 25,001 and above. Thus, it seems that political women have much more affluence than the population in general. This finding is seemingly noteworthy, when a direct relationship between family income and the involvement in more active politics has been found for women in politics. As Lee concludes:

“For women, family income plays a special role in their ability to participate in politics. Its importance probably lies in the fact that money gives a woman the financial wherewithal to replace herself at home. Thus women of higher income groups devoted more time in politics.”<sup>38</sup>

TABLE 5.10  
FAMILY INCOME (MONTHLY) OF RESPONDENTS

Monthly Income (in Taka)	Male (N=40)		Female (N=43)		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
5,000 - 10,000	7	17.5	5	11.6	12	14.4
11,000 - 15,000	2	5.0	5	11.6	7	8.4
16,000 - 20,000	11	27.5	16	37.3	27	32.6
21,000 - 25,000	6	15.0	2	4.7	8	9.6
25,001 and above	14	35.0	15	34.8	29	35.0
Total	40	100.0	43	100.0	83	100.0

$$\chi^2=5.44, \text{ d.f.}=4, p<0.20$$

There is no significant association between the sex of respondents and their monthly family income, as shown by the chi-square value being  $\chi^2=5.44$ , with  $p<0.20$ .

<sup>37</sup> World Tables 1995 (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, May 1995).

<sup>38</sup> Marcia M. Lee, "Toward Understanding Why Few Women Hold Public Office: Factors Affecting the Participation of Women in Local Politics" in A Portrait of Marginality ed., Marianne Githens and Jewel L. Prestage (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1977), pp.123-124.



As such, there is no significant difference between political women and their male counterparts in family income. The data show, about the same proportion (35 percent) of both groups of respondents have monthly incomes of Taka 25,001 and above. Although more men (15 percent) than political women (4.7 percent) cluster in the Taka 21,000 to 25,000 category, the reverse is true in case of the Taka 16,000 to 20,000 category, where more political women (37.3 percent) than their male counterparts (27.5 percent) belong to this range of income. Further, more men (17.5 percent) in proportion to the political women (11.6 percent) are noted to belong to the lower income category (5,000 to 10,000 Taka). Aggregately, more than three-quarters of both groups of respondents (77 percent) have monthly incomes ranging from Taka 16,000 to 25,001 and above, of which the major proportion (35 percent) again belongs to the highest income category (Taka 25,001 and above). In the light of these facts, it can be argued that the political women and male respondents in this study tend to belong to a higher income group and consequently represent the higher socio-economic strata of Bangladesh society.

What is important to note here is that although political women were found less frequently to have had higher educational attainment and occupational status than their male counterparts, in terms of family income political women do not appear at a disadvantage to male respondents. Thus the present findings on family income, do not conform with the findings of Jennings and Thomas,<sup>39</sup> Jennings and Farah,<sup>40</sup> Costantini and Craik<sup>41</sup> who suggest that in the U.S., women political elites come from lower income groups than their male counterparts. Obviously the political women of Bangladesh enjoy more advantages derived from their higher family income than their sisters in other societies.

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<sup>39</sup> Jennings and Thomas, *op.cit.*, pp.477-478.

<sup>40</sup> Jennings and Farah, *op.cit.*, pp.463-469.

<sup>41</sup> Costantini and Craik, *op.cit.*, pp.219-222.

### 5.2.4 *Status of Husbands*

The privileged family backgrounds of political women become more obvious when we look at their husbands' educational and occupational status. As stated before, among the ascribed criteria, married women's socio-economic status is largely determined by their husbands' social position and attainments. The female respondents were asked to mention their husbands' educational qualifications and occupations. We find that the husbands of most of the political women are well-placed in society with high educational and occupational attainment. As shown in Table 5.11, 97.7 percent of them either hold bachelor's or graduate degrees with 42.9 percent having bachelor's degrees (B.A./B.Com./B.Sc.) and 54.8 percent having master's degrees. Only one has a higher secondary degree (two years college degree). Thus the data suggest that political women tend to have well educated husbands. Since a majority of the political women were found to be better educated, therefore, it is quite natural that their husbands would be highly educated.

The educational achievements of the spouses of political women precisely correspond with their employment status (see Table 5.12) since they tend to hold prestigious occupations. Among them, 38.1 percent are businessmen, 26.2 percent are engaged in professional jobs - such as the legal profession and engineering - and 16.7 percent also occupy notable positions in different categories of fields such as, industrialists, university teachers and senior government officials. The 'other' category represents 7.1 percent, which refers to journalists and executives in private offices. However, 11.9 percent of the political women listed politics as their husbands' occupations. Overall, the data suggest a higher occupational status for the spouses of political women.

TABLE 5.11  
EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS OF  
HUSBANDS OF POLITICAL WOMEN

Level of Education	No.	%
Higher Secondary degree <sup>a</sup>	1	2.3
Bachelor's degree <sup>b</sup>	18	42.9
Master's degree	23	54.8
Total	42	100.0

Note: Excludes one single political woman.

a. Two years college graduate.

b. B.A., B.Com., B.Sc., etc.

TABLE 5.12  
OCCUPATIONS OF HUSBANDS OF POLITICAL WOMEN

Occupation	No.	%
Business	16	38.1
Industrialist	2	4.8
University teacher	2	4.8
Legal profession	6	14.3
Engineer	5	11.9
Senior government official	3	7.1
Politics	5	11.9
Others <sup>a</sup>	3	7.1
Total	42	100.0

Note: Excludes one single political woman.

a. Others refer to journalist and executive in private office.

Thus the findings of the spouses' occupational background seem consistent with political women's economic standing. Moreover, the findings suggest that through their spouses, political women enjoy a distinct social esteem together with affluence which is reflected in their family income. Their husbands' educational attainment and occupational status obviously indicate their position in the privileged section of Bangladesh society which might facilitate their political achievements. Their spouses' status might provide them with financial and moral support, let them free from working and give them adequate time to pursue an interest in politics. It may explain why the majority of the political women do not have occupational involvement.

## Conclusion

The findings in this chapter highlight the personal characteristics and socio-economic backgrounds of the women political elites in Bangladesh. Several conclusions can be reached from these findings. As a group, political women possess most of the expected attributes of political elites except occupational resources. They are elitist in nature on the grounds of their socio-economic backgrounds and represent a certain strata of society. They tend to belong to the urbanised segment in society. Their education is far better than that of the average male or female in Bangladesh. Their family status is also atypical with higher income and tend to be socio-economically advantaged compared to the population as a whole. Clearly, women in higher political offices are disproportionately drawn from educated, affluent, urbanised, and capital based female population of Bangladesh.

On the comparison between political women and a comparable male group, this study has significant findings. Political women are different from the men in comparable positions although they share some characteristics.

In contrast to past studies, the findings of personal characteristics of the respondents suggest that political women tend to be younger than male respondents. They are more prone to originate from a urbanised segment of population than their male counterparts. However, the opposite occurs in the educational and occupational status of respondents.

The study finds that like their female counterparts in other societies, political women of Bangladesh are less frequently to have had higher educational and occupational achievements than the men. Though the majority of political women are found to be highly educated, their proportion is lower than their male colleagues. Moreover, in terms of occupational status they are significantly different from the latter.

The majority of political women are noted to be housewives and the rest are generally concentrated in the teaching profession. Unlike men, their occupations are not those usually considered to confer politically useful skills on its practitioners. They are generally married to successful men who are well placed in society.

Thus, political women are less likely to show the conventional correlation between certain professions and political participation, while they are far less likely to engage in or come from gateway occupations i.e., legal profession, business, etc., that are considered compatible with political career.

From the above it appears that women political elites in Bangladesh operate in a sphere which is traditionally male dominated with lesser resources attributed by their relatively less education and low occupational status compared to their male counterparts.

Contrary to occupational disadvantages, the findings of family income indicate the advantageous position of political women. The findings suggest no significant differences between political women and male respondents in this respect and confirm that both groups tend to belong to the higher income groups of Bangladesh society. In this respect, the political women of Bangladesh appear different from their female counterparts of other countries, who were repeatedly found to belong to lower income groups than their male counterparts.

Finally, despite some gender-differences shown by data in certain socio-economic factors, as a group of female political elites of Bangladesh political women hold distinct characteristics. From the discussion of these characteristics presented in this chapter, several significant conclusions about women at the national level politics in Bangladesh can be reached. First, the usual pattern of urban bias in political representation is obvious among political women. Secondly, their better education may offer some evidence that

educated women usually choose politics as an outlet for the furtherance of their objectives. Thirdly, the elitist nature of the women political leadership can be explained by the fact that it may also be an important factor in getting women into a higher position. Advantages accompanying affluence might have facilitated their political achievements by providing them financial support and adequate time to pursue political careers. Additionally, the socio-economic status of their spouses might have helped them to overcome the barriers presumably created by their own sex.