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Electioneering for Union Parishad Membership by Woman Candidates

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Summary

✓ For the first time in December 1997 the woman members in their reserved seats in the Union Parishad (UP) were elected through universal adult franchise in Bangladesh. ✓ The paper studies the electioneering for UP membership by woman candidates for their reserved seats in a Thana of Bogra district. It also includes a brief case-study of the candidates of a selected UP. ✓ The major objectives of the study were to document the socio-economic background of the candidates and examine the nature and dimensions of their electioneering campaign. ✓ As logical consequences relevant factors were also recorded and examined like: objectives for contest for membership, campaign strategies, voters' general responses and reactions on women's candidature and their expectations from the elected candidates.

✓ Majority of both candidates and the elected ones belonged to small and medium farm families but the relative rate of success was high among the candidates belonging to small farm families. Majority of the candidates were aged between 30-39 years, moderately educated (classes VI-X), muslims, occupationally housewives and had 2-3 children. But no clear trend was found either among the candidates or the elected ones regarding their family income. ✓

Basically their close relations, family-friends and fellow villagers encouraged them to go for membership contest. A few of them had previous exposures in formal public service. No clear indication was found about their relationship with existing local level leadership structure. Actually no political-party-line based ideologies but noble wishes of working for the development of rural people; with focus on safeguarding the legal and social rights of the women and their overall development were their main agenda of discussion during electioneering. *UP*

✓ Generally speaking, the voters in the study villages welcomed the newly created provision for direct election of women members in their reserved seats in the UP. They also supported the women's participation in the overall electioneering processes. The constituency for the women's reserved seats was, in fact, a cluster of three general wards of UP. Besides that fact, the woman candidates suffered from: lack of adequate money, material and human resources and restriction on physical movement for canvassing. But notwithstanding these limitations, they made the most efficient and diversified utilization of their available scarce resources. This innovative process of election, if followed in the right direction, will accelerate the pace of women's participation in micro-level politics, empowerment and consequently overall development.