

Freedom of Women's Voting Rights: A Study on Char Fassion Upazila, Bhola

Md. Mynul Islam

Assistant professor, Political Science, OSD, DSHE, Dhaka.
and

Ph.D. Fellow, Institute of Bangladesh Studies, Rajshahi University.

Abstract: Voting Right is one of the main criteria for women's political empowerment. The study was concerned about whether women exercised their voting right independently or how women voted. The main purpose of the present study is to make women aware of the right and importance of exercising their right to vote. This survey will examine whether women exercise their voting right independently or whether they vote under the direction of a family member or husband or guardian or whether they vote using their judgment. This survey has identified the type of awareness about women's Voting Right in Bangladesh. In a democracy, voting is an equal responsibility for men and women. If they do not vote for their own decision, then in reality our democracy is half full, half empty. As a survey area, I have selected char Fassion Upazila of Bhola district which represents most of the Upazila of Bangladesh. To know the importance of views on the exercise of women's Voting Right a sample of 200 respondents were selected randomly from char Fassion Upazila through multistage sampling technique. Mainly this study is qualitative but to make the study more explicit the quantitative method also used. And the interview was taken through open- ended and close-ended question. The findings of study have consistency with the set objectives.

Keywords — Voting Rights, Voting, Women, Freedom, Political Empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

Voting is the best way for women to participate in politics, because people can directly support or reject a political decision through voting. Women can play a role first in law making and policy making and later in development implementation (Nazimunnessa Mahtab: 2007). Women also have the right to vote. Without the right to vote, women do not have the right to express their views. One of the main rights of women is to exercise their right to vote freely. New Zealand women gained their first suffrage in the world in 1893(Malaka Begum: 2000). In Europe, Finland women gained the right to vote in 1907. As the second country in Europe, Norwegian women got the right to vote in 1913.

Women in Canada got the right to vote in 1917, women in the United Kingdom in 1917 and women in the United States in 1920(Zoe Miller: 2020). The women of the subcontinent got their first suffrage in 1935 under the Government of Indian Act, 1935. The women of Bangladesh then got their first suffrage in 1935 as part of British India (Malaka Begum: 2000).The United Nations has been promoting women's suffrage since World War II, and in 1981, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women recognized women's suffrage as a fundamental right among the 189 member states of the United Nations (Ciroronjon Sarker: 2010). After the end of British rule and exploitation and the independence of Bangladesh after Pakistani rule and exploitation, the

women of Bangladesh exercised their voting right for the first time on 7 March 1973 (Md. Samsuddin et al.:2017). But most women in Bangladesh and housewives are not aware of the right and importance of proper exercise of the voting right. As a result, there is no evidence that they are able to vote independently by choosing their preferred candidate. If the number of women voters is not very low and in their own opinion voting is almost absent in the case of women. As a result, democracy in Bangladesh is in fact half full, half zero (Cironjon Sarker: 2010).

In most cases, the power of women in Bangladesh to exercise their voting right freely is limited and controlled. In this case, the women of the rural society are much more unaware and under control. They do not understand the relationship between elections and voting with democracy. They are not motivated by the idea and values that voting is a duty of the citizens and a proof of citizenship. In most cases, they are influenced by their husbands and children. Women do not have the power to elect representatives through the exercise of their own judgment. In many cases, conservatism and bigotry, violence, coercion by influential quarters discourage women's suffrage. On the other hand, dependence on men, lack of economic independence, confinement in the home corner, veil system, lack of awareness, lack of education, etc. act as barriers to women's suffrage. Poverty and ill-gotten gains affect women's free suffrage.

This survey will explore some of the factors that influence women to exercise their voting right independently. That is, whether women's opinion matters in the exercise of suffrage.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the present study is to verify women's freedom of expression in the exercise of voting right in Bangladesh, especially to check the opinion of the women of Char Fasson Upazila under Bhola district.

The specific objectives of the research are:-

1. To verify the attitude of women in voting.
2. To analyze of women's behaviour in the exercise of voting.
3. To analyse whether women are influenced in the exercise of voting.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Voting:

Voting is a democratic means or method of expressing one's own opinion or public opinion. A vote is required to make a decision in a meeting or election. The one who casts the vote is known as the voter.

Elections

Elections are a process by which the people's representatives are selected by receiving and receiving public opinion through voting on the ballot. Elections are a prerequisite for the establishment of democracy which plays a significant role in institutionalizing democracy. Elections are considered to be one of the major areas of the political system.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women:

The UN General Assembly enacted the Declaration convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on 18 December 1979 to achieve equality in all fields. It is called the International Bill of Rights for Women. This guarantee is for women also considered as 'human rights'. This Charter expresses its commitment to eliminate inequality in all cases through the provision of equality between men and women.

Article 2 States Parties condemn discrimination against women in all its forms, agree to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating discrimination against women and Article 7 States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the

country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right:

(a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;

(b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;

(c) To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.

Moreover Article 8 covers the elimination of discrimination against Women's political participation in the international arena.

However, the Bangladesh constitutional Guarantees ensure that women of Bangladesh possess full political rights with men.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Description of the Research Area



[Source: Banglapedia]

The present study has selected an upazila which is called Char Fasson. Char Fasson Upazila is under Bhola District. There are four police stations, one municipality and 21 unions under this upazila. It is mainly based on agriculture and fisheries. The area

of this Upazila is 1440.04 sq km. According to the 2001 Bangladesh census total Population of this Upazila is 4,56,437. Males constituted 51.49% of the population, and females 48.51%. The population aged 18 or over was 148,319. Char Fasson had an average literacy rate of 37.8 % (7+ years), compared to the national average of 32.4%. Except a few ones there are 280 government primary schools, 68 secondary school, 12 colleges and 80 Madrasha under the upazila. 75% of the population is mainly engaged in agriculture, Jobs 4.45%, business 10.44% and other occupations 10.11%. According to 2018 national election total voter is 3, 68,553. There are 650 mosques and 35 temples here.

Sources of the Data

Data were collected from primary sources as part of the survey. Where primary data was not found, there are secondary data such as books, journals, newspaper reports, articles (Published and unpublished) has been studied as much as possible. Data was collected from Char Fasson Upazila. There were open ended and closed ended questionnaires and was pre-tested in the field before finalization. Observation methods are also used in this study.

Data Collection Process

Relevant data are collected both quantitative and qualitative methods according to goals and objectives. All data are collected in face-to-face interview method.

Sampling: Study Design and Sample Design

The data was collected by using multi stage survey design. Here the quality approach is emphasized in line with the research objectives. Initially, data was collected from 200 respondents through in-depth interviews. The respondents were women members of 21 unions and one municipality of Char Fasson upazila of Bhola district and the rest were selected at randomly.

Survey Instrument and Survey

I, personally, with the help of a team which composed with ten educated female and some local guides have been collected data. Before going to field survey, I trained them carefully about this matter.

Data Representation and Explanation

The data was collected from the research area have been represented through different tables for analysis. Finally analyzed have been presented in form of tables and interpretation and analysis of the numbers there in.

RESULT ANALYSIS

Attitude of Women’s voting:

Table No: 1

Question Pattern	Answer pattern	Number of Response	Percentage %
Casting vote	Yes	150	75%
	No	20	10%
	sometimes	30	15%
Causes of Casting Vote	Political ideology	70	35%
	Interested in politics	40	20%
	Candidates qualification	10	5%
	Candidate from my locality	10	5%
	Candidate from my religion	20	10%
	Citizen’s obligation	50	25%
Reasons for Not-Casting Vote	Not interested in politics	4	20%
	No candidate from my religion	14	70%

None of the candidate is my Liking	0	0%
Electoral system is not free and fair	1	5%
No candidate from my area	1	5%

[Source: Field survey]

It can be seen here that most of the women of Char Fasson Upazila cast their votes. There are also ideological reasons for voting. They vote mainly because of political ideology and political awareness. Again those who do not cast vote mostly they showed religious reasons or veil practices.

Women’s Behavior in the exercising of voting:

Table No: 2

Question Pattern	Answer pattern	Number of Response	Percentage %
Direct Involvement in Politics	Yes	60	30%
	No	140	70%
Family Involvement in Politics	yes	60	30%
	No	120	60%
	No Response	20	10%
Problem Facing While casting Vote	Yes	140	70%
	No	60	30%
If faces problem, What types of Problem	Family	120	60%
	Religious	40	20%
	Masculine	40	20%
	Others	0	0%
Cast vote by own decision or opinion	Yes	40	20%
	No	160	80%

[Source: Field survey]

Here it is seen that 30% of women are involved in politics. However, only 30% of the 200 respondents are involved in family politics. So it can be said that those who are involved in politics, their family are involved in politics. They prioritize family decisions over voting decisions. Last but not least, 80% of women do not vote on their own decisions.

Influence in the exercise of voting:

Table No: 3

Cast vote influence by	Parents	40	20%
	Husband	140	70%
	Brother	10	5%
	Influential Person	10	5%

[Source: Field survey]

Here it is seen that family influence is more in voting i.e. married women are most influenced by husbands. Unmarried women or girls, on the other hand, are influenced by the decision of their parents in the family.

Relationship between Age and Voting Behavior:

Table No: 4

Age	Number of respondents	Number of voter	%	Number of non-casting voter	%
18-24	34	32	94%	2	6%
25-34	66	63	95%	3	5%
35-49	50	49	98%	1	2%
50-59	34	32	94%	2	6%
60-Above	16	4	25%	12	75%
	Total=200	Total=180		Total=20	

[Source: Field survey]

Here it is seen that young and middle aged women are encouraged to vote. But older women are not encouraged to vote or they are not aware.

Relationship between Education and Voting Behaviour:

Table No: 5

Level of Education	Number of respondents	Number of voter	%	Number of non-casting voter	%
Illiterate	40	28	70%	12	30%
Primary	40	38	95%	2	5%
SSC	35	35	100%	0	0%
HSC	35	35	100%	0	0%
Graduate	30	28	93%	2	7%
Post Graduate	20	16	80%	4	20%
	Total=200	total=180		Total=20	

[Source: Field survey]

It is seen here that ignorant and educated women are more reluctant to vote.

Results:

The first objective of the study was to verify women's attitudes towards the exercise of suffrage. This study in the work I will analyse the interpretation of the results obtained from my field survey on the basis of objective and determinants. The second and the third purpose are to analyse the behaviour of women in voting and to influence women in voting. In this case, the reason for women to vote or not to vote, age, occupation, religion, education qualifications and psychological factors etc. has been analysed. Also what is the

impact on women's lives not as his personal life or family life, etc. have been analysed. Here I have tried to analyse the interpretation through a few tables which reflect the image of freedom of expression of women voting in Char Fassion Upazila.

The research work proves that age, educational qualifications and religious factors influence voting. Young and middle-aged women cast more vote. On the other hand, some educated women are not encouraged to vote. Again uneducated and unprivileged women who do not cast their vote due to religious reason. However, the opposite figure rich women vote more in the hope of getting something. Opinion analysis showed, most women do not vote based on their own opinions. Because they love the family more and they do not want to be disobedient to their husbands and keeping the family is more important to them than voting. Some women feel that financial difficulties affect their opinions. Most of the women think family doctrine is the bearer and carrier. Thus it can be said that the objectives of the study have been proven.

Conclusion:

The right to vote is the expression of public opinion. Democracy without the right to vote establishment is not possible. And since half of the voters are women, women are not given the opportunity to express their freedom Democracy will not be established. Studies have shown that women are more likely to vote. If women can exercise their right to vote freely, the results will be positive.

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