

The Impact of Gender Differences  
on the Conflict Management Styles  
of Managers in Bangladesh



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of Managers in Bangladesh:  
An Analysis

By

Khair Jahan Sogra

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**P U B L I S H I N G**

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An Analysis  
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*To My Family*



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## PREFACE

Conflict is a common occurrence in organisations, and with the advent of women in the managerial realm, researchers have become interested in the question of whether women and men vary significantly in their choices of conflict management styles. Although this interest has encouraged many researchers to investigate the issue of gender differences and conflict management, there has been limited use of the mixed-methods research to explore this conflict and its underlying causes; and in Bangladesh, there has been none. To fill this gap, a cross sectional field study was undertaken in Dhaka, Bangladesh, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative analyses. The cross-sectional co-relational field survey was limited within the city limit of Dhaka, Bangladesh, to a sample of 340, among which were both female and male managers (final count 250 managers) working in the corporate sector of the country. To analyse the data, generated by a self-administered questionnaire survey, various statistical tests such as one-way MANOVA, simple regression, factor analysis, etc., are employed. The study uses Rahim and Bomona's (1979) dual concern model: concern for self (pro-self) and concern for others (pro-social) to determine the preference of conflict management styles of managers. To generate data for the gender stereotyped organisational environment (GSOE), a new measure is developed using factor analysis.

The aim of this book is to explore the influence of contextual factors, including the present socio-cultural and economic changes taking place in the country, on the choice of conflict management styles of managers in Bangladesh and the factors that might create gender differences in managerial styles. Earlier researchers have studied the issue using biological sex, age, education, managerial hierarchy, and gender role orientation as predictors, and yet not the gender stereotyped organisational environment. The present research differs from all previous studies by linking managers' choice to gender stereotyped organisational environments, which refers to day-to-day practices in organisations permeated with individuals' socio-cultural expectations and the general economic conditions of the country. Furthermore, this study tries to understand the underlying causes of finding no apparent gender differences in the choices of the conflict management styles of managers

in Bangladesh. Besides, by linking two divergent theories, conflict management and gender, this study tries to reduce the gap between the two mutually influencing areas of research as underscored by earlier researchers.

The present study assumes that the intensity of unsatisfied and satisfied basic needs of individuals, along with social role expectations of women and men, act as a stimulant to intensify or lessen the degree of pro-self and pro-social motives of individuals. The present economic situation of the country and the rapid changes in social values influenced by satellite media have influenced the changing outlooks of individuals into responding on the level of her/his lifestyle to the demands for such a lifestyle. The new Westernised way of thinking is affecting the old social values and heightening a materialistic outlook. These changes are taking place more rapidly among the urban highly educated population, affecting both men and women equally. Culturally it is expected that Bangladeshis, being collectivists, will behave more in a pro-social ways; however, these new Western ways of life are making Bangladeshi men and women more individualistic in outlook, thus prone to behaving in a more pro-self way, which in a conflict managing setting involves more competitive approaches to conflict management.

The findings of the present study suggest that exhibiting socially expected roles and using conflict management modes do not occur in vacuums. Both of them are strongly influenced by socio-cultural expectations governed by a rigid patriarchal system, organisational processes, and the magnitude of individuals' unsatisfied needs. All these factors in various combinations affect the managerial styles of managers, and female managers emulate the well-accepted male managerial styles as a survival mechanism in the workplace. This results in no apparent gender differences in the preference of conflict management styles among managers, though the reasons for choosing a particular style may vary between females and males. An in-depth qualitative analysis reveals that socially prescribed gender congruent roles are not fixed but fluid. Men and women both are adopting either task-oriented (dominating) or relationship-oriented (obliging) managerial styles in response to situations and organisational demands. This trend is more pronounced in the NGO sector pursuing welfare goals, and in other sectors at senior managerial levels, especially among senior level female managers. The latter group is more at liberty to use relationship orientation since they already have established themselves as being 'as effective as men'. However, it is encouraging that

there is an undercurrent of change in organisations in terms of managerial styles and, steadily, organisations are recognising that a synthesis of feminine and masculine styles can achieve better results in organisations.

At the same time, this book also claims that currently organisations are shifting away from a rigid bureaucratic approach to a more humanistic participatory approach. Coinciding with this shift in approaches to management, organisations have started valuing the much condemned 'feminine quality of relationship-orientation'. The book maintains that this gradual shift is also taking place in Bangladeshi organisations for specific type of jobs and organisations, and females are becoming sought after employees. The cumulative effects of all these rapid changes transforming the socio-economic and socio-cultural expectations of the Bangladeshi population are leading to calls for urgent attention to the study of its long-term effects on patriarchy and gender relations in the workplace. This book is only a step forward in that direction.

## Outline of the Book

This book contains five chapters:

- Chapter 1, *Gender Differences and Conflict Management Styles of Managers: Introducing Bangladeshi Women*, introduces the topic and outlines of the background, research context and current socio-economic situation of Bangladeshi women, and develops profiles of the urban women managers who play a significant role in the study. Understanding the context is critical for this study, since it has assumed that the expected roles and behaviour of female and male managers in the private and public spheres of life are directly shaped by the prevailing socio-cultural and economic conditions of the country. The chapter also describes the aim and scope of the study, thus setting the boundaries of its investigations. It identifies the research questions, research methodology, strengths and limitations of the study; and signposts the unique contribution that the study will make.
- Chapter 2, *Establishing the Research Context: A Theoretical Framework*, establishes relationships between two main concept addressed in the book: gender and conflict, and its related theories and model. First, it outlines the ongoing debates that surround the

issue of 'sex' or 'gender' as research categories: this study decides to use the terms interchangeably whilst still distinguishing between the assumptions of biological determination and psycho-social processes. The chapter reviews the theories and models of gender and concludes that the social role theory (Eagly 1987), gender schema theory (Bem 1981), and gender-in-context model (Deaux and Major 1987) can be utilised effectively in the context of this management study to explain the issue of gender from a Bangladeshi socio-cultural perspective. In a later section, there is a critical review of some of the theories and models of conflict management; it justifies the theory this study uses for explaining the behaviour of managers in organisations, and shows the interrelationship between gender differences and the styles of conflict management.

Based on these reviews, this chapter also presents a conceptual model for studying the identified research questions.

- Chapter 3, *Biological Sex, Other Contextual Factors and Choice of Conflict Management Styles*, presents the findings of the quantitative survey generated by using PASW 18 software to develop gender specific demographic and organisational profiles of the participants. It also provides descriptive and correlation statistics of the variables. It gives details on the exploratory factor analysis of organisational environment data and identifies the three underlying dimensions of organisational environment: *preference for male managers, negative perceptions about female managers, and positive perceptions about male managers*. The descriptive and inferential statistical tests also establish the internal consistency of all measures. Additionally, it presents the findings of one-way multivariate analysis (MANOVA) and discusses the underlying causes for not finding any gender differences in the managerial choices.
- Chapter 4, *Gender Stereotyped Organisational Environments and Choice of Conflict Management Styles*, discusses the national culture of Bangladesh based on Hofstede and Hofstede's (2005) findings on the country and, in the process, how it influences the organisational environment. It presents the results of simple regression analyses, and shows how a gender stereotyped organisational environment influences the choice of conflict management styles of managers in the workplace. The chapter also

describes the conflict management styles of managers and the ways socio-cultural perceptions influence the organisational work environment, thus creating challenges for women in continuing their organisational career.

- Chapter 5, *Gender Differences and Conflict Management in Bangladesh: A Way Forward*, corroborates the findings of quantitative and qualitative surveys and analyses, and presents them in a summary. Besides which, it draws conclusions and implications, and discusses the universality of findings of the study. The chapter identifies research areas for future consideration and ends with a concluding remark with a hope that this study will be a step forward to address gender issues in the workplace.

This book is based on my doctoral research completed in 2011. The research work would not have been completed without the guidance of my principal supervisor Dr. Judy Lattas and associate supervisors, first Prof. Naren Chitty and then Dr. Shaun Wilson, all of whom are at Macquarie University, Australia. They spent numerous hours with me to build upon the research topic, Impact of Gender Differences on the Conflict Management Styles of Managers. I want to express my heartfelt gratitude for Dr. Lattas' unwavering support throughout the length of my study, at both intellectual and emotional levels throughout my three and a half year stay in Australia. She particularly showed great patience in reading through, commenting on and editing the drafts. I pay my respect and heartfelt gratitude to Prof. Chitty who guided me at the initial stage of my research and set its tone; and to Dr. Wilson, who volunteered his time for formatting and giving the final touches to my thesis, in the process taking a personal interest in the timely submission of the thesis. I also thank my adjunct supervisor Prof. Hafiz G. A. Siddiqui of North South University, Bangladesh, for guiding me through my data collection phase in Bangladesh. I thank Mr. Ershadul Haque of the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh, for assisting me with the statistical analyses and helping me to understand the underlying logics of the test results. I express my gratitude to Dr. Selvaraj Velayutham and Mr. Andrew Heys for their friendly constructive criticisms on the structure of the thesis, and the invaluable comments that helped me to improve the final draft.

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in full-time study. I am also grateful to the staff at the Interdisciplinary Women Studies, Gender and Sexuality programme of the Sociology Department, Macquarie University. I also appreciate the unwavering IT support which the Faculty of Arts, Macquarie University, has given to my research work. At the same time, I am grateful to the office of the Vice Chancellor, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh, for granting generous study leave to allow me to pursue full-time study in Australia.

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Last, but not the least, I thank all my family members, especially my husband Zainul, son Sam and daughter Farhana for their unfailing patience, encouragement, and support at all stages of my study, without which I might not have been able to sustain the rigour. I dedicate this thesis to my deceased parents, who at a very early stage of my life sowed the seeds of a desire in me to 'break the tradition'.

June 2014

# CHAPTER ONE

## GENDER DIFFERENCES AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES OF MANAGERS: INTRODUCING BANGLADESHI WOMEN

### 1.0. Introduction

Since 1990, the numbers of women managers have been exponentially increasing in the corporate sector. Thus, it is only appropriate that managers at all levels pay close attention to the impact of gender differences on the choice of conflict management styles among managers and the importance of effective conflict management. In 1994, Taylor and Miller asserted that gender and conflict are not mutually exclusive and future managers need to address the issue of gender in conflict resolution processes. Benschop (2006) claimed that “gender is embedded in organizational processes and practices” (p. 290), as gender and organisational processes are not two separate fields of study but their influence on each other is mutual. This interest in the issue is strengthened by a growing concern among gender and organisation experts and researchers that organisational structure and processes based on the sex-based social role expectations of individuals value male managers over female managers and ignore female managers’ uniqueness, which they bring into organisations (Eagly and Carli 2003).

This devaluing of the attributes of female managers is a global issue and all over the world, women are struggling to dispel the myth that an *effective manager is a male manager*. Organisations perceive women as soft, docile, submissive and reluctant or incapable of taking hard decisions, and therefore not suitable for managing conflict. This doubt about women’s conflict management capability arises because, traditionally, managerial traits are associated with males and masculinity rather than females and femininity, as observed by various researchers over a period of the last forty years from different parts of the world with different cultural environments. According to Shockley-Zalabak (1981, p.

289) “perceptions of how females handle crisis and conflict often are cited as blocks to the female manager’s ascent to the executive suite”. This opinion about female managers’ effectiveness in managing conflict is making the issue of gender differences in managing conflict effectively an important concern for organisations (Powell 1988). Eagly and Karau (2002) and Eagly and Carli (2003) did their research from a different perspective and noted that two types of prejudice exist in organisations: one is that organisations do not visualise women in managerial roles, and the other is that female women managers are evaluated less favourably than male managers are. This observation about female managers’ capability to manage conflict situations creates the premises of this book.

Apart from the influence of sex differences in conflict management, organisational researchers are also interested in the influence of other contextual factors on the choice of conflict management styles at the workplace. Putnam and Wilson (1982) suggested that the choice of style is not only influenced by personal factors such as sex and individual personality, but also by situational factors such as hierarchy, issues, contexts and the task and relationship orientations of managers. Feminist researchers have emphasised that as organisations operate within the framework of patriarchal societies, gender is “one of the important characteristics of contexts in which status relations and values is negotiated” (Taylor and Miller 1994, p. 2). At the core of patriarchy is the domination of women and a social system that ensures the privileges of men through a sex based division of work, social structures, religious practices, and legal codes (Wentworth 2005). This way patriarchy reinforces the perceived gender specific roles and gender specific personal attributes of individuals that lead to a belief that female and male managers handle conflict differently at the workplace (Phalane 2001).

The interest in the issue of managerial choice for a conflict management style is not new. For the last seventy years, academics and practitioners have studied this particular stream of research within the conflict management field. Pioneers in this field are Follett (1940), Deutsch (1949), Blake and Mouton (1964), Thomas and Kilman (1974), Renwick (1975, 1977), Rahim and Bomona (1979), and Puritt (1983). Identifying the styles of managing interpersonal conflict as a process was first proposed by Mary Parker Follett (1940) who found three primary styles: domination, compromise, and integration; and two secondary styles: avoidance and suppression (Rahim and Magner 1995, Chakrabarty et al. 2002). Subsequently, Blake and Mouton (1964), in their classic book *The*



*Managerial Grid*, were the first to generalise the two-dimensional modes of interpersonal conflict handling. Their dual concerns model proposed that individuals have either Concern for Production or Concern for People in organisations (Holt and DeVore 2005). Blake and Mouton (1964) plotted those two concerns on a 9-point two dimensional grid, with 1 representing low and 9 representing high concerns respectively, which resulted in five styles: forcing (low concern for people and high concern for production, 1.9); withdrawing (low concerns both for people and production, 1.1); smoothing (high concern for people and low concern for production, 9.1); compromising (medium concerns for both people and production, 5.5); and problem-solving (high concerns for both people and production, 9.9). This dualistic model implies that the interactions of the two concerns are diagonally linear, starting from negative statistical interactions to moderately positive interactions and ending in highly positive interactions (Sorenson et al. 1999).

This book uses Rahim and Bomona's (1979) dual-concern model to explore the choice of conflict management styles of managers in the context of rapidly changing socio-cultural-economic expectations of managers in Bangladesh, incorporating a gender perspective in its analyses.

## **1.1. The Status of Women in Bangladeshi Society**

In the last thirty years, the demographic profile, in terms of gender, of the corporate sector of Bangladesh has experienced noticeable changes. The reasons are: the government's egalitarian stance and its moving away from a social welfare approach to a gender mainstreaming approach, especially after ratifying the Beijing Women World Conference in 1995; continual pressures from international agencies; adverse economic conditions, coupled with increasing access to higher education and increased economic opportunities in urban areas. Apart from these, other contributing factors to the marked high growth rate of women in managerial occupations are the increasing numbers of women-owned small and medium enterprises (SME), and the rise of media, transnational telecommunications, and transnational financial and local service sectors (Suryanaraynan 2011). The influx of women in the paid labour force has forced the male dominated patriarchal society of Bangladesh to relax its tight grip on women. Nevertheless, that does not necessarily mean that this has changed the attitude of men towards women. Although women have

equal status by law, in reality, this equality has yet to materialise (Sogra 1995, Halder 2004, Khan 2005).

In the first twenty-five years after the independence in 1971, the government adopted a social welfare approach to enhance women's position in society as it was identified that women lacked the required skills and knowledge to enter the job market. This approach helped individual women to gain entry in selected fields that were thought of as suitable only for women. This created a sex-segregated workforce and established male domination at the workplace (Khan 1988). Only after ratifying the Beijing Declaration announced at the Beijing Women World Conference in 1995 did the government move away from the welfare approach to a gender mainstreaming approach. The government and broader civil society tried to introduce gender equality policies into all developmental processes. Consequently, despite unequal access to resources, increasing numbers of women joined the paid work force and many of them joined in non-traditional, hitherto male jobs. In Bangladesh, for instance, the percentage of women joining the organised labour force has increased approximately from 21.28% in 2002-2003 to 102% in 2010 with an annual growth rate of 7.28% (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) 2010). Despite comparatively limited benefits available to female employees, the number of women in managerial positions is also increasing at a faster rate than that of men. In Bangladesh, the annual labour growth rate of females for the period of 2002-2003 to 2010 was 7.45% which was much higher than the rate for males (2.00%) (BBS 2010). Furthermore, the participation rate of female workers in the labour market increased faster than that of males in both urban and rural areas. In rural areas, the number of female workers has increased from 6.4 million in 1999-2000 to 13.2 million in 2010 (or 106%); and in urban areas, this number has increased from 2.2 million to 4 million (or 81.8%) for the same period (Basak 2013).

For Bangladesh, these new entrants in the workforce are not only changing the demographic patterns of employment in organisations; they are also challenging the prevailing predominantly male work culture of these organisations. Increasingly, women are joining in decision-making positions in organisations that need some degree of conflict management skills to provide effective leadership (Brewer et al. 2002). As societal expectations of women in Bangladesh are still very traditional, this new role of women with some degree of power and authority has the latent prospect of creating conflict in organisation. Likewise, neither employers

nor the organisational cultures as a whole really understand how these new entrants could be helped to assimilate into the workplace; entrants who are so vastly biologically and psychologically different from the traditional male employees. As early as 1990, Eagly and Johnson observed that men still hold the majority of decision-making positions in organisations as employees generally have negative attitudes towards female managers as effective leaders. This observation is still valid for Bangladesh. Since women are here to stay, they need to put in extra efforts for adapting the prevailing work culture, as men still design, manage, and occupy the majority of decision-making positions of an organisation.

This increase in the numbers of women has had very little impact on Bangladeshi women's organisational, familial, and legal status. The corporate sector of Bangladesh is still male dominated and female managers are more concentrated at the entry and mid-levels of management. Consequently, to be accepted as managers, females adopt or follow the predominant male work culture to survive in an organisation (Hossain and Kusakabe 2005). Globally, family responsibilities remain one of the major responsibilities of women, and in the end, these women suffer from 'double binding' (Ely and Meyerson 2000). Bangladesh and its female population are no exception. On a legal standing, though the Constitution has empowered the government to take 'affirmative action' to remove gender inequality, unfortunately this power still cannot be effectively used as certain civil laws reaffirm the cultural tradition of patriarchy. Patriarchy creates women's subordinate status and when it is accepted by all (including women) as natural or ordained by religious teachings, it (re)produces gender differences in all spheres of women's lives (Phalane 2001). In patriarchy, men enjoy a superior position in life. This not only reduces the effectiveness of constitutional provisions guaranteeing the equal status of women, but also negates legal provisions for ensuring gender equality in Bangladesh. For example, the widow of a government employee cannot claim a monthly pension allowance from the exchequer unless every month she submits a notary public certificate that she has not remarried irrespective of her age; no such certificate is needed for a widower of a female government employee to claim the pension allowance. The 1951 Citizenship Act restricts a Bangladeshi woman from extending her nationality to her foreign husband, while the same law does not affect men similarly.

### **1.1.1. The current socio-economic status of women in Bangladesh**

A patriarchal social system dominates women's lives in Bangladesh. This system upholds a rigid division of labour that controls women's mobility, roles and responsibilities, and sexuality. Thus, Bangladeshi women face a host of inequities, including: (a) low economic and political participation (6.8%), (b) low literacy (53.68%), (c) poor health and nutrition (39% of girls and 40.3% of boys under the age of five are malnourished), (d) social discrimination in terms of women's mobility (57.8% of rural men and 55.4% of urban men do not want their womenfolk to travel alone), (e) unequal legal provisions, and (f) gender-based violence and trafficking of women and children (Gender Statistics of Bangladesh 2009). Poverty is endemic in Bangladesh with a per capita income of US\$1,700<sup>1</sup> in 2010 and 36.3% of the population living below the poverty line with an unemployment rate of 5.1% (CIA Worldfact Book 2010). While 36.3% of the population live below the poverty line, landless female-headed households face the worst conditions, with 80% of them still living below the poverty line (Ahmed et al. 2007).

The following section depicts a detailed picture of the socio-economic gap between women and men as identified in the Global Gender Gap Index Report (GGGR) 2010 and GGGR 2013. The index measures the gap between women and men in four fundamental categories: economic participation and opportunity, political empowerment, educational attainment, and health and survival.

#### **Economic Participation and Opportunity**

The economic participation of women is important as it not only alleviates poverty, but also encourages the economic development of a country. This dimension has been measured by women's presence in the workforce in quantitative terms and economic participation of women in qualitative terms. Earlier researchers have concluded that women are burdened with dual careers across cultural boundaries, as every society actively discourages men to share household responsibilities including the care of children and elderly relatives (Benson and Yukongdi 2005). This attitude of society has made many professional women leave their career once they

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<sup>1</sup> US\$1,700 per capita income is based on Purchasing Power Parity (PPP), not nominal income. Nominal per capita income is US\$750 (BBS 2010).

start having children (Hewlett 2002). Consequently, the numbers of female managers are still very low in many countries and most other female employees are generally concentrated at the lower level and in lowly paid jobs (ILO 2002).

According to the GGGR (2013), the female to male ratio in the total labour force participation is 0.69. For managerial and legislators this ratio is 0.31 and for professional and technical categories, the female to male ratio reduces to 0.28. This finding reveals the ground realities. Although women are joining the paid labour force in increasing numbers, they are mostly concentrated in non-managerial jobs, since in Bangladesh access to tertiary education or opportunities to acquire the required managerial skills is very much skewed against women (Table 1).

**Table 1: Participation of male and female students in educational institutions over the years (1981-2007)**

Year	Percentage of male and female students							
	Primary		Secondary		College <sup>2</sup>		University	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
2007	-	-	-	-	-	-	70.04	29.96
2005	85.6	87.4	46.04	53.96	58.36	41.64	75.57	24.43
2001	51.0	49.0	48.1	51.9	62.1	37.9	75.8	24.2
1991	54.7	45.3	66.5	33.5	74.8	25.2	78.9	21.1
1981	61.2	38.8	75.0	25.0	81.8	18.2	81.5	18.5

Source: Gender Statistics of Bangladesh 2009

Economic opportunity is measured by using quantified indicators such as the duration of maternity leave, the percentage of wages paid during maternity leave, the number of women in managerial positions and the perceptions of business leaders. In Bangladesh, all women employees in government organisations and multinational corporations enjoy 16 weeks fully paid (100% paid by the employer) maternity leave for their first two pregnancies. However, in private sector organisations and in NGOs, the duration of leave and the pay amount varies from organisation to organisation. In many organisations, the leave is granted without pay.

<sup>2</sup> College education generally means having grade XI and grade XII and undergraduate programmes in various disciplines; but in many cases, a college can have a master's programme as well.

Although labour law stipulates mandatory maternity leave for all female employees in the organised sector, its strict enforcement is absent in private organisations. Currently, the government is discussing the possibilities of increasing the provision for paid maternity leave from 16 weeks to 24 weeks and including 2 weeks paternity leave nationally<sup>3</sup>.

Despite comparatively limited benefits available to women employees, the number of women in managerial positions is increasing at a faster rate than that of men, especially in urban areas. The main reason for the higher growth rate of women in urban areas is due to the rapid expansion of export oriented manufacturing units, where cheap unskilled female labourers are in high demand. Similarly, between 2002 and 2006, the participation rate of females has increased by approximately 27% in managerial, technical, and professional occupations, from 40,700 (2002-2003) to 51,600 (2005-2006) (Labour Force Survey 2010).

An earlier study (Sogra 1993) on the perceptions of top managers about female managers concluded that women need continual nurturing from higher authority to be effective in organisations. This book will examine whether or not over time these perceptions of top managers about women managers have changed.

### **Political Empowerment**

Political empowerment refers to the number of women accessing formal and informal decision-making structures and the extent to which they can voice or have their women's issue related concerns included in policy formulations. This area is measured by data on the number of female government ministers, seats in parliament held by women, women holding senior, legislative, and managerial positions, and the number of years a female has been head of state of her in her own country.

Bangladeshi women have come a long way since the country's emergence as an independent state in 1971. In 1973, in the first parliamentary election of the country, the number of women who won the general election at a

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<sup>3</sup> On 9 January 2011, the government passed a presidential order approving 6 months paid maternity leave for all government employees. They will be able to avail this benefit twice in their working life with the government. However, this order is mandatory for government organisations only; other types of organisation are free to have their own rules. Report in *The Daily Star* on 12 January 2011 <[http:// www.thedailystar.net](http://www.thedailystar.net)>.

national level was 0, however there was a provision for 15 reserved seats for women in that Parliament. Since then, in the general election of 2008, the number of women who have won by direct vote has risen to 20 in addition to 45 seats reserved for women, with 14 women holding a cabinet position. The number of years the country has had a female head of state is 20 out of 42 years of independence (GGGR 2013). At local level elections, the participation of women is higher. In the 2008 local level election of Union Parishads (Council), which is the first tier of civil administration, the number of women who won as chairperson of the Parishad was only 21, while the number of women members who won the election was 13,637 (25.26%) (Gender Statistics of Bangladesh 2009).

Although the participation of women in managerial jobs has increased considerably, the percentage of these women persistently remains very low. Most of the female managers are clustered at the lower level with dead-end peripheral jobs (Ahmad 1991, Kashem et al. 2002). The government statistics of public sector data serves as an example. Between 2006 and 2008, the overall percentage of female administrative cadre officers had increased from 15% to 17.97% (Table 2).

In comparison to the total population of the country, this number may be very small but highly significant for a country like Bangladesh, where the socio-cultural expected norm is that women should stay within the four walls of her house and shoulder the burdens of all domestic and familial responsibilities. Therefore, this minuscule group of women has made a distinct break from the prevailing traditional norms of society and has shown the courage to challenge a very dogmatic patriarchal practice. They are the pioneers; and hence deserve special and careful attention. Another commendable achievement of Bangladeshi women in political empowerment is that for the last twenty years the country has enjoyed continuous female leadership. Since 1991, two women leaders from two major political parties have simultaneously occupied both the positions of the Head of State and the Leader of the Oppositions in the Parliament.

**Table 2: Number and percentage of managers in civil administration, 2006, and 2008**

Managerial Hierarchy	Post	2006				2008			
		Total Nos.	Nos. Of Female	Nos. Of Male	Percentage Of Female (%)	Total Nos.	Nos. Of Female	Male	Percentage Of Female (%)
Total		4492	676	3816	15.0	4419	673	3746	17.97
<b>Top Level</b>	Secretary	64	1	63	1.56	54	1	53	1.89
	Additional Secretary	83	0	83	0.0	89	1	88	1.12
<b>Middle Level</b>	Joint Secretary	364	25	339	6.87	339	25	314	7.96
	Deputy Secretary	1471	172	1299	11.69	1458	170	1288	13.20
<b>Junior Level</b>	Senior Assistant Secretary	1314	206	1108	15.68	1311	212	1099	19.29
<b>Entry Level</b>	Assistant Secretary	1196	272	924	22.74	1168	264	904	29.20

Source: Gender Statistics Bangladesh 2009



## **Educational Attainment**

It is widely recognised that educational attainment is the most critical factor for reducing the gender gap. Without comparable education to boys and men, it is almost impossible for women to gain access to well-paid formal sector jobs, advance to the decision-making positions, participate in government, and gain political influence. A World Bank Report (1993) has revealed that a higher education level for women helps to reduce the inequalities in gender and increase the quality of lives. This dimension is measured by literacy rates, enrolment rates, and average years of schooling across the population.

In the last decade (1995-2007), the literacy rate for females in Bangladesh among the population of 7 year-olds and over showed a higher growth rate than that of males. For females, the increase is 23.2%, while for males there is a 9% increase in the literacy rate. For urban females, this increase is much more pronounced than for rural females. The reasons are better access to educational institutions, better availability of infrastructural support systems in urban areas, and enlightened professional parents who generally treat their boy and girl children fairly and equally.

At the primary school level, the national net enrolment rate between 2002 and 2007 remains constant at the average of 85% for both boys and girls, with a slightly higher enrolment rate for girls. With increasing educational levels, however, this enrolment rate decreases drastically for girls and women (Gender Statistics Report 2009). The enrolment ratio of females to males in primary education in Bangladesh is .84; for secondary, it is 1.13; and for tertiary, it is 0.61 (GGGR 2013). The population census reports of 1981, 1991, and 2001 show that the ratio of female to male 20-24 years old in literacy is extremely low. In 1981, it was 0.20 and in 1991, it was 0.24. However, given the all-out effort of public and private sectors, this ratio has increased manyfold, rising from 0.24 in 1991 to 0.47 in 2001 (Table 3). According to the BBS (2009), the total number of students enrolled in public and private universities together was 1,375,422 out of which 518,961 were female students (37.73%). In a country of 160 million people, this small number of students enrolled at a tertiary level shows that education is still a privilege, not a basic right, and women are the worst sufferers.

**Table 3: Ratio of 20-24 year old literate females to males**

Year	Ratio of literate females to males		
	National	Rural	Urban
1981	0.20	0.17	0.26
1991	0.28	0.22	0.40
2001	0.47	0.44	0.50

Source: Population census report 2001, BBS

The very high percentage of girls' enrolment rates in primary and secondary schools are the result of various motivational programmes undertaken by successive governments. The foremost of them is free compulsory primary and secondary education for all children, specifically for girls. Besides this, the government introduced monthly food grain rewards for 85% monthly attendance in classrooms for every girl child; if there is no daughter in the family, then one boy in the family enjoys this benefit. Currently, instead of giving food grain, the school-going children get a monthly stipend and free required textbooks. The government, with assistance from UNESCO, is implementing these motivational programmes with a hope that they will help free the school-going children from the drudgery of household chores and prevent discouraged parents from withdrawing their children from school to engage them in paid employment to supplement the family income, thus reducing the incidence of child labour. In 2005-2006, there were 3.7 million children between the ages of 5 to 14 who were economically active, out of which 3.8% were 5-9 years olds, and 15.6% were 10-14 years olds (Labour Force Survey 2010).

### **Health and Survival**

The differences in women's and men's access to sufficient nutrition, healthcare and reproductive facilities, and the issue of the fundamental safety and integrity of a person; all these factors combined represent the health and survival dimension. Globally, maternal mortality at childbirth and violence against women are two factors that affect women's lives most severely. Violence against women threatens women's physical security and integrity, all over the world. This particular vice is endemic to such an extent that even Sweden, the most gender-friendly country in the world, is not free from this particular vice (GGR 2010).

This area of the gender gap (health and survival) is measured by the effectiveness of government initiatives to reduce poverty, the adolescent

fertility rate (as an indicator of health risks among young women and their choice of available birth control), the percentage of births attended by health workers, and maternal and infant mortality ratios.

The health and survival rate has improved greatly in the case of Bangladeshi women. According to the GGGR (2013), the sex ratio at birth for female to male is 0.96 and the healthy life expectancy ratio is 0.98. The adolescent fertility rate is 70 per 1000 live births and over the years, the growth rate of teen births has been declining. However, the use of contraceptives is lowest among teenage mothers and highest among women in their twenties. The oral pill is the most popularly used method of women's contraception, followed by contraceptive injection. It confirms the societal expectation that all familial responsibilities including the burden of birth control fall under the woman's purview.

The infant mortality rate is 37 per 1000 live births and the maternity mortality rate is 240 per 100,000 live births. Skilled health workers attend 20% of births. Although the number of maternity and child welfare centres has not increased between 2003 and 2006, the number of registered midwives has increased by approximately 13% in the same period, and per capita government expenditure has increased by a little over 51% (BBS 2010).

Violence against women during pregnancy is more prevalent among rural women than that of urban women. In 2000, there were 1.06% of pregnant women in rural areas who reported violence against them during pregnancy, whereas this percentage was only 0.32% for pregnant women in urban areas. In the scale of basic rights, the Bangladeshi performance is not very encouraging. On a scale of scoring, 1 = total equality and 0 = total inequality, legal options to prevent violence against women and children in the country scored only .08 (GGGR 2010). It shows that the almost non-existent legal provisions, and the lax attitudes of society towards violence against women and children, put them among the worst as victims of gendered harm.

### **1.1.2. Urbanisation and the profile of urban women in Bangladesh**

A discussion on urbanisation is important, since the target group of this study is urban managers working within the city limits of Dhaka city. Urbanisation is one of the most visible effects of globalisation in the

developing world and the relationship between urbanisation and development has been found to be positive (Islam 1999). Bangladesh is not immune to this effect; the projected population growth between the years 2007 and 2015 in urban areas is estimated as high as 22%, and for the female population the growth rate is slightly higher than the national growth rate of 22.56% (BBS 2008). However, the growth in urbanisation in developing countries like Bangladesh is not the outcome of industrialisation as it has happened in the West, but an outcome of the growth of the tertiary sector and the informal manufacturing sector (Islam 1999). The growth of population in major cities and a large urban population has little effect on the status of women in the country. Yet it is undeniable that important changes are taking place in urban women's employment, more subtly if not radically. According to the Gender Statistics of Bangladesh (2009), the percentage increase of urban working women between 1995-96 and 2005-06 is 75% (Table 4).

**Table 4: Labour Force Aged 15 Years and Over by Sex and Residence, 1995-2006 (in millions)**

Period and Data Source	National		Rural		Urban	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
<b>1995-96 LFS*</b>	5.4	30.6	3.8	23.9	1.6	6.7
<b>1999-2000 LFS</b>	8.6	32.2	6.4	25.1	2.2	7.1
<b>2002-03 LFS</b>	10.3	35.0	7.7	27.3	2.7	8.6
<b>2005-06 LFS</b>	12.1	37.3	9.3	28.4	2.8	8.9

\*LFS= Labour Force Survey

Source: Gender Statistics of Bangladesh 2009,

This extremely high growth rate in the Bangladeshi urban female workforce can be deceptive, since most of these women are migrant workers employed by the export oriented ready-made garment factories and other types of manufacturing units in export processing zones. The majority of these women are unskilled and have either primary education (varying from grade 1 to grade 5) or no education at all. According to the

Labour Force Survey 1999-2000, there were 2.1 million women working in urban areas, out of which only 142,400 women were working in professional, technical, and managerial jobs. The Labour Force Survey (2008) for the year 2005-06 shows that the number of professional females in the urban workforce then was 2.8 million, out of which only 163,000 women were working in professional, technical, and managerial jobs. The growth rate for the years 1999-2000 and 2005-06 is only 14.47% for highly educated women, the target group of this study. The statistics reveal that the overall figure of working women in urban areas has increased because 90% of semiskilled and unskilled female workers are employed in the readymade garment sectors and export processing zones. The representation of women at the middle and top level of corporate management is almost nonexistent (Chowdhury 2008).

### **Profile of Urban Women**

According to Enayet (1979), women in urban areas in Bangladesh can be grouped under three categories: (1) migrant women workers, who live in temporary living arrangements in and around city areas; (2) long time urban residents, who seek paid employment for raising their living standards; and (3) elite women, who work for reasons other than economic. Kumar (1986), in her Indian study, has labelled this last group of women as professional women. However, in the Bangladeshi context, the second and third groups both belong to the professional female workforce.

#### **1. Migrant women workers**

Migrant women workers live in and around city areas under temporary arrangements like a mess house or in city slums. They migrate from the village to the city in search of paid employment to sustain their own and their family members' lives; and generally have little or no education, are unskilled, and are untrained for any kind of job. They either work on the shop floor of manufacturing units, especially in readymade garment factories, or are employed as domestic help in upper or middle class households. They are paid minimal wages, have unspecified working hours, and do not enjoy any job security or other benefits of employment in the organised sector. They are non-unionised and often victims of total exploitation by their employers (Sogra 1995).

## 2. Urban professional women

These women live in urban areas permanently, in their own homes or in rented private houses or apartments. They consider paid employment as a way to escape from grinding poverty and improve their current standard and quality of living. Budhwar et al. (2005) have reported similar findings in their Indian women in management study. Women of this category are all highly educated, with at least a master's degree or an engineering or medical degree. They prefer and generally find work in managerial posts in the organised sector, enjoying comparative job security, regular working hours, a relatively high salary, and other benefits of a standard managerial job. Sogra (1995), in a study of Bangladeshi women, observed similar findings. As a category, this class of urban women often overlaps with the urban 'elite' women.

## 3. Urban elite women

The elite group of urban women mainly join the paid workforce not for economic reasons but for self-actualisation. They mainly work for personal fulfilment, using their education to full potential and achieving a sense of independence. These women are generally highly educated and work in occupations where they themselves or their male relatives, are owners and financiers<sup>1</sup>. They belong to the privileged urban class, where working for economic gain is only of secondary importance to them (Budhwar et al. 2005).

These two latter groups of women are the main target of this study; the women who work out of economic necessity and the women who work for self-fulfilment, since both groups have more chance to join and remain in the managerial workforce and are supposedly more career-oriented.

### **1.1.3. Challenges faced by Bangladeshi female managers**

The foremost challenge faced by female managers in their daily lives is the all-pervasive *purdah*, a manifestation of the dominant culture of patriarchy and the religion-based socialisation process of feminine subjectivity that results in low representation of female managers in the organised sector.

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<sup>1</sup> This time, while collecting data for this study, I noticed that this trend has changed and currently women are establishing their own SMEs. At the same time, highly educated women are joining high profile multinationals for self-fulfilment.