Women's Political Engagement in Bangladesh: A Study of Female Students' Experiences at the University of Dhaka

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Abstract - This study explores the socio-economic backgrounds of female students involved in politics at the University of Dhaka, their status in political participation, and the challenges they face. Eleven female students shared their personal experiences, highlighting the barriers to their political engagement. In Bangladeshi society, politics is often viewed as unsuitable for women, who are expected to stay at home rather than participate in public political life. Many families do not support their daughters' involvement in politics due to concerns about social stigma and safety. As a result, the political status of female students is vulnerable. Many avoid politics out of fear for their security in a system known for violence and male domination. Key challenges include family opposition, harassment, rumours about their character, and a lack of respect for their leadership abilities. The political environment remains male-dominated and often hostile to women's full participation. The study highlights the urgent need to reform the political system to ensure safety and support for women in politics. Empowering female students requires breaking down societal stereotypes and creating inclusive spaces where women can actively engage without fear. Without such changes, women's political participation will remain limited, ultimately hindering the country's social and political progress.

Keywords: Female Students, Political Participation, Gender Inequality, Bangladesh, Student Politics, Empowerment

I. INTRODUCTION

Almost half of the population in Bangladesh are women, but women are not treated the same as men. They are often deprived of their rights and face inequalities in every sphere of life, including the political sector. A very small number of women are involved in political activities in Bangladesh, and even fewer hold leadership positions. Student politics at the University of Dhaka has a significant history in the creation of Bangladesh, and many important political movements were led by its students. Despite this glorious record, the status of female students in politics remains minimal. Female students are generally reluctant to join politics or participate in political activities due to social stigma. Those who do enter politics face various challenges, including criticism or questioning of their character, social norms, and values. They also encounter discrimination and obstacles in their political activities.

Female students are often advised to maintain distance from political activities at home because there is no security for women in the political system. After joining politics, they face discrimination compared to male students and are not treated equally to their male counterparts. These obstacles reduce the number of female students participating in politics, reflecting a harsh reality of the political system. This research explores the status and challenges women face in politics. Specifically, it examines the experiences of female students involved in politics at the University of Dhaka, focusing on their socio-economic backgrounds, their positions in campus politics, and the challenges they encounter while participating in political activities. The goal is to better understand the real-life struggles and barriers that affect their political participation.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature from different perspectives has been reviewed to understand the status and participation of women in politics, as well as the challenges and obstacles they face in this area in Bangladesh. Some of the major findings related to this topic are briefly discussed below:

A. Status and participation of woman in politics

Women's participation in South Asian politics presents a complex picture. On one hand, there are powerful female leaders like Indira Gandhi, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, Benazir Bhutto, Sheikh Hasina, and Khaleda Zia, who entered politics mainly through family connections, which helped them overcome many obstacles faced by women globally, such as lack of money, experience, and mobility restrictions (Jahan, 1987). These leaders demonstrated considerable skill and stayed in power, yet they rarely framed women's liberation as their central political issue. On the other hand, the majority of women, especially poor, illiterate, and rural women, have limited political engagement beyond voting and remain marginalized in decision-making (Jahan, 1987).

Despite their presence in politics, women's roles tend to be symbolic rather than substantive. Their representation in national and local legislatures remains minimal, and they rarely hold leadership positions in political parties or trade unions (Jahan, 1987; Chowdhury & Islam, 2014). Patriarchal social structures, cultural norms, and male-dominated political systems often restrict women's mobility and participation (Panday, 2010; Kumar, 2017). Female politicians frequently face harassment, discrimination, and threats, limiting their ability to lead and participate meaningfully (Chowdhury & Islam, 2014; Panday, 2010).

The emergence of women's movements in South Asia has brought attention to issues such as violence against women, economic exploitation, and political rights, linking middle-class and working-class women in grassroots organizations (Jahan, 1987). However, these movements still struggle to expand their influence, particularly against conservative religious interpretations that limit women's roles, especially in countries like Bangladesh and Pakistan (Jahan, 1987). These movements are evolving, addressing broader social and political concerns from a women's perspective and seeking alliances with other popular movements (Jahan, 1987).

Institutional reforms, such as reserved seats for women in local governance, have improved female participation but have not fully addressed underlying gender inequalities (Panday, 2013). Women's political involvement often remains symbolic, with limited power or influence (Panday, 2010; Lawanga, 2008). Female students in Bangladesh, including those at the University of Dhaka, face similar challenges, such as social stigma, patriarchal restrictions, and lack of resources, which restrict their political participation (Chowdhury & Islam, 2014). Overall, increasing women's political participation requires not only more women in politics but also significant social and cultural change to overcome deeply rooted barriers.

B. Challenges woman is facing in politics

The literature clearly shows that patriarchy—both in public and private life—is one of the biggest obstacles to women's political participation in South Asia, especially in Bangladesh. In public spaces, women face serious challenges such as political violence, the influence of black money, sexual harassment, and a widespread belief that politics is only for men (Chowdhury, 2004, 2018). At home, the situation is not much easier. Many women struggle with a lack of family support, financial dependence, and husbands who discourage or block their involvement in politics. These forms of private patriarchy often go unnoticed but have a profound impact on women's ability to engage in political life. As Ahmed (2008) points out, cultural attitudes, unequal education, and limited party support further prevent women from stepping into leadership roles. Jahan (1973) adds that without strong family ties or patronage, it becomes even harder for women to rise in politics.

Other researchers highlight how multiple layers of discrimination exacerbate the problem. Lawanga (2008), Kumar (2017), and Panday (2010) discuss how poor education, religious restrictions, and male-dominated party systems all keep women on the sidelines. Many women are stuck in the informal economy, doing unpaid or low-wage work that leaves them without the time or resources to campaign or participate in political discussions. They also face practical challenges, such as limited mobility in public spaces or lack of access to reliable information. In both Bangladesh and wider South Asia, the system itself is stacked against them. Even when women enter politics, they often lack a meaningful voice. These studies collectively point to the same conclusion: unless deep-rooted social, economic, and institutional barriers are addressed, women will continue to be underrepresented in political life.

C. Students politics in Bangladesh and participation of female students

Student politics in Bangladesh has a long and proud history, playing key roles in major national movements such as the 1952 Language Movement, the 1971 Liberation War, and the struggle for democracy in the 1980s (Hossain et al., 2014). However, recent studies argue that it has now taken a problematic turn. Today's student politics, especially in public universities, is heavily controlled by national political parties such as the Awami League, BNP, Jatiyo Party, and Jamaat-e-Islami. These parties use their student wings to assert dominance on campuses, often leading to violence and unrest. Meanwhile, private universities prohibit student politics altogether, creating a divide and reinforcing negative perceptions of students' rights and political engagement (Hossain et al., 2014). Alam (2011) notes that student and teacher politics are deeply intertwined in South Asia, and although often overlooked, they significantly influence institutional management and the education system. Zaman (2014) adds that unlike in Western countries, where student unions serve students' welfare, student politics in Bangladesh primarily serves party interests, frequently disrupting academic life.

When it comes to female participation, the picture is even more concerning. Chowdhury and Islam (2014) found that while many female students are politically curious—discussing politics with friends and family, reading newspapers, and following political news—their actual participation is minimal. Most come from families that are only partially politically active, and cultural norms discourage their active involvement. Very few women support or are involved with political parties, and participation in activities such as voting, rallies, or writing to editors is rare. This low level of engagement is not due to a single reason but a combination of cultural expectations and gender norms. Girls are socialized to be passive, family-focused, and non-competitive, while politics is still largely seen as a "man's arena" (Chowdhury & Islam, 2014). Despite women holding top leadership roles in the country, these deep-rooted cultural attitudes continue to keep female students on the political sidelines.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. Feminist Perspective

Feminist theory helps us understand how women are treated unequally in society, including in politics. It shows that this inequality is not natural—it is built into the way our society functions. In a country like Bangladesh, women in politics often face judgment and discrimination simply for being involved. People question their character and assume they do

not belong in public life. Even though the country has a female Prime Minister, most women in politics still struggle to be taken seriously because politics is widely seen as a man's domain. Feminist thinkers argue that this kind of discrimination occurs not because women are less capable, but because the system is designed to keep power in the hands of men.

B. Goffman's Stigma Theory

Goffman's theory of stigma explains how society labels certain people as different or "not normal" and treats them unfairly because of it. In Bangladesh, women who participate in politics are often seen as breaking social rules, which brings stigma. They are viewed as going against their "proper" role, which is to stay at home and care for the family. This kind of thinking damages their reputation and prevents them from being fully accepted in political spaces. Even if they have the ability or interest, the fear of being judged or rejected causes many women to avoid politics altogether. When we consider both feminist ideas and stigma theory together, it becomes clear why so few women are involved in politics. It is not just that political systems are dominated by men—it is also that women are made to feel that they do not belong. Society pressures them to remain within traditional roles, and stepping outside these roles invites criticism and disrespect. These social attitudes create powerful barriers that prevent women from participating in political life, even if they wish to do so. To change this, we need to challenge both the systems and the mindsets that exclude women.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This research explores the status and challenges faced by female students involved in political activities at the University of Dhaka. Given the sensitivity and depth of the topic, a qualitative research approach was chosen. A quantitative method would have limited the scope of understanding, as it does not allow respondents to express their thoughts, experiences, or emotions freely. Since the aim is to explore the underlying reasons, socio-political backgrounds, and obstacles faced by female political activists, in-depth interviews provide the most suitable means to gather rich and meaningful data.

A. Selection of Study Area

The University of Dhaka, often regarded as the epicentre of student politics in Bangladesh, was selected as the study site. With its strong historical legacy in shaping national politics, it provides a relevant and dynamic context for understanding how female students navigate political spaces. However, despite this legacy, questions remain about whether female students enjoy the same status or opportunities as their male counterparts. To capture these realities, the study focused specifically on residential female students, as they are more deeply embedded in campus life and better positioned to share insights about daily political engagement and related challenges.

B. Study Population

The study focuses on female students who are involved in political activities, either through formal organizations or independently. These participants were selected to examine their socio-economic backgrounds, levels of engagement, and the barriers they face as young women navigating a male-dominated political environment within the university.

C. Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis includes two groups of female students:
1. Those actively involved in political activities and student movements but not affiliated with any formal political organization.
2. Those affiliated with the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), the student wing of the ruling Awami League.

These groups were selected to provide a diverse understanding of female political participation—both within party politics and outside formal party structures.

D. Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A total of 11 female students were selected using purposive sampling, as they were identified as political activists on campus. Among them:
1. Five were independent activists who participated in elections such as DUCSU (Dhaka University Central Students' Union).
2. Six were members of the Bangladesh Chhatra League.

This mix allowed for comparative insights into how affiliation (or lack thereof) influences women's political experiences and access to power.

E. Data Collection Method

I used semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection. This approach allowed flexibility in conversation while ensuring that key topics were covered. Prior to each interview, I obtained informed consent and explained the purpose of the study. Interviews were conducted privately to ensure comfort and confidentiality. Names were recorded only for participants who explicitly permitted it, and audio recordings were made with consent to ensure accurate data capture.

F. Timeline of Data Collection

The interviews were conducted over five days, from December 25 to December 29, with approximately three respondents interviewed each day. This schedule allowed sufficient time for conversation and reflection, while also helping to manage my workload as a student researcher.

G. Pre-testing of Questionnaire

Before beginning the formal data collection, I conducted a pre-test of the interview guide with three female students

involved in political activities. They were not part of the final sample.

This step helped me refine:
1. The clarity and simplicity of language,
2. The sequence and relevance of questions,
3. The effectiveness of probing techniques,
4. And the avoidance of overly suggestive or leading questions.

Following this, I finalized a set of 14 open-ended questions designed to capture personal experiences, challenges, and reflections related to political engagement.

H. Data Processing and Analysis

After collecting the data, I listened to each interview multiple times to ensure clarity and accuracy. I took detailed notes and began organizing the responses into patterns and themes. These were then compared with insights from existing literature. Through this process, I was able to develop categories and descriptive units that helped identify broader structural issues. The analysis was guided by feminist theory and Goffman's concept of stigma, helping to frame the participants' experiences in relation to gender, power, and social norms.

I. Limitations of the Study

Like any research project, this study has its limitations:
1. Time constraints limited the depth of fieldwork, as I had to balance academic responsibilities.
2. A larger sample would have enriched the findings.
3. Some respondents hesitated to share openly due to the political sensitivity of the topic.
4. I had to spend considerable time building trust and explaining the purpose of the study before starting interviews.

Despite these limitations, the study offers important insights into the lived experiences of politically active female students at the University of Dhaka.

V. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This section describes the analysis of data, followed by a discussion of the research findings. The socio-economic background of female students involved in politics is very important. Most of my respondents belong to middle-class families, while two belong to lower-middle-class families. One of my respondents from a lower-middle-class family, Case Study 02 (aged 24), said: "I came from a lower-middle-class family. My father is a farmer and my mother is a housewife. They do not want me to be involved in any political activities because they think it is a waste of time. Nothing will come from doing politics; there is no benefit in engaging in political activities. They just want me to complete my graduation and get a good job for a good life."

Middle-class families generally prefer that their daughters avoid political activities. They want them to focus on their studies and secure a good life. Another respondent, who also belongs to a lower-middle-class family and is involved in Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), Case Study 05 (aged 23), said: "I had to struggle a lot to get into the University of Dhaka. Now I have to pay for my studies on my own by giving tuition. I have to earn money for living and my studies; sometimes I even send money to my family to help them. My father is a farmer and my mother is a housewife. They do not even know what politics or political activities are or what I am involved with. They just want me to finish my studies and get a good job. They have no opinion about my involvement in politics because they have no understanding of it. So, I have to do things on my own."

Female students from middle- or lower-middle-class families often face obstacles from their families. Their families generally do not want them to be involved in politics, thinking that it is unsafe for women and that they should stay away from such activities. One of my respondents, who was elected DUCSU Vice President of a hall, Case Study 04 (aged 25), said: "My father has a job, and my mother is a housewife. They never support any political activities or political involvement. They strictly told me not to get involved in politics because they are always concerned about my safety as a woman, and also because I am an activist against the ruling party BCL on campus. During the DUCSU election, my father told me that whatever the result, I must accept it and not create or participate in another movement against it, even if the administration manipulates the results in favor of the ruling party. My family never wants me to be involved in this kind of chaos."

Middle-class families who are well-established and have political involvement often support their daughters' political participation, but they remain concerned about their safety, as some of my respondents mentioned. One respondent, a free activist from a well-educated and established middle-class family, shared a different story. Case 03 (aged 25) said: "My father is an advocate and my mother was a school teacher. All my family members are involved in politics. They support politics and are involved with the governing party, Awami League. Since I am a free activist and not involved with the governing party organization BCL, they do not fully approve. They told me to join the governing political party, and they would support it. I do not face obstacles from my family in doing politics, but they want me to be involved with the ruling party."

Case study 07 (aged 22), a DUCSU-elected General Secretary of a hall, said: "My father was a professor and my mother is a school teacher. My family has strong political involvement. My grandfather was involved in politics with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and my father holds a political post in the district committee of Awami League. They both were freedom fighters. They never asked me not to be involved in politics; they support me. But they want me to engage in politics ethically and ideologically, avoiding any unethical

activities. Sometimes, they are just concerned about my safety."

Another respondent from a middle-class family, Case 08 (aged 21), described: "My father is a police officer and my mother was a housewife. My family members are involved in politics and are always supportive of my participation. They advise me to be careful and worry about my safety, but they always encourage me in different political activities and student-related movements."

A respondent from another middle-class family, Case 10 (aged 21), said: "My father was a teacher, and my mother is also a teacher. My father was involved in politics before he passed away. My mother is also involved with the governing party. My father sometimes advised me not to be too involved in politics, but my mother always inspired me to participate in political activities. My mother also worries about my safety."

Some respondents' families do not support political participation at all. One of my respondents, Case 01 (aged 25), said: "My father and mother are both private employees. They have no involvement in politics and never support political participation. Unfortunately, I got involved in politics, but they dislike it completely and have constantly tried to convince me to leave it. They worry about my security all the time."

Considering the socio-economic background of female students involved in politics, the findings show that most come from middle- or lower-middle-class families. Families often do not support their daughters' political involvement due to concerns about safety. Families already involved in politics may support their daughters but sometimes try to keep them away from politics because they view political activities as unsafe for women. In some cases, the daughters' political involvement also significantly influences their family's political engagement.

A. Status of female students in politics

The status of female students in politics is very vulnerable. A very small number of female students are involved in politics. Although student politics at the University of Dhaka has a very glorious history, female students are not very interested in participating. This is because they have to face various challenges in politics, which are often not favourable to them.

One of my respondents, case 04 (aged 25), said: "I was not involved in any political activities before. I was just part of an organization called 'Slogan Eqattor' at the university. Things started to change when, in different movements, general students were beaten or humiliated by the ruling party, BCL. On 23rd January 2018, BCL attacked some female activists who were free activists because they were involved in the 'Seven College Movement,' which was very unethical and a violation of ideology. Similar incidents started happening in other student movements, where general

students faced violence from BCL. These events deeply affected me. Then I began to object to or protest against many violations of our rights. I started writing against the university administration and the ruling party BCL. While protesting, I faced many threats, including threats of rape and murder. I also faced many questions about my character. Rumours about my personal life and character were spread by BCL followers. I found that, in some cases, the university administration did not support me. I began to feel insecure on my own campus. My opinions as a DUCSU member were not taken as seriously as those of male members. Women in politics are in a very vulnerable position."

When asked about discrimination, one of my respondents (case 06, aged 26) said: "Even in the 21st century, society treats us as sex objects and as merely part of the reproductive system. Women are always dominated by men, even in politics. You can see that our Prime Minister is a woman, but we cannot see many other female leaders in politics. The number of female leaders is very small. Male members of politics always get priority over women. Women are discriminated against in various opportunities. Women are always harassed sexually and mentally, regardless of the political party they are involved with. In the ruling party BCL or as individual activists, women are always targeted for harassment. Their opinions are ignored in political decisions. For example, in our BCL committee, there has never been a woman as President or Secretary at the central or university level. Even though some female leaders have great potential and proven ability to lead political activities, they are ignored because they are female. Even if they are capable of leading, they often have to engage in 'BED POLITICS to get a position, which is extremely unfair and demoralizing for female politicians."

For the same question, another respondent (case 03, aged 25) said: "Women are always harassed in political participation. The BCL group physically attacked me and my friends during the 'Seven College Movement.' They also threatened to rape me multiple times. Male politicians threatened me several times through phone calls and spread rumors about my character and personal life to stop me from protesting against them. They do not even respect their female co-politicians. You can see the attack on 14th May 2019, when the full committee of BCL was formed by the president and secretary. In that committee, female politicians were devalued. They were disappointed with their assigned posts, as they deserved better. When they tried to protest, they were attacked by their party's male members. This shows that women are not safe in any political party. This is the status of female students in politics. In the 'Quota Movement,' many women were involved, but now only the names of male leaders are recognized. There are no female leaders acknowledged."

On this question, a perception emerged from two participants involved with the ruling party BCL. They said: Case 07 (aged 22): "Our leaders always try to protect us from harassment. They take our opinions before making any decisions. There

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is a wrong path in politics, but it depends on you whether you choose the wrong path or the right one."

Case 01 (aged 25): "Women are treated differently by different leaders. Our committee always gives protection and priority to female politicians, but the new committee devalues female participants. Instead of giving posts to capable women, they give positions to their close associates."

When asked, "Is our campus secure for female political participation?" some individual activists responded: "Our campus is not at all safe for female political participation. Women are always harassed by men in politics. Women are not secure on their own campus. They are harassed physically and mentally. They have to face questions about their character all the time. They face threats of rape and murder. At any time, I could be raped or murdered. I feel insecure all the time."

Another said: "Instead of being a member of the best educational center in the country, this campus cannot provide safety. Women politicians are always harassed on campus. Female politicians are not safe here."

Another respondent, case 08 (aged 21), a political activist of BCL, said: "I would say our campus is 60 percent safe for women politicians. It is not fully secure. They have to face harassment and violence in campus politics. The low rate of political participation among female students is due to the lack of safety; they feel insecure in political activities."

Considering female students' status on campus, one respondent, case 11 (aged 25), said: "Women's political status is not in a good position. Women are always abused and harassed by male politicians. They face different problems, do not get opportunities as men do, and are always underestimated by male participants. They feel insecure in political participation, and our administration cannot provide a secure campus for female politicians."

Another respondent, case 09 (aged 21), described the status of female politicians as: "You can see that the status of female politicians on campus is very vulnerable and insecure. They face harassment, discrimination, and multiple obstacles in their political participation. They face physical and verbal violence and are always dominated by their male co-participants. This patriarchal society does not accept women as politicians. The dominant patriarchal systems have not changed in the 21st century. There is talk of women's empowerment in our country, but the actual situation shows otherwise. Women are dominated in every sector. Female politicians cannot voice their opinions in political decisions."

B. Obstacles female students face in politics

Answering the question, "What are the obstacles female students face in politics?" most of my respondents gave similar answers. They mostly talked about the same

challenges. One's own will to participate in politics is very rare among female students. Social stigma restricts them from engaging in outside activities.

One of the respondents, case 03 (aged 25), said: "In our society, women are not encouraged to engage in outside or political activities. Society teaches them that their role is to be homemakers, and outside activities are for men. Social stigma keeps them from joining politics; they cannot break the tradition of their expected role. They do not consider their free will. They are dominated in this society and do not challenge the dominating system. I think one's own will is the most important thing for anything. Female students are always scared to join politics, as women involved in politics are considered normless or valueless. Social stigma is the main problem preventing female students from joining politics."

Another obstacle for female students in politics is the absence of safety or an insecure political system. One respondent (case 06, aged 26) said: "The main obstacle female students face in politics is that they feel insecure participating. They have to face violence and harassment in different political activities. The political system does not provide a safe environment. Women involved in politics are always afraid for their safety; anything could happen to them. They face different threats and acts of violence. Only a very small number of female students can overcome this situation and join politics. This terror of insecurity discourages them from participating."

Another respondent pointed out that family is a main obstacle. Case 01 (aged 25) said: "I think family is the main obstacle in joining politics. Most families strictly order female students not to join politics. They say politics is not for women; it is for men. For this reason, many women do not join politics, even if they wish to. Families do not want their daughters to engage in violent activities. Since politics is considered unsafe for women, families try to prevent involvement."

Women who are involved in politics often face judgments about their character. This perception is independent of political party affiliation. Women in politics are frequently seen as characterless and involved in unethical activities. Some respondents (cases 01, 04, 06) said: "Women involved in politics are always considered characterless. They are seen as dissolute and undisciplined, lacking norms and values. People view them narrowly. 'Khaterrajniti' or 'Bed politics' is a term implying that women gain political positions by having relationships with powerful male leaders. People assume that all female politicians use this method to gain leadership, which is a misconception. Although this may have happened in the past, people still hold this perception. For example, an ordinary female student can stay outside the hall and hang out with friends, but if a political female student stays outside at night, people start making humiliating comments about her character. Being political is often equated with being dissolute or characterless."

The patriarchal social system is another obstacle. Case 07 (aged 22) described: "In this patriarchal society, women are always stigmatized and dominated by men. Women cannot fully enjoy their rights under this male-dominated political system. They have to follow rules created by men for men's benefit. Women face gender discrimination in every sphere of life. Men created these rules to oppress women, and the political system is no exception."

VI. DISCUSSION

A. Socio-Economic Background of Female Students in Politics

Most female students who are active in politics at the University of Dhaka come from middle- and lower-middle-class families. These families are often hesitant or even resistant to their daughters engaging in political activities due to concerns about safety, social stigma, and a perceived lack of benefits from political involvement. In contrast, those from politically active families receive more support and encouragement, largely because political engagement is already normalized within their households. This pattern mirrors broader South Asian trends, where many prominent female leaders, such as Sheikh Hasina, Khaleda Zia, Indira Gandhi, and Benazir Bhutto, have entered politics through family legacies (Jahan, 1987). Thus, family background and class play a significant role in shaping whether and how young women enter political spaces.

B. Status of Female Students in Campus Politics

The status of female students in campus politics is alarmingly low and often unsafe. Many faces various forms of harassment, both verbal and physical, and are sidelined in political decision-making despite having leadership capabilities. Some join politics through residence hall influence, ideological motivations, or family legacy, but they are often treated as secondary to male leaders. Their participation is symbolic at best, lacking real influence or power within political organizations. The male-dominated and patriarchal structure of student politics creates a hostile environment in which women's opinions are undervalued, and their presence is frequently questioned. Even in an institution with a rich history of political activism like the University of Dhaka, women remain marginalized, and their political engagement is viewed as breaking social norms (Panday, 2010; Kumar, 2017).

C. Obstacles Faced by Female Students in Politics

Female political activists face a host of challenges, beginning with resistance from their families, who fear for their safety in a violent and unstable political environment. Social stigma plays a major role, branding women in politics as morally questionable or characterless, regardless of their actual behavior or values. Structural and cultural patriarchy, as outlined by Chowdhury (2004) and Ahmed (2008), systematically limits women's access to political institutions and leadership roles. Religious and cultural norms also reinforce the belief that a woman's place is in the home, not in public or political life (Panday, 2010). Additionally, a lack of political training, limited economic resources, and inadequate representation in decision-making bodies further hinder their participation. These overlapping barriers create a deeply unequal playing field, where female students must navigate not just politics but also a society that questions their very right to participate.

VII. CONCLUSION

Female students who are involved in politics mostly come from middle- and lower-middle-class families. Most of their families do not support any political activities or political participation in any party and have very strict rules about it. However, families that are involved in politics are sometimes supportive of female students' political participation. The status of female students in politics at the University of Dhaka is very vulnerable, as indicated by the low number of female students in politics. Female students involved in politics often feel unsafe and insecure. They have been threatened many times to stop their movements or protests, and the administration is not very concerned about it. This violent system decreases the participation of female students in politics. Women are discriminated against and deprived of their rights in this political system. The main obstacles female students face in politics include family opposition, social stigma, harassment, rumours about their character, patriarchal societal norms, religion, lack of political education, and limited economic resources. All of these factors play a crucial role in hindering women's political participation. To build a fairer society, we need to remove the stigma that holds women back from participating in politics and focus on empowering women as a key part of the country's progress. Creating a safe and supportive political environment for women is essential to encourage more of them to get involved. As Ahmed (2008) points out, increasing the number of women in leadership roles—both locally and nationally—is necessary to give Bangladeshi women a real voice in decision-making. This requires breaking down deep-rooted stereotypes that limit women to household roles and prevent them from stepping into public and political life. Unfortunately, political parties often are not welcoming spaces for women, which makes it even harder for them to participate (Chowdhury, 2018). To change this, we must ensure women's political and social rights are protected and actively work to dismantle the systems of oppression that hold them back. Giving female students a stronger place in politics is an important step toward achieving true gender equality in Bangladesh's political landscape.

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