

Historical Evolution of Rural-Local Government in Bangladesh and Its Current State

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ABSTRACT: The local government system of Bangladesh that we see at present time has a long historical evolution. It has come to its present shape through a gradual process of evolution. The present structure of rural-local government institutions of Bangladesh is the outcome of the evolution of more than two hundred year British and Pakistan rule. Even after the independence, there had been numerous changes made to their structure. Different governments brought about changes in their composition and functions in the name of decentralization. Behind those initiatives there had been different motives of the then governments. This article is an attempt to present a vivid account of the existing structure, formation and historical development of the rural local government bodies in Bangladesh.

KEYWORDS: Bangladesh; Rural-Local Government; Union Parishad; Upazila Parishad; Zila Parishad.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Local government is very important for the political development of a country particularly to strengthen its base for democracy. It makes people politically conscious, and enables the people to establish a democratic society and administrative system. It is regarded as a highly viable mechanism through which democratic processes and practices can be established and participatory development ensured (Khan, 2000 in Barakat A. et al, 2015: 33). It is the vital part of the State, which deals with the matters of people of a particular locality (Stones, 1963:11). According to the United Nations (UN), the concept of local self-government refers to a political sub-division of a nation or state which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs, including the power to impose taxes or exact labor for prescribed purposes. The governing body of such an entity is elected or otherwise locally selected (Siddiqui, 2005: 4 in Assaduzzaman, 2009: 102-103).

The genesis of local government in Bangladesh has a long tradition. The establishment of local government institution was first initiated during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Over the decades, the structure, functions, and financial management of local government institutions have witnessed many spectacular changes in coherence with the changes in Acts, Ordinances, Rules and Regulations. Such changes were dictated by the imperatives of legitimizing and broadening the power-base in the central/national government. In course of time, laws have been made to form local bodies at village, Upazila/Thana (sub-district), and district level to share the functions, responsibilities and authorities of the centre (Siddiqui, 2005: 4). This study tries to focus on of the historical development of local government, particularly the growth of rural-local government institutions in Bangladesh. It analyzes the initiatives of different governments of different regimes that contribute to shaping the current structure and formation of rural-local government bodies of the country.

II. CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL BASIS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN BANGLADESH

Bangladesh's Constitution of 1972 clearly spelt out the legal basis and responsibilities of local government. There are few provisions relating to local government. Article 59 (1) (Part III) states that the local government in every administrative unit of the Republic shall be entrusted to bodies composed of persons elected in accordance with law. Article 59 (2) states that Parliament has been given the power to make necessary laws for its local government administration and the work of public officers, and the maintenance of public order. Article 60 provides that for the purpose of giving full effect to the provision of Article 59, Parliament shall, by law, confer powers on the local government bodies referred to in that article including power to impose

taxes for local purposes, to prepare their budgets and to maintain funds. Apart from the above two articles, article 11 provides that the Republic shall be a democracy in which fundamental human rights and freedoms and respect for the dignity and worth of the human person shall be guaranteed, and in which effective participation by the people through their elected representatives in administration at all levels shall be ensured.

III. HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF RURAL-LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN BANGLADESH

The growth and development of local government in the Indian sub-continent did not follow any specific laws or rules. The local government bodies experienced dramatic changes in their nature based on the defining characteristics of the ruling regimes. The present system of local government has been inherited from the British rulers who modeled the local government bodies on their own. They first implanted municipal institutions in Indian subcontinent on the pattern of British urban government. On the other hand, the evolution of rural local government passes through several stages of trial and error (Siddiqui, 2005: 39). This section is an endeavor to discuss the evolutionary process of rural-local government institutions of Bangladesh. For the convenience of discussion, we can divide the whole evolutionary process of the nature and functions of rural-local government into four periods, such as pre-British period, British period, Pakistan period and Bangladesh period.

3.1 Pre-British Period

During pre-Mughal era, village-based local governments, e.g. village council were in force in this sub-continent. Every village used to manage its own affairs. During the medieval age, village administration was organized under the Village Panchayat (Khan, n. d.: 8). This system originated on their own and thus it did not have any legal basis. The Panchayet was composed of five persons who were appointed by the community (Siddiqui, 2005: 475). The Panchayet was responsible for maintaining law and order, resolving social disputes, implementing development activities, superintending education, health, etc.

During the Mughal period, the revenue collection system became more systematic and the local administration became more dynamic in this regard. In this period, Sarkar/Chakla, and Pargana became the nerve centers of general and revenue administration (Khan, n. d.: 8).

3.2 British Period (1766-1947)

The British rulers made different experiments with the local government system of the Indian subcontinent during their two hundred year ruling. The main purpose of their experiments was to devise a system that would serve British imperial interests (Islam, 2015: 63). With the inception of the Permanent Settlement System in 1793, the British colonial rulers replaced the indigenous system with the British model of local governance. Both the Pargana and the Panchayat system were abolished. The civil and criminal laws and courts became the basis of local administration and land lords became the local rulers.

They introduced the Chawkidari Act in 1870 that attempted to revive the age-old Panchayat system. This Act entrusted the District Magistrate with the power to form a five member Panchayat (Islam, 2015: 63) at union level. The Panchayet had only one function, e.g. maintaining law and order situation. There were some disadvantages of Panchayet system. Some of them are,

- Public representation was not reflected under that system because Panchayet members were nominated, not elected. They were considered as government official;
- They failed in maximum cases in collection of taxes and creation of funds;
- The Chaukidars were not regularly paid their salary;
- The Panchayet was formed only to assist administration and to maintain law and order. They were not responsible for social welfare activities (NILG, 2012: 4).

In 1882, Lord Ripon passed the Local Self-Government Act, 1885 which introduced a three-tier system of local government, i.e. district board for district, local board for subdivision, and Union Committee for several villages spreading over an area of ten to twelve square miles (Khan, n. d.: 8). But the Chaukidari Panchayet existed side by side. The Union Committee consisted of five to nine members elected by the residents of the Union. The Union Committee would elect a Chairman from among the members. The Lieutenant Governor was vested with the authority to establish the Union Committee (Siddiqui, 2005: 475).

The Bengal Village Self-Government Act was enacted in 1919 through which the former three-tier system was replaced by a two-tier system consisting of Union Board and District Board (Khan, n. d.: 8). The Union Board was composed of six to nine members of whom two-thirds were elected by the union residents and one-third nominated by the District Magistrate. The system of nomination was abolished in 1946. The Board members elected a President and a Vice-President from amongst themselves. The President was the chief executive of the Board.

The Act of 1919 did nothing other than confer of power to the Union Board from Union Court for settlement of minor disputes. Other functions were same as that of under the Act of 1885. So, the 1919 Act was

a minor improvement over the 1885 Act. Village governments used to enjoy much more judicial power during ancient and medieval ages (Khan, n. d.: 10-11).

3.3 Pakistan Period (1947-1971)

After the independence of Pakistan in 1947, the structure of local self-government remained the same till 1956. But the system was changed radically with the introduction of the Basic Democracies Order by President Ayub Khan on October 27, 1959 (Rahman, 2000: 112-113). This Order prescribed a new brand of local government system. Four-tier local government was set up: Union Council, Thana Council, District Council, and Divisional Council in ascending order (Rahman, 2000: 112-113). Former Union Board was changed to Union Council and a lot of changes took place in the formation, functions, and financial management of Union Council. On average a Union comprised an area with 10,000 inhabitants and the Union Council was constituted with ten to fifteen members; from 1960 to 1962, two-third of them were elected and one-third nominated by the government. The system of nomination was abolished after the introduction of the constitution in 1962 and the Union Council became a fully elected body. The voting was held through ballot. The Council elected one Chairman and one Vice-Chairman from amongst its members. The Chairman and members had to take oath before entering office. The Chairman could be removed by a no confidence resolution of a two-third of the total members. The usual term of the office of Union Council was five years.

3.4 Bangladesh Period (1971-2018)

Since independence of Bangladesh in 1971, different governments took different initiatives to strengthen the rural-local government bodies. Though changes have been made in terms of arrangement of tiers of local government institutions, unfortunately almost nothing has been done to strengthen them.

Mujib Regime (1971-1975)

Immediately after independence, President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman promulgated the Presidential Order No. 7, 1972 through which he dissolved all existing local government bodies and appointed administrators to take-over their functions. The name of local government bodies was changed. The name of the Union Council was changed to Union Panchayat and the name of Thana Council was changed to Thana Development Committee while the District Council was named as Zila Board or District Board (Panday, 2008 in Islam, 2015: 64).

Again in 1973 the Presidential Order No. 22 was enacted which provided for a three-tier rural-local government system with a directly elected Union Parishad (UP), a Thana Parishad under the control of Sub Divisional Officer (ex-officio Chairman) and a Zilla Parishad (ZP) under the control of DC (ex-officio Chairman). But the functions and sources of income of these local bodies remained almost the same as in the BDO, 1959.

Zia Regime (1976-1981)

In 1976, President Ziaur Rahman initiated major changes in the system of rural-local government for the first time in independent Bangladesh. He introduced a three-tier rural-local government system under the Local Government Ordinance 1976: UP at the Union level, Thana Parishad at the Thana level and the ZP at the District level. The structure and functions of the UP remained almost the same as they were under the Presidential Order No.22. But the post of the Vice-chairman was abolished and four additional members (two from women and another two from peasants) nominated by the SDO were included (NILG, 2012: 5). However, the Ordinance conferred significant control of the central government over the UPs. For example, the SDO was given the veto power against any decision of UPs (Khan, n. d.: 9).

The Ordinance promulgated Gram Shava (village councils) at the village level which was transformed into Gram Sarkar (GS) (village government) in 1980. The GS was a body consisting of gram pradhan (village executive) and eleven elected members representing different classes of the village (Panday, 2011). The GS was a mini-government which could undertake planning and promotional programs (Chowdhury, 1987: 20). But the military regime of General H M Ershad abolished GS by a Martial Law Order in July 1982 (Panday, 2011). The Ordinance also entrusted the UP judicial functions under the newly promulgated Village Courts Ordinance, 1976 according to which the village courts were to consist of the UP Chairman, two UP members and two other representatives from the two parties of the disputes (Panday, 2011).

It is said that the Local Government Ordinance, 1976 was a continuance to the BDO in terms of functions and taxation power. Though it delegated forty functions to the UP, it did not reshuffle the revenue sources of the UP to match the assigned tasks (Panday, 2011).

Ershad Regime (1982-1990)

President H M Ershad introduced Upazila Parishad (UZP) in place of Thana Parishad and a considerable authority was delegated to the UZP under the Local Government (Thana Council and Thana Administration Reorganization) Ordinance 1982. The UZP was entrusted with the power to impose tax, rates, fees and tolls. The UP lost its authority again in this process to accommodate transfer of responsibilities and authority to the UZP (Khan, n. d.: 9).

The Local Government (UPs) Ordinance was enacted in 1983 which divided the Union into three wards. A UP consisted of a Chairman, nine elected Members- three from each ward and three nominated women members each of whom was to represent one ward. The nominated women members were to be nominated by the UZP from among the women of the entire Union (Siddiqui, 2005: 72). The provision of nominating peasant members was omitted by this Ordinance. In 1988, by an amendment of the Ordinance of 1983, provision was made to have the women members nominated by the DC instead of UZP (Siddiqui, 2005: 67).

Under the Local Government (ZPs) Act, 1988, a ZP consisted of 4 categories of members: (a) public representatives such as Member of Parliament (MP), and Paurashava Chairman of the concerned districts, (b) nominated members, selected by the government from amongst residents of the concerned district, (c) nominated women members also selected by the government from amongst residents of the concerned district, and (d) certain officials which includes DC and other district level offices specified by the government (Siddiqui, 2005: 72). All members other than officials had voting rights. The ZP Chairman was to be appointed by the government.

In 1989, three separate Ordinances were passed to govern three hill district local government Parishads. These are, (a) The Bandarban Hill District Local Government Parishad Act, 1989, (b) The Khagrachhari Hill District Local Government Parishad Act, 1989, and (c) The Rangamati Hill District Local Government Parishad Act, 1989. According to these Acts, each Hill District Council (HDC) was composed of thirty one members (tribal and non-tribal) who were to be elected directly by the voters of the concerned hill district. The Chairmen of the three hill district local government Parishad were elected from the tribal people. The term of that Parishad was three years. The DCs of these districts acted as Secretaries of the Parishads (Siddiqui, 2005: 480). HDCs are to be the principal organization of tribal regions for the implementation of development projects. It may be noted here that three Hill districts of Bangladesh were functioning under the above laws up to the passing of Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council Act, Act XII of 1998.

Khaleda Zia Regime (1991-1996) - 1st Term

The first Khaleda Zia government (1991-1996) abolished the Upazila system. The government passed the Local government UZP and Upazila Administration Reorganization (Repeal) Ordinance 1991 and constituted Thana Unnayan Samannya Committee (Thana Development and Coordination Committee) at the Thana level. The Thana Unnayan Samannya Committee (TUSC) comprised a Chairman, ex-officio members, nominated members, and official members. The UP Chairman and Members of the constituent UPs would be the ex-officio representative members of the committee and they would elect the Chairman of that Committee. Three women members would be nominated by the government from amongst the UP Members of the thana/Upazila and the relevant Thana level officers (Siddiqui, 2005: 102).

The Local government (UPs) (Amendment) Act was passed in 1993 through a Union was divided into nine wards (Siddiqui, 2005: 100). A UP consisted of one Chairman, nine Members (one elected from each ward) and three women members from reserved seats (one from three wards) elected by the UP Chairman and Members. But not more than one woman member was to be elected from a ward. The functions of the UP under this Act remained unchanged as the Local Government (UPs) Ordinance, 1983.

Sheikh Hasina Regime (1996-2001) - 1st Term

After taking over the power, the Sheikh Hasina government formed a Local Government Commission in May 1997 to suggest the structure of local government consistent with democratic spirit and with a sustainable base. This commission suggested a four-tier system: Gram Parishad (GP) at village level, UP at union level, UPZ at Thana level, and ZP at district level (Khan, n. d.: 10). Accordingly the government passed the Local Government (UPs) (Second Amendment) Act, 1997 under which the structure of the UP remained same as the Act of 1993 except holding of election in reserved women seats.

The Local Government (GP) Act, 1997 provided the provision of forming GP at the ward level. The GP would be treated as an administrative unit for the purpose of fulfilling the Article 59 of the Constitution. It would comprise a Chairman, nine male and three female members. The concerned ward member would act as the GP Chairman. It was not given the power of taxation (Siddiqui, 2005: 109-110). But, the GP could not be constituted due to the intervention of the High Court.

After the Peace Accord of 1997 between the central Government and the tribal, the government established a Ministry of CHT Affairs and CHT Regional Councils. Government also reorganized the Hill

District Local Government Councils into HDC (Bandarban, Khagrachari and Rangamati). Each HDC is composed of 31 members who are directly elected by direct election. Majority of them come from tribal populations. HDCs are to be the principal organization of tribal regions for the implementation of development projects.

In 1998, the UZP Act was enacted according to which an UZP consisted of a Chairman, members, and women members in the reserved seats. The Paurashava Chairman or Acting Chairmen and UP Chairmen or Acting Chairman under the jurisdiction of the concerned Upazila would be the ex-officio representative members of UZP. Out of the total number of UP and Paurashava (if any) members/commissioners, there would be one third reserved seats exclusively for women members who would be elected by UP women members and Paurashava women commissioners from amongst themselves (Siddiqui, 2005: 109-110). The ex-officio representative members and the women members in the reserved seats would have voting rights. The UZP Chairman would be elected by the voters of the entire Upazila on the basis of adult franchise. But the Upazila Parishad Act, 1998 was not in operation practically by the then government. The previous TUSC continued their functions at the Upazila level up to 2009.

The ZP Act was passed by the government in 2000 through which a ZP consisted of a Chairman, fifteen members, and five women members in the reserved seats. All those members would be elected by the members of an electoral college consisting of the City Corporation Mayor and Commissioners (if any), UZP Chairman, Paurashava Chairman and Commissioners and UP Chairman and Members within the jurisdiction of a district (Siddiqui, 2005: 122). The ZP Chairman and members including women members in the reserved seats will be entitled to receive an honorarium, special privileges, leave and other facilities by the government. But, the Act was inactive up to 2011. In December 2011, the Awami League government appointed ZP Administrator under Article 82 of the Act.

Khaleda Zia Regime (2001-2006) - 2nd Term

After coming to power for the second time, Khaleda Zia passed Gram Sarkar (GS) Act on 26 February 2003. The Act called for a 15-member non-elected GS in each UP ward, chaired by the elected member of the respective ward. The women members elected in reserved seats were to serve as advisors to each of the three GS in their constituencies. The UNO was empowered to nominate the members of the GS other than the chairperson, unless there was a consensus in the meeting where at least 10 percent of the voters of the ward were present to decide on the panel of nominees. The government started to implement the legislation from August 1, 2003 and within a few weeks, about 40,000 GS bodies were formed.

Caretaker Government Regime (2007-2008)

During this period, the Chief Advisor of the Caretaker Government took different initiatives to strengthen local government bodies in Bangladesh. The system of GS was abolished by this government on 01 January 2007 and the Upazila system was revived with some minor changes in the UZP Act. Free and fair elections were held in different areas to elect Upazila Chairman and Members. Moreover, some City Corporation elections were also held during their regime (Islam, 2015: 65).

Sheikh Hasina Regime (2009-2014) - 2nd Term

After emerging in power for the second time, Sheikh Hasina led Awami League government took some important measures to strengthen the rural government institutions particularly in the structure of UP and UZP. The government passed the Local Government (UP) Act, 2009 according to which the UP shall consist of a Chairman and nine members from nine wards including three women members in the reserved seats. On the other hand, Local Government (UZP) Act, 2009 was passed by the government through which the UZP is to be constituted with an elected Chairman, two Vice-chairmen (one is reserved for women). On 01 December 2011, the UZP (Amendment) Act, 2011 was enacted in the Parliament. During this period, the government also took initiative to run the ZP by elected representatives through implementation of the ZP Act 2000. As a part of this initiative, the government appointed administrators to the ZPs on 15 December 2011. Most of the Administrators were the top Awami League leaders of the concerned districts (The Daily Star, 2011). No election was held to ZP during this term. The unelected 'Administrators' completed their five years of office at the end of 2016.

Sheikh Hasina Regime (2014- to date) – 3rd Term

After coming to power for the third time, the AL government took steps to introduce a party based system in the local government elections and make the ZP stronger through decentralization of power to the elected representatives. Accordingly, at the end of 2015, the government passed the Local Government (UP) (Amendment) Act, 2015, the Local Government (UZP) (Amendment) Act, 2015, the Local Government (ZP) (Amendment) Act, 2015, the Local Government (City Corporation) (Amendment) Act, 2015, and the Local Government (Paurashava) (Amendment) Act, 2015 were passed. These Acts introduced a party based system in

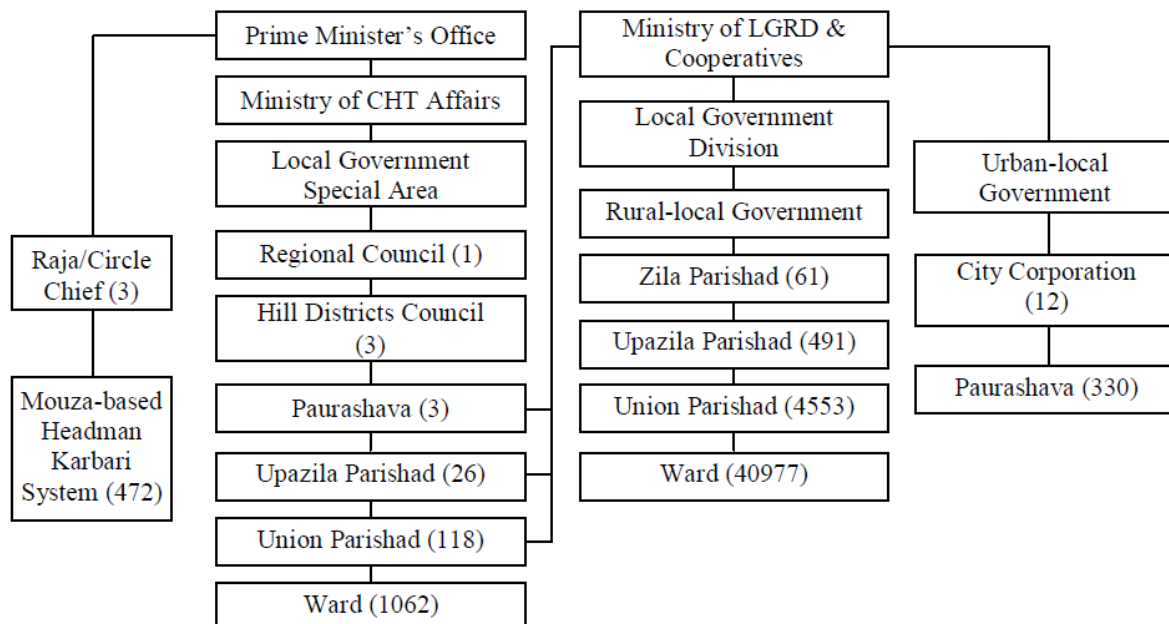
the local government elections. According to these Acts, to contest the election, candidates are to be nominated by the political parties. But there will be no restriction for a person to contest in the election as an independent candidate with a symbol of his/her choice. The last local government elections were held following these Acts. In previous elections, parties backed their candidates only informally, while aspiring candidates freely filed nominations.

During this period, as a part of strengthening ZP, the government passed the ZP (Amendment) Act, 2016 updating the ZP Act 2000. This Act made clear the ambiguity about the formation of the Electoral College to elect 21 members of the Parishad (one Chairman, fifteen Members, and five Women Members in the reserved seats). The Electoral College will be constituted with the public representatives from all tiers of local government. Under the ZP (Amendment) Act, 2016, the ZP election was held in sixty one ZP of the country in December 2016. Elections in three HDCs such as, Bandarban, Khagrachari and Ragamati did not take place as there are separate laws for those three district councils. The reorganization of the ZP was obviously a welcome step which has completed the whole cycle of LG elections on the one hand, and as a gesture of honoring the constitutional provision to have elected local government institutions in all the administrative units of the country on the other (Ahmed, 2016.).

IV. CURRENT STATE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN BANGLADESH

Local government institutions are at present divided into categories: rural and urban. There are three categories of rural-local government. ZP is placed at the top of the rural-local government hierarchy. Below the ZP, there are UZPs. UP is the third tier of rural-local government. Urban areas have two distinct categories: City Corporations and Paurashavas. Paurashavas are classified into A, B, and C, depending on the amount of revenue they generate. For the Chittagong Hill Tracts, there is another special type of local government (Figure 1). At present, there are 4553 UPs, 491 UZPs, 330 Paurashava, 12 City Corporations, 61 ZPs and 3 Hill District Councils in Bangladesh (Wikipedia, 2020). The average number of populations is 34 thousand in UP, 287 thousand in UZP, 89 thousand in Paurashava, 1,860 thousand in City Corporation and 2,340 thousand in ZP (Barkat et. al., 2015: 36).

Figure 1: Existing Structure of Local Government in Bangladesh



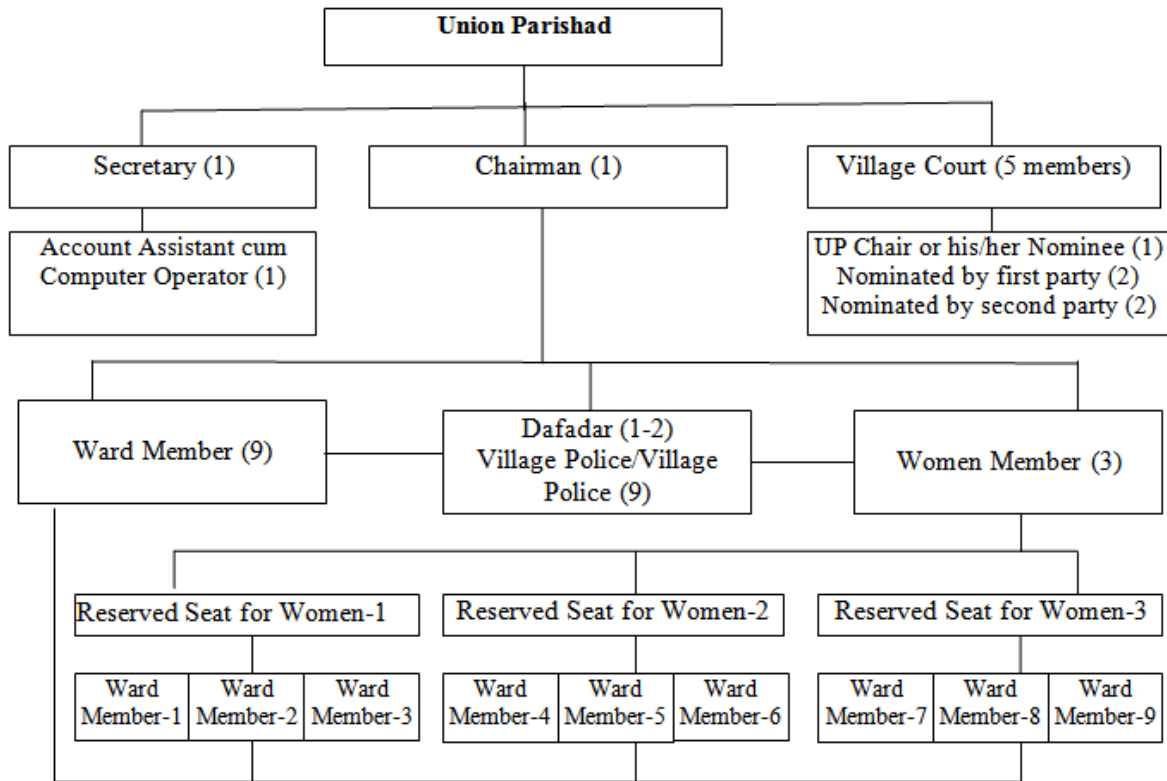
[Source: Developed based on Tofail, 2002]

4.1 Current State of the Union Parishad

Currently UP is being governed under the Local Government (UP) (Amendment) Act, 2010. It has been functioning with an elected body of thirteen members consisting of one Chairman and twelve Members of whom three seats are exclusively reserved for women. The Chairman and members will be elected by direct election based on adult franchise every five years. Within one month of first meeting after formation of a Parishad, a panel of three Chairmen is to be elected by the members from amongst themselves. One panel Chairman must be from reserved women members. Each UP has a full time secretary appointed by the DC. A

single position for Accountant Assistant-cum-Computer Operator has been created. The provision of village police is there to maintain law and order of the UP (one to two Dafadars and five to nine Chowkidars/Mahalladers). Dafadars and Chowkidars are appointed by the DC on approval of the UNO. The current organogram of the UP has been presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Current Organogram of the Union Parishad



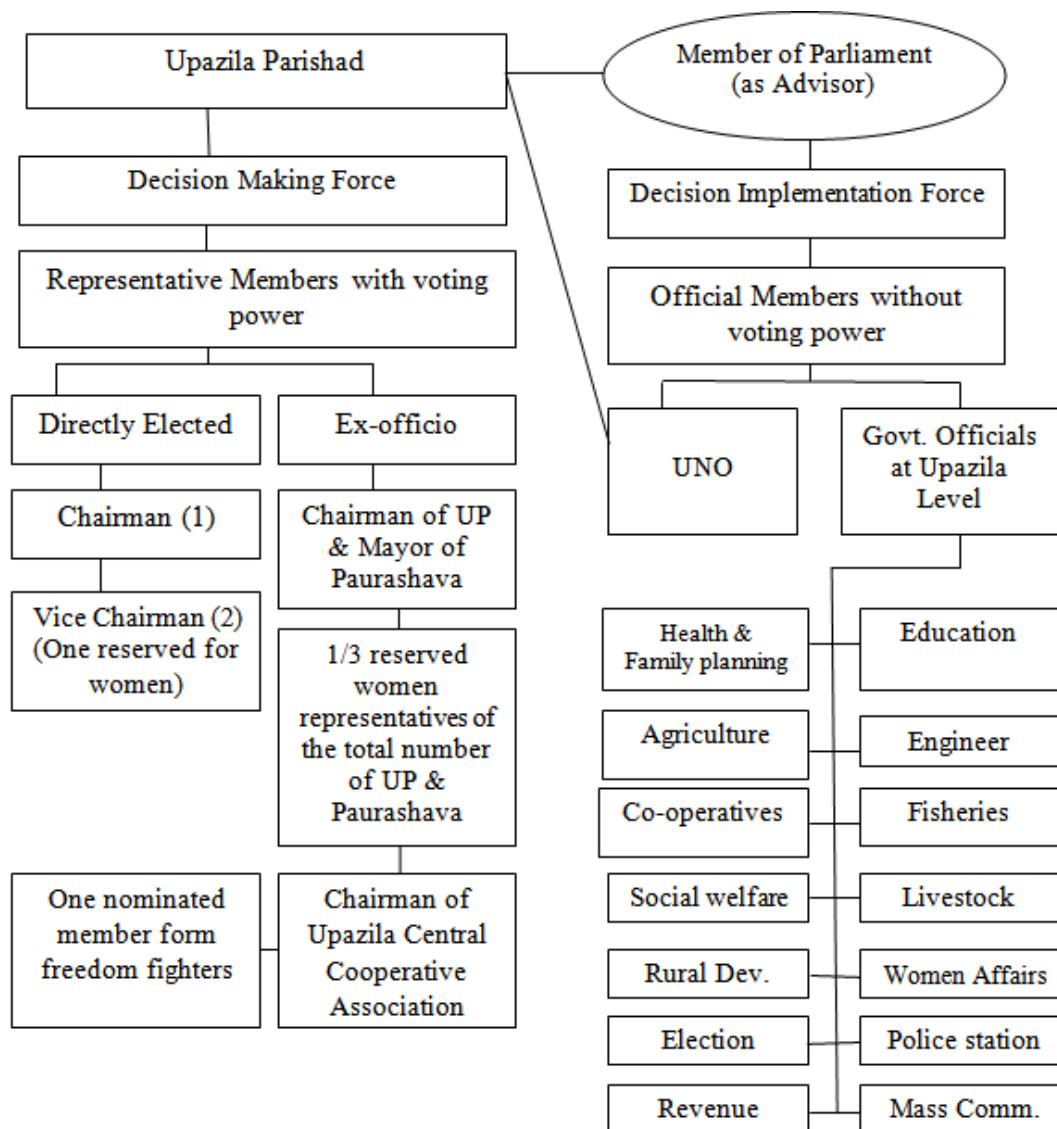
[Source: Developed by the authors]

A UP has some government official members without voting rights such as Sub-assistant Agricultural Officer, Sub-assistant Community Medical Officer, Family Welfare Visitor, and Veterinary Field assistant working at Union level. In addition, representatives from freedom fighters, Community Based Organizations, NGOs, religious leaders, women, and disadvantaged occupational groups like weavers, fishermen, landless workers, and destitute women could be members of the UP without voting right (Barkat et. al., 2015: 40). The Village Court is a semi formal court run by the UP with the chairmanship of UP Chairman along with four members of whom at least two are from the UP Members. For smooth functioning of UP, each UP has thirteen Standing Committees on specific subject-matters. Each committee consists of five to seven members and other co-opt members. Apart from these Standing Committees, additional committees are to be constituted with the approval of the DC, if necessary in the UP (Barkat et. al., 2015: 44).

4.2 Current State of the Upazila Parishad

Currently UZP is being governed under the UZP (Amendment) Act, 2011. A Chairman, two Vice-chairpersons (one of them a woman), Chairman of all UPs under the Upazila concerned, Mayors of all Paurashavas (if there are any) are to be the representative members in the UZP along with one-third reserved women representatives of the total number of UP and Paurashava to be elected from the women members of UP and Paurashava, one Nominated member form freedom fighters, and the Chairman of Upazila Central Cooperative Association. Moreover, government officials, especially those transferred to the UZP are ex-officio members of the UZP without voting rights. The current structure of the UZP has been presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Present Administrative Structure of the Upazila Parishad



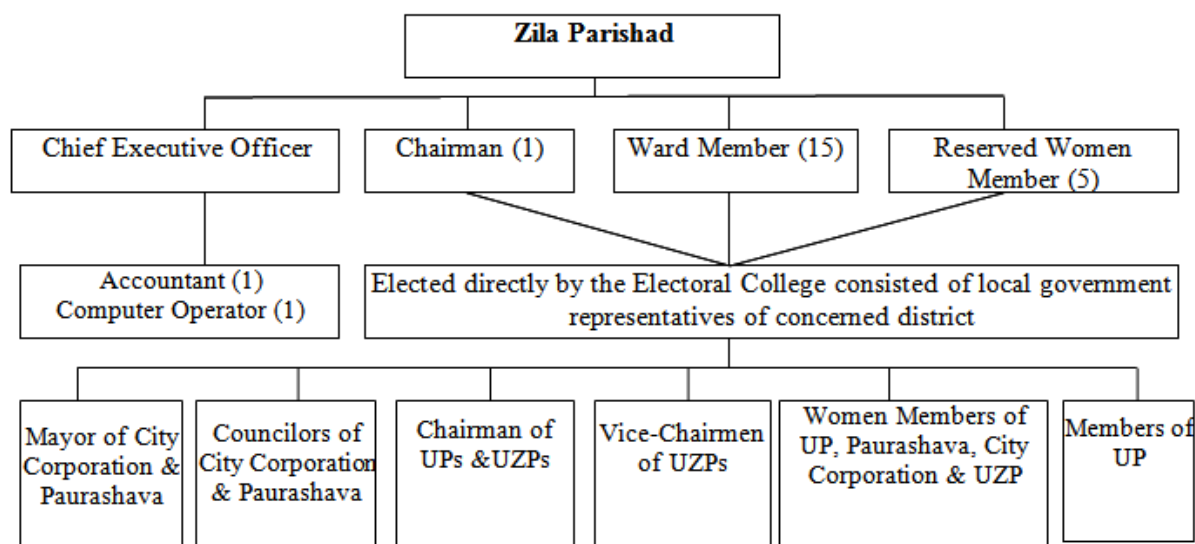
[Source: Developed by the authors]

The UNO will serve as the chief executive officer of the Upazila and the government will appoint one secretary to the Parishad. The Member of Parliament (MP) becomes the advisor of the UZP. After taking advice from the MP the UZP can try to communicate with the government. It has been made mandatory. The Vice-chairpersons will elect a two-member chairman panel within one month of the first meeting of the Parishad. The UZP will hold at least one meeting a month at its office. For executing its activities smoothly, the Parishad will form seventeen Standing Committees on different issues with the duration of maximum two and a half years within a month of the first meeting (GoB, 2011: Article 29). At least one-third elected women members from the reserved seats will be the presidents of these Standing Committees, each consisting of five to seven members and other co-opt members. The Parishad can also form additional Standing Committees if needed.

4.3 Current State of the Zila Parishad

ZPs are currently being governed under the ZP (Amendment) Act, 2016 according to which a ZP consists of a Chairman, fifteen Members, and five female Members in the reserved seats. All of them will be elected by the Electoral College which is formed with the public representatives from all tiers of local government like Mayors, Councilors, and reserved Councilors of the City Corporations, Paurashavas, and Chairmen, Vice-chairmen, Members and reserved Members of the Ups and UZPs (Figure 4). As per the section 31(2) of the Act, a temporary panel Chairman, or a member or a government nominated official could be able to discharge the duties of the ZP Chairman in case of his or her absence.

Figure 4: Present Structure of the Zila Parishad



[Source: Developed by the authors]

It is noted here that sixty one ZP of the country are functioning under the ZP (Amendment) Act 2016. But three Hill districts are now functioning under the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council Act, Act XII of 1998 according to which each HDC is composed of 31 members who are directly elected by direct election. About 65% of those members come from tribal populations.

V. CONCLUSION

Strengthening the local government body is the cherished goal of the people. The demands for democracy and local government have always moved in tandem. The representatives of a local body based on democratic ideas can promote the interest of the people. It is essential to establish local government bodies at each level of administration with elected representative. Paragraph 59 & 60 the Bangladesh constitutions have an outline of a local government system with elected representatives facilitating effective participation the people for each unit of administration. In compliance with the constitutional requirement and to institutionalize the democratic aspirations in all walks of life, it is obligatory to ensure the operation of effective local government organizations. The history of local government shows that Bangladesh inherited a colonial local government structure since it was under the British Raj for two hundred years and under Pakistan for about 24 years. Local government bodies have been established at different levels in different periods. Laws/Ordinances have been made to form local bodies at village, Thana, District and Divisional level from time to time. Since inception the local government institutions have undergone frequent changes in their functions and responsibilities. The local government bodies have been created, abolished and reintroduced in every period of government with a view to meeting the needs and expectations of the general people. In spite of having subsequent and manifold changes, rural-local government institutions are now established, unambiguously, at every administrative unit of the country except division. The Local Government Division of the Ministry of LGRD and Cooperatives is entrusted with the responsibility of managing the affairs of the local government bodies in Bangladesh. Presently, the rural-local government institutions i.e. the UP, UZP and ZP are functioning under the Local Government (UP) Act 2009, the UZP (Amendment) Act 2011, and the ZP (Amendment) Act 2016 respectively. Every institution has a well defined structure, set of predetermined goals, a team of personnel, mechanism of coordination and a set term of five years. The representatives of all those tiers are elected by the people on the basis of adult franchise and are paid a monthly honorarium.

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