

Does Critical Mass Matter? An Inquiry into Descriptive Representation of Women Members of Parliament in Bangladesh

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Abstract

Over the last few decades there has been growing tension on the issue of representation of women in the parliament with the advent of feminist movement. Westminster countries¹ thereby have undergone a number of experiments. As a response to pacify the growing tensions attempts including changes in the electoral system, party culture etc. have been ventured to increase the participation or representation of women in the parliament in the Westminster countries. Among the main four Westminster countries (United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and New Zealand), New Zealand has achieved very noticeable changes in the representation of women in the parliament. United Kingdom, the mother country of Westminster has also encountered a number of changes in the electoral system. This wave of change has not been confined only in Westminster countries. It has rather stirred the curtain of the parliament of other countries, especially those which were under the rule of British East India Company for a long period of time. In all these Westminster countries both descriptive and substantive representation of women in the parliament has substantially increased. It has therefore, been very imperative to investigate whether or how descriptive representation has been the case for Bangladesh, a country ruled by British East India Company for about two hundred years. Furthermore, the parliamentary system of Bangladesh is implanted with the inner logic of Westminster system. Upon this context this article attempts to investigate whether descriptive representation of women has increased in the parliament using data collected through primary and secondary source. The article also attempts to measure the extent and pattern of descriptive representation of women in the parliament. In doing so the article uses the lens of Marian et al (2006).

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