

## PREFACE

South Asia, as Sobhan has argued, is united by a common thread of misgovernance. Several reasons may account for the lack of good governance in the region, of which the ineffectiveness of governing institutions, particularly parliament, civil service and local government, is very important. These institutions have had an asymmetrical growth, with the bureaucracy predating the other two. Parliament is the youngest among the three institutions of governance. These, however, share one attribute—all three can be considered as ‘gendered’ institutions. In fact, lack of gender balance in different governing institutions is one of the important reasons for their ineffectiveness. Different countries in the region have adopted measures in recent years to mainstream gender in these institutions, among other things, by adopting a policy of ‘positive discrimination’. This has led to an increase in the number of women at different levels. Women have also fared well while competing with men for jobs/seats in different institutions. While it may take a long time to achieve gender parity, it is clearly evident that women are at least as capable as men in doing things that have traditionally been considered to be the ‘preserve’ of men. The change in gender composition of different institutions, however, has not taken place in a uniform way. Differences in the scope and scale of change are noticeable in different countries of the region; these can also be noticed in the same country over a certain period of time.

However, our understanding about the nature of change taking place in the gender composition of different governing institutions in South

Asia and its implications for empowering women is limited. The policy of inclusion adopted in different countries with a view to encouraging more women to come to the forefront has not received much scholarly attention. In particular, there is no major comparative study on the scope, implications, and limitations of the policies and/or measures used to mainstream gender in different governing institutions in the South Asian region. This volume seeks to redress this deficiency. It particularly tries to explore if there is any major relationship between descriptive representation and substantive representation of women in these three governing institutions and examines the factors that account for such relationship or lack of it.

Most of the papers included in this volume were earlier presented to an International Conference on Inclusive Governance in South Asia organized in Dhaka by Public Administration and Governance Research Network and the Department of Public Administration of the University of Chittagong, in collaboration with The Asia Foundation (TAF) and Southern University Bangladesh. I gratefully acknowledge the financial support of TAF, Southern University, UGC, University of Chittagong, YPSA, and Manusher Jonno Foundation. It would have been almost impossible to organize the Conference without such financial support. Several chapters—2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 12 and 16—have been specially written for this volume. I am extremely grateful to the authors of different chapters who, despite their busy schedule, agreed to contribute to the volume. Colleagues from different parts of Bangladesh and abroad travelled a long way to attend the Conference; many of them also gladly agreed to review papers which the authors have found very useful. I appreciate their kind support and cooperation. Dr. Muhammad A. Hakim, UGC Professor of Political Science at the University of Chittagong read drafts of some of the chapters. I am grateful to him. I owe a special debt to Ms. Jerin Chaudhury for careful reading and extremely helpful editorial comments on the book. Special acknowledgements are due to Professor Drude Dahlerup of the University of Stockholm, Sweden; Professor Shirin M. Rai of the University of Warwick, UK; and Professor Ahmed Shafiqul Huque of McMaster University, Canada, for endorsing the book. Professor Huque also read drafts of Chapters 1 and 18 and made extremely useful comments. I am indebted to him. Finally, I am also grateful to members of the editorial team of Palgrave Macmillan, particularly to Warren Jemima and Beth Farrow, and to Jayanthi Narayanaswamy of Springer Nature, for their help and support in making the publication possible.

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