

Rethinking Political Culture Bangladesh Perspective

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Abstract

At present most of the developing countries are trying to establish democratic political culture in their domestic politics. Bangladesh is also an emerging country which has been passing a very crucial situation for a long time in its political arena to do this. The essential prerequisites of developed political culture were almost absent in our politics since its beginning. The reasons of that are many. As other developing and new independent states, Bangladesh also needs to overcome many challenges of its political system. Among all those challenges the establishment of democracy, eradication of corruption, establishment of rule of law, ensuring of independent judicial system, proper institutionalization of politics, arrangement of impartial, free, fair and periodical election, practicing tolerance and moral values among the political parties and leaders etc. are more important. After post independence of Bangladesh most of the political parties have taken serious attempts to develop political culture. But, because of violating the principles of democratic values by both ruling and opposition parties Bangladesh has not yet achieved its expected goal of political culture. My present study is an attempt to summarize the nature of Bangladeshi political culture by analyzing the political activities during the various regimes of government.

Keywords: Political culture, Institutionalization, Confrontation, Socialization, Tolerance.

Introduction

The political culture of a nation consists of the characteristic attitudes of its population towards basic features of the political system- the nature of the regime, toward specific political institutions toward particular

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incumbent of such institutions or offices, toward the policy outputs of the system of government (Bhuyan, 1991). Actually the relation between political culture and political system is reciprocal. So nature of political culture depends on beliefs, values and attitudes of political personnel towards the politics and political institutions. In a stable political system homogeneous and integrated types of political culture are found. Because, a general agreement among entire population is exist there. On the contrary, where the people are not homogeneous, generally they do not share common attitudes, belief and orientations toward political system. The population of Bangladesh is overwhelmingly homogeneous in compare with other developing and underdeveloped countries. There is no major ethnic linguistic cleavage in Bangladesh society. Over 98 percent of population is ethnically Bengali. The miniscule non-Bengali population is limited to the tribal area and in the few urban centers. Ethnicity, language, caste and tribe which are the major sources of cleavage in other states of South Asia, are not significant factors in Bangladesh society and politics (Jahan, 2005). In such a socio-cultural background and with thousand of dreams Bangladesh started its journey since 1971 under the leadership of Awami League. After liberated from Pakistan, the Bengali nation expected that Awami League government would establish a fair environment of political culture for the nation. But within some years of starting, the parliamentary democratic ideals degenerated into an authoritarian governmental system which was abrupt and unexpected. Since then Bangladesh has completed more than three decades of its independence and near about two decades of re-journey of parliamentary democracy. But it has failed to establish a meaningful political culture among the political parties and citizens.

Objectives of study

The present study is conducted to trace the natures of Bangladeshi political culture that we are practicing. To asses the roles and modes of political parties during the national elections are under both presidential and parliamentary system of governments. More specifically the study has given the importance to find out the short comings of our political culture. And finally it has put forward some recommendations and suggestions.

Methodology

The study follows the analytical and descriptive methods of social science research. To conduct this study, we have fully relied on secondary sources. The information have been collected from political

literature published in various books, journals, daily news papers and other authentic sources.

Meaning of Political Culture

At present among the most discussible issues and concepts in political science, the term political culture is one of them. Political culture consists of attitudes, beliefs, emotions and values of society that relate to the political system and to political issue (MacIver, 1926). It has, since been employed in the comparative analysis, not simply of the developing countries, but of the developed nations as well (Almond and Verba, 1963). According to Almond “Every political system is embedded in a particular pattern of orientations to political actions” (Almond, 1956). L.W. Pye is of the view that political culture is a “set of attitudes, beliefs and sentiments which give order and meaning to a political process and which provide the underlying assumptions and rules that govern behavior in the political system, or the manifestation in aggregate form of the psychological and subjective dimensions of politics (Sills,ed.1968). The political culture consists of empirical beliefs, expressive symbols and values which define the situation in which political action take place. It provides the subjective orientation to politics (Pye and Verba, 1995). In fact, the concept of political culture emphasizes that each individual has some sort of orientation to the political arena. The orientation of individual to politics may be varied into three types; cognitive orientation, affective orientation and evaluational orientation (Pye and Verba, 1965). Later on Almod & Verba also expressed those as; parochial, subjective and participant political culture (Bhuyan, 1991).

On the basis of theoretical aspect of political culture it is clearly understood that the nature of political culture depends on the nature of individual’s orientation towards politics. Similarly, the pattern of individual’s participation in politics also affects the political culture of state. In the context of developing and developed countries, the participation and responsive pattern of individuals towards politics are not same. In developing and transitional societies like Bangladesh political culture tends to be fragmented rather than homogeneous. The integrated political culture is generally found in developed societies because the individuals share common orientations towards politics there. For identifying the natures of Bangladeshi political culture it is necessary to analyze the overall political situation during the various regimes of governments.

Politics of Bangladesh before 1990

The emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 was a unique turning point of its political history. Immediate after liberation the regime of Bangobandhu

Sheikh Mujibar Rahaman, at first introduced a west minister type of parliamentary government system under the first constitution of Bangladesh in 1972 containing the high ideals of nationalism, socialism, democracy and secularism. Because of introducing such type of constitution, the dream of people of Bangladesh was come into reality. But after some days of newly introduced constitution, many controversies arose by the opposition political parties that created disintegrated situations among the general people and political parties. At that time some political parties started violent actions at various places and launched their struggle to unseat the government. The law and order situations were broken. In order to meet with the worsening condition in the country, resulting from the armed threat of the radical opposition, deteriorating law and order situation, factionalism in politics and other crisis of the country, the government was compelled to declare an emergency on December 28, 1974. After few weeks of that the constitution was amended to replace a presidential system of government (BAKSAL) instead of parliamentary system. The regime came to an end with the overthrow of Awami League through a violent bloody coup by some alienated junior officer of Bangladesh Army on August 15, 1975 (Hasanuzzaman, 1998). Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was killed by them.

The Killing of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibar Rahman had resulted in a great political vacuum and followed by a series of military coups and counter-coups staged mainly by a group of young army officer. Since then Bangladesh was kept virtually under Martial Law until General Ziaur Rahman could legalize his rule by undertaking a series of steps to democratize his regime (Parveen, 2001). After killing of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the army –led civilian rule was started by Khandker Mustaque Ahmed who ultimately failed to control the administration. At that stage, a soldiers' uprising was organized under the leadership of a retired colonel of armed forces Abu Taher to bring a fundamental change in administrative system. But it created the further instability in political environment of Bangladesh. Then Ziaur Rahman got the advantages of soldiers' uprising which brought him to power on 7 November, 1975. After taking the power, at first he tried to democratize all the political institutions of the country. He commenced a new dimension in Bangladesh politics. His political party BNP along with other political parties got the opportunities to practice political activities in full swing. The 2nd parliament election was held on 27 January, 1979. But the sudden assassination of President Zia in Chittagong by a group of army officers on 30 May 1981, the country had to face again the leadership crisis. Then Abdus Sattar who was the Vice President of Zia's civilian government took the power of government. But, because of existing factional relation

between Abdus Sattar and BNP, within a very short time Lt. General Ershad took over the state power by a bloodless coup on 24 March 1982 and governed the country for about nine years in illegal and autocratic way. Like Ziaur Rahman, Ershad also organized political party twice, first as Janadal in 1983 and later then as Jatiya Party in 1986, which was composed of retired army and civil service officers, under the autocratic rule of Ershad many national and local elections were held since 1983 to 1988 but none of them could get the mental recognition from the mass people of Bangladesh. Political and administrative corruption was vigorously increased at this regime. At this inconsistent political environment the law and order situation was broken down. Ershad had to face a strong opposition simultaneously from the combined movements led by the two major political parties, Awami League and BNP since the starting of his regime. Third and fourth parliament elections held respectively in 1986 and 1988 under the Ershad government. BNP boycotted all elections held under Ershad. The Awami League participated in the 1986 parliament election but boycotted the other polls (Ahmed, 1995). At the beginning of 1990 all major opposition parties including Awami League and BNP jointly started a drastic movement against Ershad government. Ershad tried to stay in power, but being faced with such mass movement; at last he decided to resign. On December 6, 1990 after dissolving the parliament, Ershad handed over power to chief justice Sahabuddin Ahmed the nominee of the combined opposition parties.

Trends of Parliamentary Politics after 1990

After near about one and half decade, the re-journey of parliamentary democracy was started since 1991 under the twelfth amendment of Bangladesh constitution. It was a milestone of Bangladesh's democratic history. The 5th parliamentary election was held on 27 February, 1991 under the caretaker government of Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed. The fifth election was greatly significant because of the spontaneous and unanimous participation of genuine voters as well as the political parties. In the 5th parliament the winning party BNP took Jamat-E-Islami as the partner of coalition and formed government. Before holding the 7th parliamentary election in 1996 Bangladesh observed many drastic political conflicts of political parties mainly between the two major parties Awami League and BNP.

The years 1991-1996 witnessed a new phase of agonizing political movement by the opposition parties. At that period it was a great challenge to Begum Khaleda's government to run the state democratically. The major challenging and contested issue was free and fair elections. At the end of 1993 the opposition parties raised the demand

for establishment of non-party caretaker government and continued boycott of the parliamentary sessions for the next two years. Then opposition parties combined involved in various types of street movements and demonstrations outside the parliament. The chain of command of the government was broken down, law and order situations deteriorated quickly. The country was repeatedly shutdown by strikes called Awami League. Finally the opposition Parties led by Awami League resigned from the parliament in December 1994 (Jahan, 2005).

International organizations suggested both Awami league and BNP to settle the existing conflict through democratic way. But the two major political parties could not reach to a peaceful decision. Facing continuous agitation by the combined opposition the BNP chairperson, prime minister, Begum Khaleda Zia, on 24 November 1995, declared over radio and television that her government had advised the president to dissolve the sangsad, cancel the by election and arrange the next general election (Dhaka Courier, 1 December, 1995). And later then the parliament was dissolved in December 1995. In that situation the opposition parties continued their agitation movement demanding 6th parliament election under a neutral caretaker government. But the BNP government, on the plea of constitutional continuity, decided to go ahead with its election plan, and ultimately the polling date for the 6th parliamentary elections was fixed on February 15, 1996 (Hassanuzzaman, 1998). The voter less election of sixth parliament held on the fixed date. The new parliament met only once to pass a constitutional amendment providing for future parliament elections under a neutral caretaker government. Kaleda Zia reigned and handed over power to caretaker government headed by former chief justice Habibur Rahman. Under this caretaker government the 7th parliament election was held on 12 June 1996. Awami League won the election and formed the government of 7th parliament.

Under Awami league regimes of the Parliamentary government in 1996, thirty years Ganges water treaty was signed with India and in 1997 a peace accord was signed with the rebels in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The opposition party BNP and other smaller parties immediate criticized these accords and tired to protest. The opposition parties also organized violent agitation against Awami League government. Hartal, oborodh, walkout from parliament and parliament boycott continued as well.

However on 1st October, 2001, the 8th parliamentary election was held under the caretaker Government of former chief Justice Latifur Rahaman. In this election the BNP led four party coalition won 215 seats and Awami League won only 62 seats. In this parliament BNP led 4 party alliance formed the government. At the regime of 4 party alliance

governments in between (2001-2006), the opposition party Awami league continued the destructive agitation movements, as; walkout from parliament, parliament boycott etc. demanding various political issues. After completing 5 years term Awami League on 27 October, 2006 requiring the election to a new parliament within the next 90 days under a caretaker government headed by the past chief justice of the Supreme Court. In question of appointing the chief advisor of caretaker government, Awami league started agitation. On 28 October 2006 by a bloody class between 4 party and 14 party alliances, many people died and injured. Then Justice Hassan expressed his inability to be the chief advisor of the care taker government. In that context president Iajuddin Ahmed himself took over the charge of caretaker government. But this composition of caretaker government refused by Awami League led 14 party alliances. As their demand, later on a new caretaker government was installed with Dr. Fakruddin Ahmed a former governor of the state Bank, as the chief advisor (Fazal, 2009). Under chief advisor Dr. Fakruddin Ahmed the 9th parliament election was held on 29 December 2008. The 14 party alliances Mohajote won a landslide victory with 262 and formed government. On 5 January the 10th parliamentary election was held. In 10th parliamentary election BNP did not take part in contest. Awami league led Mohajote won and formed government in 10th parliament.

The sixth and 10th parliamentary elections in Bangladesh have not obtained the faith of the mass people. The New York Times considers the 10th parliamentary election “a bizarre election” due to lack of competitions and that less than 25 percent people voted this time against 87 percent in the previous elections held in 2009. In these regards, since 2013 to January 2014 more than 500 peoples killed at hand of law enforce and political rivals, twenty two people got killed on the poll day alone (Daily Star 06, 2014).

Natures of Bangladesh’s Political Culture

Confrontation among the political parties has been continued in Bangladesh politics since after its liberation. Patronizing corruption and abusing power by the political leader has created bad situation among the political parties and the general people. Practicing dictatorship under the parliamentary democratic system has become a regular culture of contemporary Bangladesh politics. Though, after independence the first regime of Bangladesh government started with a parliamentary democracy it failed to achieve the ideals, values and all other needs of democracy. Later on no government could establish real democratic atmosphere for the country.

Walk out from the parliament session creates great hamper in democracy. Since independence of Bangladesh ten parliament elections were held. Among these, only three parliaments worked under the presidential system of government and the rest seven parliaments including 10th are functioned under the parliamentary system of government. The incident of walkout occurred 224 times by the combined opposition parties in the first, fifth, seventh and eight parliaments (Hussain, 2007). Similarly parliament boycott has been turned into habitual practice of opposition parties in Bangladesh which makes the parliament ineffective.

Political intolerance among the political parties in Bangladesh has created the unstable political situation over the past twenty three years of parliamentary democratic rule. The intolerant attitude of political parties towards their opponent has also been continued. Lack of practicing tolerance and lack of respect to others' is now vigorously observed in Bangladesh politics. Though trust is another important factor of political culture political leaders most often do not trust anybody. That's why, at the time of holding election opposition parties are involved in agitation.

Since the independence of Bangladesh all regimes of government has been nurtured corruption which expedites confrontation of politics. The arrangement of one party election is a great cause of confrontation and factional politics in Bangladesh. It has accelerated mistrust among the political parties and general people. The most significant factor of our current political crisis is the absence of democracy within the political parties. Ruling and opposition parties both do not practice intra and inter-party democracy even in parliamentary function.

Recommendations of this study

- For establishing a peaceful and integrated political culture at first the ruling and opposition parties have to change their present out look towards politics.
- Practicing political socialization may be the meaningful process by which every political individual and group can change their outlook, values and attitudes towards politics.
- The ruling and opposition parties both have great roles and responsibilities for the establishment of democracy, making the parliament effective as well as to avoid the confrontational natures of politics. So instead of continuing boycott from the parliament opposition parties should practice the normal processes of parliamentary system. Similarly the government has to have the ability

and proper efficiency to make the parliament more attractive and effective.

- Political parties need to reform their policies.
- Political leadership must have to acquire the quality of patriotism.
- Political parties should have to practice intra-party democracy.
- The opposition should co-operate the ruling party to rush the state policy in a peaceful way.
- Political parties should be responsible, committed and dedicated to the state and citizens affairs.
- Arranging free, fair and impartial election is very urgent and necessary matter for a fair political environment.
- Both ruling and opposition party should ensure their accountability and responsibility to the state.
- Government will have to take initiatives to build the moral values of the citizens and political parties.
- Every political party must show their respect to all national leaders.
- Both ruling and opposition parties will have to take steps for institutionalizing of democracy.
- Political leaders should be courageous in question of morality and ethical practice.

Conclusion

At the end of discussion it can be said that ‘The time is Now’ for Bangladesh to mitigate the present uncomfortable situation urgently. Though the establishing parliamentary democratic culture was a great vision of Bangladesh’s people, ultimately that has yet not been achieved. All the time political leaders of Bangladesh give their commitment to establish democracy. But, in practice they do not follow democratic ideals and values. Besides these, it has been alleged that the politicians are the mostly liable for chronic corruption in Bangladesh. According to TI’s report, Bangladesh stood first in terms of corruption worldwide for four consecutive terms 2002-2005 during BNP regime. Bangladesh secured first position worldwide in terms of corruption in 2001 in the history of Bangladesh during AL regime, ranked by the TI (Hussain, 2014). Corruption was also prevailed in every sector of Ershad regime (Khan, 2003). Massive corruption is also a great cause of disintegration among the political parties and citizens in Bangladesh. So, in this context, not only political parties but also all types of the citizens have to rethink and do all the necessaries for reforming our political culture.

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