

## **A Critical Analysis on Parochial Political Culture of Bangladesh**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The present is an opportune time for extensive research on political culture. Political culture is a powerful, potential, burning and unifying concept at present. Political culture is a way to share views and normative judgments by the people regarding political system. In every countries, political system and political culture are very important aspect. Different countries belong to varied political culture and it helps to understand how and why a government is so organized in a certain way. Again why is democracy successful or fail, or why some countries still have monarchies? Being a citizen of a country we should know about political culture. It can provide clues to political relationships, In this way an effective politics can be introduced in the country through a healthy political culture. The parochial political culture of Bangladesh is deeply entrenched in its political processes and institutional practices, manifesting in various stages of governance, including nomination, elections, parliamentary conduct, and interparty relations. The zero-sum approach of political culture has obstructed the development of consensus-building, issue-based politics, and democratic norms. As a result, the political landscape is shaped less by participatory citizenship and more by personality cults, patron-client networks, and institutional erosion, all of which reinforce a parochial political culture that is detrimental to democratic consolidation in Bangladesh. The main objective of this study is to identify the parochialism of political culture in Bangladesh. This study also attempts how to build up a participatory, mature and developed political culture by eliminating all the parochial and poorly political culture in Bangladesh. This paper concluded by suggesting pathways aimed at fostering a more participatory political culture in Bangladesh.

### **1. Introduction**

Countries around the world practice democracy through many ways. Most democratic countries in the world today use the parliamentary system as opposed to a presidential system like that used in the United States. Bangladesh is a parliamentary representative democratic republic, whereby the Prime Minister of Bangladesh is the head of the government and of a multi party system. Here executive power is exercised by the government. Legislative power is vested in both the government and parliament. The current parliamentary system was adopted in 1991 by a neutral democratic election, as per demands of outline of the three alliances under the leadership of Bangladesh Awami League (AL), Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and the leftists, but between 1975 and 1990 the nation experienced military rule. Having got independence Bangladesh has passed 52 years but its achievements in the spheres of political culture is not noteworthy. The main prerequisites of successful democracy is not only the multi party political system but also it is important that how should be the political culture in party politics. If analyse the political culture of the two major political parties, it is found that Sheikh Hasina the President of Awami League (AL) was the President of the party, the leader of the parliament, the President of the economic council and after all the Prime Minister. On the contrary Begum Khaleda Zia the President of BNP was the President of the party, the leader of the opposition in the parliament and Prime Minister when she was in power. Once again the

elected parliament members of the opposition do not appear in the parliament session. Moreover, a party attacks on purpose upon another without verifying the equity-inequity, right-wrong, good-bad etc. The attitude of all leaders from grassroot to national stages practice autocratic culture. In the parliament the existing decision-making process of all parties leader are not issue oriented. It is totally lejurbased. Here, decisions are made in absence of the related minister or the parliament member or the political leader. The political parties try to solve the problem by using power instead of constructive discussion. These should not be the political culture of a democratic country. These are parochial and inferior political culture. The main aim of this study is how to build up a participatory, mature and developed political culture by eliminating all these parochial and demeaning political culture in Bangladesh.

## **2. Statement of the Problem**

Political culture is an immense idea that should be existed among all parties. It is a continuous political process which can only be sustained and developed by giving proper attention to certain political issues which is related to the political system and to people's concern. Though Bangladesh has passed 52 years of its independence, it has failed to institute a developed political culture as per political tradition. Political culture plays a vital role in the sphere of democracy, political development, political stability and change but due to lack of worthy political culture Bangladesh has failed to establish all those political process.

The political culture is not same kind of all countries of the world. The political culture has been built up very unequally in most of the third world countries. As a developing country of the third world Bangladesh is not exceptional. To analyse the political culture of Bangladesh, it will easily be evident that the political culture of Bangladesh is divided political culture. Professor Walter. A. Rosenbaum mentioned about some characteristics of divided political culture those are strongly present in the political culture of Bangladesh. There is no coherence between the political parties and the people of Bangladesh regarding the political system, national identity and goals. There is a lot of suspicion and mistrust of each other among the major social groups and political parties.<sup>1</sup> According to the triad classification of political culture of Almond and Verba, a lot of element or characteristics of 'participant political culture' exists strongly in the political culture of Bangladesh, such as there are excess visions about Political System, Input, Output and the role about self 'Cognitive', 'Affective' and 'Evaluative' are exists to the people's of Bangladesh.<sup>2</sup> The main characteristics of political culture in Bangladesh is, here exists lack of 'Democratic Culture' to the political leaders and activists. The attitude of patience, camaraderie, respects and cooperation are the main elements of democratic culture but none of those are fully present in Bangladesh. There are some parochial ideology, like Regional, Class, Party, Denominational, Religious etc. are exists to the political leaders and activists. In this context, it is reasonable to say that the political culture in party politics in Bangladesh is mixed political culture. This type of political culture is not conducive to political development rather immense impediment.

Comparatively the nature of political culture in party politics in Bangladesh is too much parochial, in the context of some highly democratic state, like United States of America (U.S.A), United Kingdom (U.K) and India. Today, the existing political culture of U.S.A is unique. The American political culture is the American dream. Its belief that each American has the freedom to pursue a better life, a nice house, a car or two and a more comfortable existence than ours. This freedom has fueled incredible "RAGS TO RICHES" stories, such as presidents starting out in log cabins and highly successful entrepreneurs who came to America as penniless immigrants not to mention the guy that dropped out of Harvard to become the richest man in the world. These stories contribute to the American political culture. French writer Alexis de Tocqueville, an early observer of the American political culture came to the United States primarily to answer the question 1830s, "Why are the Americans doing so well with democracy, while France is having so much trouble with it?" Tocqueville thought that France could learn a thing or two from the Americans. Toequeville's observations remain today a classic study of American political culture. He identified several factors that influenced American's success abundant and fertile land,

countless opportunities for people to acquire land and make a living, lack of a feudal aristocracy that blocked the ambitions and the independent spirit encouraged by frontier living. The American political culture that Tocqueville described in the 1830s has changed over the years but in many ways, it has remained remarkable the same, even after the continent was settled coast to coast. The American view has been characterized by several familiar elements, such as liberty, equality, democracy, individualism, rule of law, nationalism and capitalism. Not all Americans share the same views, of course but the vast majority subscribes to these general ideals. Many events have questioned and answered various interpretations of American values and beliefs but most of all, the political culture defines political attitudes, institutions and activities that are most cherished in American political life.<sup>3</sup>

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and North Ireland, in briefly its called United Kingdom (U.K). The British Constitution is a Constitution of never ending evolution and it is basically unwritten. Professor Munro told, "The British Constitution is the Mother of all Constitutions, the British parliament is the mother of all parliaments." The United Kingdom (U.K) is a country of parliamentary democracy where the parliament is sovereign but crowned republic is existing.<sup>4</sup> United Kingdom (U.K) still have a queen. She does not have any real political power but they do not just end the monarchy because of British political culture one that highly prizes tradition.<sup>5</sup> In the United Kingdom (U.K), factors such as class and regionalism and the nations history such as the legacy of the British Empire impact on political culture. The political scientists Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba says, the political culture of U.K is a deferential civic culture.<sup>6</sup>

Besides, India is a powerful state of South Asia. It's politics works within the framework of the country's Constitution. India is a parliamentary secular democratic republic in which the President of India is the head of the state and the Prime Minister is the head of the government.<sup>7</sup> Political culture in India is not merely a reflection of community life style. On the one hand, it is also the link between historical experiences of politics and model identities and on the other, the needs of new political forms. Defined thus, it becomes not only an emerging national idiom but also a cultural vector deal is gradually entering the community's life- style as a legitimate force of social change. There are four historical stages in the development of the culture of Indian politics. The contemporary political culture also consists of four strands, each with its own psychological problems of adaptation and their typical culture expressions. These strands are related on the one hand, to the four corresponding historical stages and on the other, to different levels of personality functioning in the model Indian. Within this framework, a new approach can be taken to the analysis of the major themes and symbols in Indian politics. It is possible, as for example, to decompose some of the major themes into their stage- specific contents which again can be related to the larger adaptive problems faced by the community at different historical phases.<sup>8</sup>

In the above discussion, it is clearly observed that all those countrie's political culture is not same. The political culture of every country is unique and mixed method based. These mixing is also remarkable in the political culture of Bangladesh yet, it is the best example of parochial political culture.

### **3. Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of this research is to identify the parochialism of political culture of Bangladesh but it has some specific objectives which are as follows;

- a) To analyse the candidate- nomination process in election;
- b) To analyse the nature of electoral culture;
- c) To analyse the nature of the participation of the political parties in the parliament;
- d) To analyse the nature of the participation of political parties out of the parliament and
- e) To evaluate the interrelation of the political parties.

### **4. Research Methodology**

On the basis of the content analysis of the study, different methods of study have been used in this research. Its data have been collected from secondary sources. Moreover, the researcher has followed

the historical and observational methods to continue the study. The mentionable documents which have been used in this research are nomination letters of political parties, election manifestos of political parties, reviews of the parliament program, reports of the election commissions, news statements, leaflets, the daily newspaper, relevant research works of the researchers, published books, published articles etc. which are available in the Central Library of Rajshahi University and websites such as Google Scholar etc. No empirical evidence has been used in this study.

## **5. Definition of Key Concepts**

Political culture is an important part of basic culture. So, it is essential to discuss about basic culture before defining the political culture.

### **5.1. Culture**

Culture is not a small thing rather a very comprehensive and magnificent concept. Culture is an umbrella concept which encompasses the social behavior and norms found in human societies, as well as the knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, customs, capabilities and habits of the individuals in these groups. Human acquire culture through the learning processes of enculturation and socialization, which is shown by the diversity of cultures across societies.<sup>9</sup> A culture is a way of life of a group of people the behaviors, beliefs, values and symbols that they accept, generally without thinking about them and that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to the next.<sup>10</sup> Edward Burnett Taylor told, "Culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."<sup>11</sup>

### **5.2. Political Culture**

The concept of political culture is broad and complex. Political culture describes how culture impacts politics. Every political system is embedded in a particular political culture. Its origins as a concept go back at least to Alexis de Tocqueville but its current use in political science generally follows that of Gabriel Almond.<sup>12</sup> Political culture is the 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. It encompasses both the political ideals and the operating norms of a polity. Political culture is thus the manifestation in aggregate form of the psychological and subjective dimensions of politics. A political culture is the product of both the collective history of a political system and the life history of the members of that system and thus it is rooted equally in public events and private experiences.<sup>13</sup> Almond and Powell define it as, "Political culture is the pattern of individual attitudes and orientations towards among the members of a political system."<sup>14</sup>

### **5.3. Parochial Political Culture**

One of the characteristics of the parochial political culture is that the individual's knowledge about the political system is very limited. Individuals do not consider themselves important in politics and have no role to play. The government maintains a great distance from the people and public support for political authorities is very low. People do not expect any change or anything else from the political authorities. The position of government in such a political culture is much like that of an authoritarian regime and other political parties outside the government are also authoritarian and critical for the sake of criticism and this is how the parochiality is being created in politics. Parochial political cultures are commonly found in underdeveloped countries. Some examples of parochial political cultures can be seen in various regions in Asia and Africa.

## **6. The Parochial Political Culture of Bangladesh**

Political culture is a very recent term in Bangladesh. To identify how low or parochial the political culture of Bangladesh is extremely difficult. In spite of that it is possible to pick out the parochiality of the political culture of Bangladesh by analysing the following objectives:

### **6.1. The Parochialism in Candidate Nomination Process in Election**

Election is an inseparable concept in parliamentary democratic system. Candidate nomination as a part of election process is the vital activity of a political party. Traditionally, the political parties in Bangladesh

are immensely centralized and decision-making authority, particularly in electoral decisions such as candidate nomination. Its totally in the hands of the party leader and his closest advisers.<sup>15</sup> The two major political parties- the Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist party (BNP) are run solely on the authority of Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia, in some respects.<sup>16</sup> Most persons like leader of major political parties, election observers and non governmental organizations (NGOs) believe that dynastic and patronage links in the form of muscle or money are very important in order to receive a nomination from the major political parties and the power of selection is laid in the hands of the party leaders. The observation of NGO, Supreme Court lawyer and third party politicians about the nomination process, as set out below:

Businessmen are getting into politics by spending their own money and having cadres, even in their constituencies but then in two or three years they have to make back the money. Tolls will have to be collected.<sup>17</sup> Frankly saying, there is no democracy within the party, here the most important part of the party like the two leaders who are in fact, however they decide, that is the rule and this includes the candidate selection process.<sup>18</sup> This study uses the example of the Awami League's decision to support a disputed candidate in the Narayanganj City Corporation election in 2011, where the observation was the role that muscle, strength/organizational capability and patrimonial loyalty play within the political party. Here the Awami League party leadership selected Shamim Osman, a known muscleman as their affiliated candidate rather than Salina Hayat Ivy was more popular within the constituency. Here the seat is the most important thing for every political party, specially for Awami League and Bangladesh Nationalist Party. That's why major two political parties prefers businessmen. In a statistics 67% (percent) of the members of Parliament elected in the 12th National Parliament election held on January 7, 2024 are businessmen and the main reason is that money is very important to get the nomination.<sup>19</sup>

## **6.2. The Parochialism in Elections and Electoral Culture**

Since 1971, independent Bangladesh has conducted twelve national elections, the first election was in 1973 and the most recent is in 2024. Elections are conducted at seven layers of administration at both national and local levels from top to bottom. At all levels, the elections are conducted along party lines. During the first decade of independence, elections were largely a fair and competitive game for representative politics. Over time, the representational politics became rusted with money, muscle, violence, manipulation and largely commercial in nature.<sup>20</sup>

Election engineering is a common culture in Bangladesh politics. There are many forms of election engineering that various political parties have practiced during the past three decades. These various forms of election engineering include international timing, gerrymandering, changing of electoral rules and the voting system.<sup>21</sup> In Bangladesh, elections are managed and conducted by an autonomous body known as Bangladesh Election Commission (EC) which is constitutionally sanctioned and empowered. Constitutionally, the EC is to discharge the duties relating to election, maintaining absolute neutrality without favoring or disfavoring the ruling or the opposition parties. In Bangladesh the EC has become a highly politicized and controversial institution since 1991. Since it has the absolute power in determining district boundaries, nomination and selection, ballot-box distribution and vote counting, the ruling parties have been heavily inclined to use the institutions in their favor by appointing like-minded or partisan commissioners.<sup>22</sup>

Imprisonment is a vital weapons of election gains. In Bangladesh, false cases against political opponents are commonplace and are effective tools to score political gains. The culture of filling cases against anonymous suspects is very strong and primarily used against political opponents.<sup>23</sup> For election, campaigning is must. In Bangladesh, political campaigning is now mostly one sided, as the opposition parties enjoy no or relatively little opportunity to campaign. Naturally, the ruling party always enjoy the support of the law enforcement authorities in such competitive election campaigns, while the opposition parties are disfavored by those authorities. The police often approve the ruling parties use of a suitable public space, including major roads for campaign gathering, at the same time

denying the opposition parties the same.<sup>24</sup> In election, ballot casting venues are represented by polling agents of political parties. Among other malpractices, expelling the polling agents of opposition parties from the polling booths was a common complaint that the EC would receive in large numbers. However, recently under the AL government, the practice has spiked to a disproportionate level. As for example, in the 2018 Gazipur City Corporation election, where about 50 polling agents from opposition BNP were arrested by plainclothes secret police, even though there were no criminal cases against them.<sup>25</sup> Another recent trend has been the arrest of opposition party supporters by the police immediately before the election day from a political rally or campaign meeting in the name of public safety. This police was extensively used in the Khulna City Corporation elections in 2018.<sup>26</sup> Bogus and phantom votes are very widespread electoral corruption in Bangladesh. An easy way to ensure winning is to stuff the ballot box with false votes.<sup>27</sup> In the 2024 twelfth national parliament election, the news of fake voters voting was circulated in different media, the journalist of Daily Star was blocked by taking pictures of fake voters in a center of Dhaka-8 constituencies, later he was rescued under police guard.<sup>28</sup> The ultimate electoral corruption in Bangladesh takes place through hijacking the ballot boxes when it becomes clear that the ruling party candidates are likely to lose. The purpose of hijacking is to destroy the casted ballot papers so that in vote counting, the opposition does not win or the voting process is canceled.<sup>29</sup>

### **6.3. The Parochialism in the Nature of the Participation of Political Parties in the Parliament**

The parliament of Bangladesh, to ingeminate, did not function properly since 1991 when multi party democracy was reestablished. In the fifth parliament dating from 1991 many acts were introduced in the form of ordinances practice which was not favorable for promoting the democracy. In a sense, it led to what has been described as 'dictatorship of the Prime Minister.'<sup>30</sup> There are dense walk outs, boycotts and finally mass resignation of the opposition from the parliament in 1994. Sometimes, committees and subcommittees did not function well because often minister headed them or sufficient representation had not been given to the opposition parties. Those committees also many circumstances were not able to arrive at consensus on various issues. Negotiations of the parliament bothered from lack of skill, training and knowledge. Many members were absent from the parliament sessions that led to chronic quorum crisis. Its main function turned out to be passing of the acts in hurry, clearing of the budget and hurling praise or abuse.<sup>31</sup> The main opposition party which boycotted the parliament in the 9th national parliament blamed the government party for their absence and said that the government party did not create the environment to go to the parliament. The ruling party does not want BNP to return to Parliament.<sup>32</sup> A seminar of the Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industries (FBCCI) and Bangladesh Economic Association as reported by the Daily Star, "The present state of politics has make parliament virtually non-functional, democracy meaningless and economic activity crime-based, pushing the entire society towards degression."<sup>33</sup>

### **6.4. The Parochialism in the Nature of the Participation of Political Parties out of the Parliament**

Hartal, strike, street violence politics etc are some of the common means to abolish the government in Bangladesh. Lack of understanding between the ruling and opposition parties are also damaging the democratic spirit and proper functioning of the democratic process in Bangladesh.<sup>34</sup> As for example, at the end of 1993 in the fifth parliament the opposition parties raised the demand for establishment of non political caretaker government and the country was repeatedly shutdown by the strikes called AL.<sup>35</sup> Again, under Awami league, the seventh 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. Then the opposition party BNP and other smaller parties immediate criticized violent agitation against AL government. Hartal, oborodh, street violence etc continued as well.<sup>36</sup> A study conducted in 2010 has showed that only 5 days of hartal were observed during 1972-1975, 59 days of hartal were observed during 1981-1987, 266 days of hartal were observed during 1991-1996 and 215 days of hartal were observed during 1996-2001.<sup>37</sup> Bangladesh Awami League called hartal for 173 days from 2001-2007 during the eighth national parliament.<sup>38</sup>

### 6.5. The Parochialism in the nature of Interrelationships between Political Parties

Determining the parochialism of political culture is not complicated by determining the nature of the relationship between political parties. The interrelation of political parties in Bangladesh is always conflicting. As for example, the relation between government party and opposition party is brutal. In the parliament session the two major political party like government and opposition party's relation is ungainly, such as uproars, file hammered, to obstruct to talk another, to brick-bat with indecent language to the speaker of the parliament. As a result the program of parliament is hindered.<sup>39</sup> Again out of the parliament their relation is avengeful. In the seventh parliament the government take measures to solve the problem of Chittagong Hill Tracts. Finally, the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord, 1997 signed between the Bangladesh government and the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity but the major opposition party BNP called the peace accord 'Black Treaty.' BNP also told that, this treaty is against the independence, sovereignty, integrity, constitution and the mass interest.<sup>40</sup>

Even outside the Parliament, the political parties do not co-exist well, they keep blaming each other on various issues, recently they are blaming each other on the issue of quota reform movement. Making political gains is more important than solving problems.<sup>41</sup>

However, the interrelation of political parties becomes a revenges such a way.

### 7. Findings and Discussion

In the above discussion, it is distinct that as the political culture of bangladesh is not developed rather destructive, low and parochial so political development and democracy are far cry. To ensure political development and democracy, the political culture have to be developed first yet, one thing is very much clear that there still remain some challenges to develop political culture such as :

- a) Dominance, power, patronage, money and muscle is the main component to get the nomination in election.
- b) International timing, election engineering, ECs corruption, false cases, bogus votes, proxy vote, hijacking the ballot boxes are the basic weapons to win the election game.
- c) Commotion, file beating, walk outs, boycotts and finally mass resignation are the casual matters to do the democracy meaningless.
- d) Vandalism, burning, hartal, strike and street violence are damaging the democratic spirit.
- e) Revenge and brutal relationships of political parties make democracy the 'Zero-sum game.'

### 8. Conclusion and Recommendation

In the alluded presentation, it is appreciable that the political criminalisation has taken place in extreme level so the political culture of Bangladesh is parochial, low and destructive. For overcoming the situation, the political parties have to be tolerant, diaphanous, ethical, noble, reciprocal, liberal democratic and so on. The nomination and election process should be fair and just. The participation of political parties in the parliament and out of the parliament should be very democratic. The interrelation of political parties should be tolerant, mutual respects as well as humble and gentle. These recommendations may be the recipe to overcome the challenges and to develop the political culture as well as to ensure the political development and democracy.

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