

The Role of Political Parties in Democracy: Bangladesh Perspective

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Abstract

In Bangladesh specially two big political parties Bangladesh Awami League and Bangladesh Nationalist Party come to power by rotation. Political Parties in Bangladesh have miserably failed to establish democratic system within their respective parties. The party leadership have a tendency to practice dictatorship in running party affairs. In Bangladesh we found an under developed political culture. She lacks democratic political organizations, institutions and practices in true sense. As a result democracy in Bangladesh have almost failed. Apparently there exist some indicators for democracy such as parliamentary system of government, parliamentary committee system, multi party system, a fair democratic constitution in a Bangladesh. All these indicators have been almost failed to institutionalize democracy in Bangladesh.

Introduction

Political parties play an important role in modern democratic state. The states face challenge by complex organizational developments and participation by a large number of people who had remained excluded from the dominant political elite. (La Palombra, and Winer, 1966: 3-5) A highly significant contribution made by political party to representative democracy is that it mates possible coherent policy and accountability of the elected deputies. If there were only independent members or several small groups in parliament, they would form unstable coalition to pursue interest and policy according to shifting preferences. They could not put forward and get public endorsement for a portfolio of consistent policies. (Gallagher, Laver, and Mair 2001:273-275).

The political system of a country owes to political parties for its proper functioning. Through political participation and political socialization political parties mobilize the political system. The parties create a sense of identity which transcends loyalty to the small groups divided by ethnicity, religion, geographical location, etc. Socialization implies acceptance of shared values and interests which provides the basis of integration. Mobilization and participation is the key to the process and political party is the motor that runs it. (La Palombra, and Winer, 1966: 3-5)

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Research Methodology

Different methods of study have been used in this article. Both the primary and secondary sources have been used for data, collection. In addition, the researcher has followed the historical and observational methods to continue the study.

Objectives of the Study

- To study the process and practices of democracy within the parties.
- To analyze trends of political parties regarding democracy.
- To study the nature of party leadership.

Democracy

We have seen that the state may be expressed by many activities and operate in many diverse forms; and also that the success of the activity depends upon the appropriateness of the mechanism to the purposes sought. In the countries which concern us, the social power relationship has embodied itself in a general form of the state called democracy, but this term, literally conveys no-more-but no less, than that government is, or ought to be, carried on by the people, 'democracy', has come to mean so many different things, some very hostile to catch other that it needs careful analysis if misunderstanding and idle controversies are to be avoided, and it the possible and quite legitimate differences of connotation and its very varied institutional arrangements are to be revealed. (Finer, 1977:67)

Bangladesh faces problems in practicing democracy. In Pakistan democratic culture almost absent. As a result, the struggle for self-determination of the people of Bangladesh became intertwined with the struggle for democracy. In fact, the 1971 liberation war, in its immediate sense, was a result of Pakistani ruling elites unwillingness to accept the verdict of the 1970 election.

Democratic practices are used to face a lot of serious problems in Bangladesh. The tragic coup of August 1975 may be considered as a serious attack on democracy in Bangladesh. Bangladesh came under military rule for the first time. Next to that General Ershad came into power through a military coup in 1981. However, a civilian uprising in 1990 put an end to the era of quasi-military rule of General Ershad. A new phase of civilian rule began in Bangladesh in 1991 that is Parliamentary Democracy.

In 1996 the political parties devised the innovative system of the caretaker government (CTG) for holding acceptable elections. Two elections were indeed

held under CTGs in 1996 and 2001. So that by 2007, Bangladesh had three consecutive elected governments.

Most importantly, the new CTG took up the problematic task of reforming politics, to this end, it promoted formation of new parties and encouraged groups within existing political parties to initiate inner party reform, including disposition off their current leaders. To facilitate the latter task, the government also engaged in selective prosecution of political leaders for corruption.

Unfortunately, the efforts of government to reform politics have so far yielded very limited results. The newly created parties did not take off, and preexisting political parties remain basically unchanged. (Khan, and Andaleeb, 2011: 32-34)

Political Party

Democratic culture within the political parties helps to attain its institutionalized shape.

At the core of the governance of all societies lies the political system. The structures of political parties and the factors that assist in determining those structures are only one set of factors which guide us in determining how political parties function in the political system. (Sobhan, 1993:4)

Party operates within party systems, and the type of system will have profound effects on party systems but it is difficult to classify party systems according to one single criterion. (Ball, 1994:91) Political parties may be principally defined by their common aim. (Ball, 1994:91) A political party consists of a group of citizens more or less organized who by the use of their voting power, aim to control the government and carry out their general policies. It is the most elaborate and comprehensive form in which public opinion is organized and made effective in government. (Gettell, 2002:289)

Relationship Between Political Party and Democracy

Democracy is meaningless without party democracy. But in Bangladesh every political leader or party, popular or unpopular, big or small, in or out of power, talks about democracy incessantly into practice parties voted into power to strengthen democracy have all failed to encourage its values. (Ahmed, 1995:364) In Bangladesh, major political parties often have a tendency of oppose without any valid reason. They are habituated to boycott the parliament. The situation may be expressed through the following table.

Serial No.	Parliament	Total Working Days	Boycotted Days of Opposition	Percentage
1	First	134	1	74
2	Second	206	67	32.52
3	Third	75	29	38.66
4	Forth	168	3	1.78
5	Fifth	395	135	38.18
6	Seventh	383	163	42.56
7	Eighth	373	223	59.78
8	Ninth	418	342	81.81

Source: Feroz., 2015:5

The major political parties in Bangladesh feels the importance of democracy. But if we analyse the actual situation, we find a serious lacking of democratic practices within the parties themselves. The major parties also argue in favour of transparency and accountability. (Karim, 2004) Political parties survive for the very useful functions they perform in the modern nation states. The states face challenge by complex organizational developments and participation by a large number of people who had remained excluded from the dominant political elite organizational complexity implies institutions which have evolved to perform function exercise powers specified to them and differentiated from other organization. (La Palombra, and Weiner, 1966:3-5)

Political parties mobilize the citizens for purposive participation. They make demand, express support or opposition and voice protest. Legitimacy of government depends on people's support; even regimes which are dictatorial or never got express electoral support claim legitimacy in the name of the people. When people are mobilized, the barriers for participation are removed. The new institutions and rules broaden participation and provide methods for conflict resolution. Political parties create a sense of identity which transcends loyalty to the small groups divided by ethnicity, religion, geographical location etc. Socialization implies acceptance of shared values and interests which provides the basis of integration. Mobilizations and participation is the key to the process and political party is the motor that's runs it. (La Palombra, and Weiner, 1966:3-5) Political Party makes possible coherent policy and accountability of the elected Deputes. (Rahman, 2008:96)

Role of Political Parties Towards Democracy in Present Bangladesh

In contemporary Bangladesh the major political parties are Bangladesh Awami League, Bangladesh Nationalist Party, Bangladesh Jamat-E-Islami and Jatiyo

Party. Awami League with roots dating back to 1949 is the oldest political party and enjoys widespread grassroots support. Particularly for its leadership role in the war of independence in 1971.

On 1 March 1971 which agitated the people of East Pakistan to such an extent that they demanded the declaration of Independence of East Pakistan. (Maniruzzaman, 1975:43) From then an armed struggle for liberation started and it lasted for nine months. Through this armed liberation war Bangladesh became an Independent State on 16 December 1971. (Maniruzzaman, 1975: 95-96) After the Independence Awami League was in power during 1972-1975 and during 1996-2000 and currently for 2008-2012 terms. Bangladesh Nationalist Party was established in 1978 by the late army general turned President Ziaur Rahman. Later Bangladesh Nationalist Party managed to establish itself as a major and popular political party in Bangladesh. This party was in power during 1979-1983, 1991-1995 and 2001-2006. There are dozens of other smaller, personality centered parties that operate under the shadow, in co-operation with or by the grace of, the large parties. In addition to these, there are a number of splinter communist and socialist parties that represent the socialist ideology. Although there exists a number of parties in Bangladesh, in reality the country has effectively ended upto day mainly with a two party system led by Awami League and Bangladesh Nationalist Party. After the fall of President Ershad in 1990, either Awami League or Bangladesh Nationalist Party formed government in coalition with other political parties. Most political parties in pre and post independence Bangladesh have remained prone to factionalism. Nevertheless, there were occasions when rival parties worked together to achieve particular national goals, for example, during the anti-Earshad democratic movement in the latter half of the 1980s. (Rahman, 2010:1)

Political Parties would engage in deliberations on issues and problems which they see affecting vital national goals and suggest means to resolve them. (Chowdhury, 2012:18)

Mainly the process of democratic transition began in Bangladesh with the fall of Ershad government after a prolong movement for democratization. (Siddiqui, 2013:261)

The dream of democratic governance system faced difficulty soon after its independence. The nation got snarled into a legacy of blood. Although it started with Westminster model of democracy, Bangladesh took little time to turn itself into a single party resume in 1975. The majestic leader Bangobandhu Sheikh

Mujibur Rahman was brutally killed with most of his family members by some army officers from in 15 August 1975. From 1975 to the fall of Ershad regime in 1990, the country shuttled back and forth between military and civilian rule. President Ziaur Rahman faced a number of mutinies and coup attempts. He was killed in May 1981. Between 1972 and 1992 the cabinet was reshuffled 87 times. (Bichitra, 1992). A nine year long mass agitation led to the fall of the Ershad regime. Though the general election of 1991. The country was once again on the road to democracy (Rahman, 2010:2).

Every political party as an organization has its own culture and behavior. The members are influenced by the culture and behavior of the organization. Local members of local groups follow the group behavior and attitudes of the central group. Bangladesh Awami League led alliance with left wing secular parties, and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party led coalition with right wing Nationalists Islamic Political Parties (The Daily Star 2007). Both the major parties have different culture. Here Awami League and Bangladesh Nationalist Party is the main party or group. The central group makes the policies and decisions to be acted in the whole party the local group always instructs and influences to follow the central commands and decisions. This chain of command follows in many organizations. The questions may rise about the participation of the group members in the decision-making process.

In new democracies, distorted democratic culture affects both the polity and political activities. Polity becomes power-oriented in the sense that power turns out to be the motive force at every layer of administration. The political activists, on the other hand, become motivated to use political power as the medium of power, influence and in some cases property for mobilizing more in their baskets.

Unfortunately Bangladesh has had a very poor traditions of growing leadership through democratic practices in the parties instead, the chief have been elevated to their positions under the aegis of what is an institutionalized dynastic culture effectively extending these undemocratic structure of power to the party level and subsequently as the incumbent ruler at state level (Chowdhury, 2012:46).

The party is intimately involved in political recruitment selection of the political leadership in whose hands power and decisions will in large measure (The Daily Star 2007).

Bangladesh presents contradictory images of political parties. On the one hand, political parties have a positive image for their contributions in our nationalist struggles and in our movements for realizing democracy. In the 1950s and 1960s

political parties mobilized mass support behind the Bengali nationalist movement. It is this mass mobilization that created the political will in favor of establishing Bangladesh as an independent state in 1971. It is again, the political parties who mobilized and sustained people's support for the restoration of democracy when Bangladesh came under military rule during 1975 to 1990.

But, after the restoration of electoral democracy in 1991, the political parties have fallen short in translating their democratize promise into actual practice. The parties have failed to develop democratic processes in parliament and outside of parliament and practices to promote intra party democracy. Here below the chart is an example.

Parliamentary Sitting Boycotted by the Opposition 1991-2001

Sl. No.	Parliament	Total Working Days	Boycotted Days by Opposition	Percentage
1	Fifth	395	135	34.18
2	Seventh	383	163	42.56
	Total	778	298	38.30

Source: Feroz, 2012:210

Media has frequently reported on corruption and criminal activities of party activists and their Impurity from justice which showcased their role in eroding the rule of law. Inter-party relationships gradually became highly adversarial which prevented parties from settling their difference through democratic discussion and debate. Indeed many observers have identified the undemocratic practices of political parties as key factors inhibiting the consolidation of democracy in Bangladesh. Side by side with those contradictory images we are also confronted with several political party practices that are puzzling and run counter to theories of party and political development. (Jahan, 2015:6-7)

A highly significant contribution made by political party to representative democracy is that it makes possible coherent policy and accountability of the elected deputies. If there were only independent members or several small groups in parliament, they would form unstable coalition to pursue interests and policy according to shifting preferences. They could not put forward and get public endorsement for a portfolio of consistent policies. Moreover, if the coalition could change and the members could shift loyalty, the responsibility for failure could not be establish clearly nor could the voters boot them out. They would shift blame to others and return to their positions. Coherent policies would not be

feasible and parties held accountable if the legislations were individual notables agreement among whom is contingent not necessity of a policy platform. (Rahman, 2008: 96-97)

Recommendations

In this study the role of political parties towards democracy have been examined. As a result, the problems of peoples participation in democratic process and the legitimacy problems of government in Bangladesh have been analyzed too. Finally the following recommendations may be suggested to improve the situation:

- The party in power should play a positive role both within and outside the parliament. The ruling party must possess a liberal attitude towards other political parties. This positive attitude of ruling party can play an important role to institutionalize democracy.
- Opposition parties should stop the practice of boycotting the parliament.
- Opposition political parties need to play a fair role within the parliament to scrutinize and critique the government.
- Democratic values should be maintained at every stage of political parties from top to bottom. In addition, party can play a noble role for teaching and practicing democracy.

Conclusion

Political party led the democratic movements of the country. After the restoration of electoral democracy in 1991 they feel short in institutionalizing democracy, promoting good governance and practicing democracy within their own organizations. Mainstream electoral parties tended to remain pre-occupied with the mission of capturing state power with the goal of expanding their support base through patronage distribution.

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