



## *Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology*

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### **Note from the Editor**

In this third year of our publication we have crossed a major milestone. *Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology* has signed a contract with EBSCO, a US based database company, for worldwide circulation of the journal. EBSCO will add the BEJS in its impressive list of journals and make available to its clients full text articles and other papers published in the e-Journal. Thus *Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology* becomes the first academic journal from Bangladesh and perhaps the only e-journal from South Asia to achieve this status. BEJS is already being referred to by the major search engines and is listed by more than a hundred thousand websites. We consider this a great achievement for sociology in Bangladesh.

We feel that such success of the e-Journal is the result of our sincere effort to stand up and be counted among the sociologists of the world. Bangladesh offers very little of such possibility and faltered in the past. Thanks to the works of a few dedicated sociologists, some of whom are contributing regularly to the e-Journal, we have been able to make our presence felt within the region and hopefully the world over.

We are also proud that we have been able to promote a few young scholars from Bangladesh and elsewhere and shall continue to do so in the future. We are also receiving contributions from sociologists of various countries and hope to attract more such papers and articles now that EBSCO has taken over the circulation. We particularly encourage Bangladeshi sociologists abroad to enrich the journal by their contributions as well.

## The Predicament of Democratic Consolidation in Bangladesh

S. Aminul Islam\*

“... [T]oday liberal democracy is the only game in the town; but we are free, of course, to play it badly” (Sartori, 1991).

The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear (Gramsci, 1998).

“... [T]he most severe, irreconcilable cultural clashes will be within societies, between different ideas about how to continue modernization, what to reject and what to accept. We also know that within any society, when the wrong side wins, tragedy will ensue” (Chirot, 2001).

### Introduction

The puzzle of what leads to the rise of democracy and how it is consolidated has fuelled an enormous amount of research over the last half a century. The increasing realization over the decade of 1980s that many countries moving through the springtime of people would not be able to create or sustain liberal democracy and eventually will get entrapped in what has been later called illiberal democracy (Zakaria, 1997; 2002) led to concern with the critical issue of democratic consolidation. An extensive literature has again grown up around this theme. In spite of growth of such a scholarly literature, the concepts and theories of democratic transition or consolidation are far from clear or adequate.

In 1990 Bangladesh entered into the process of democratic transition in the wake of huge mass upsurges and although there have been regular elections and transfer of powers, the country is yet to achieve democratic consolidation. Thus the issue of democratic consolidation in Bangladesh is of crucial importance for the global agenda of democratization because it is a Muslim majority country and has a population of over 147 million. But, there has been very little theoretically grounded analysis of the dynamics of democratization in Bangladesh. Most writings on the democratic experience of Bangladesh are descriptive or historical accounts (Khan and Husain, 1996; Thorlind, 2001; Ali, 2005; Ali, 2006; Jahan, 2003; Jahan, 2004; Rashiduzzaman, 2001; Ahmed, 2003; Jamil, 2002; Ahmed, 2001; Kochanek, 2000). It has been described in a cursory way as illiberal democracy (Zakaria, 1997) or fragmented democracy (Wagner, 1999). But there have been few in-depth studies.

The objective of this paper is to follow a new perspective for the study of the predicament of democratic transition and consolidation from the experience of Bangladesh. We developed an early version of this perspective in 1992 on the basis of research of the political culture of Bangladesh through a survey of political leaders and historical analysis of the major political parties of the country and predicted that the country would face prolonged crisis during its transition towards democracy (Khan, Islam and Haque, 1996). I have followed it with other works and this working paper is another attempt at refining this perspective.

The country provides a fascinating example of fragile democratic experiment even in a favourable niche. Bangladesh is a homogenous country with few cleavages in terms of ethnicity, religion or caste and entrenched stratification. People have historically manifested strong democratic spirit. Thus the case of Bangladesh is extremely puzzling and merits greater scholarly interest than has been the case. This paper makes an attempt at fleshing out a theoretically grounded analysis of the mechanism that keeps the country suspended in illiberal democracy (Zakaria, 1997) and

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prevent it from achieving democratic consolidation by focusing upon the every day reality of micro conflicts and an examination of enemy discourses among political parties. This paper tries to develop a process analysis different from search for determinants of democracy, which has proved futile, or country or regional studies that have used ill-matched conceptual or theoretical frameworks (Munck, 2001). It combines regime analysis with agency perspective or parallel discourses and parallel rationalities (Wood, 1994) that actors deploy for undertaking particular courses of action. This paper builds on and uses previous works of mine and of my colleagues (Khan, Islam and Haque, 1996; Islam, 2002a;Islam 2002b; Islam, 2003; Islam, 2005a; Islam, 2005b;Islam 2005c; Rahman and Islam (2002).

### **Paradigms of democratic transition**

The literature on democratic transition can be viewed in terms of several paradigms three of which have dominated the field of research. The early studies that spawned in 1950s and 1960s were of three types. Firstly, some macro level studies -either comparative or specific country studies that sought to focus on the genealogy and historical pattern of democratic transition and some of them turned out to be classics such as Moore (1966), Bendix (1964), Lipset (1963), and Dahl (1956). Secondly, a number of other studies tried to explore the determinants of democracy through cross-country empirical data. These studies mostly focused on England, France, Germany and USA. Thirdly, an extensive scholarly work on political development or modernization grew up from the study of political change in the Third world. Although these studies were not directly concerned with democracy, but it was no less clear that the ideal political development or modernization was democratic polity.

The main crop of research, however, emerged after 1974 and on the basis of the experiences of southern Europe, East-Central Europe, Southeast Europe, former Soviet Union, Latin America, East and South-East Asia, and Africa (Munck, 2001). This body of research has generated four paradigms: bureaucratic – authoritarianism, patrimonialism / neo-patrimonialism, patron-clientelism, and political culture. The model of bureaucratic –authoritarianism (BA) was largely shaped by O'Donnell (1973). He classifies political regimes in terms of three dimensions – who govern, who gain and with what policies. In other words he looked into the structure of the regime, nature of the dominant political coalitions and strategic public policies, especially those related to industrialization, increased political activation of the popular sector and the growth of technocratic occupational role. On the basis of these criteria he identified three historic types of political systems in Latin America – oligarchic, populist and BA. He took particular care to map out the emergence of BA in terms of these criteria.

He shows that the end of consumer cycle during import-substitution industrialization in Latin America led to high fiscal deficit, foreign-indebtedness and inflation. It inevitably caused economic austerity and reduction in resources for the popular sector, which triggered widespread protests by the masses. Industrialization led to the rise of technocrats – civil and military bureaucracy and other professionals in society and they had generally low tolerance for populist policy of redistribution. Thus they orchestrated the 'coup coalition' with a view to ending the populist policy and eventually built up an authoritarian state.

### **Neo-patrimonialism**

A second paradigm, which has been deployed especially for Africa, is neo-patrimonialism. The term patrimonialism was introduced by Max Weber (Weber, 1978;Islam, 2004) to refer to a specific sub-category of traditional domination. It emerges in an agrarian society when a ruler acquires a territory and has an administrative staff and a military force to control over it. The ruler regards it as his personal property. All offices are regarded as "part of the ruler's personal

household and private property” (Weber, 1978:1028-9). The administration is manned by favorites – kinsmen, clients, dependants and so on who subsist on benefices, taxes or fees or fiefs granted by the ruler. These privileges can be only enjoyed at the discretion of the ruler. The administration is run along “purely personal connections, favors, promises and privileges” (Weber, 1978, 1041). When such a system becomes extremely arbitrary and the ruler becomes totally discretionary in his behaviour, it is called “*sultanism*”. In the *Religion of China*, Weber highlights some critical aspects of patrimonialism. Bribes were pervasive in bureaucracy. People had to pay bribes for any official work and the bribes would pass on to the top level of the bureaucracy. The expansion of trade and money economy fueled the rent seeking behaviour and led to the prebendalization of state economy. It became a major obstacle for development of the capitalist economy as it led to the ossification of the social structure (Weber, 1964: 61).

Its use in the context of third world states began in 1966 when Guenther Roth (1968) pointed out that many third world states were hardly states in modern sense of the term; they were rather patrimonial regimes. Zolberg was first to use it in the context of Africa (Medard, 1982). Later some theorists found that third world states were often an admixture of what Weber called legal-rational domination and patrimonialism. It led to the coining of the term neo-patrimonialism (Eisenstadt, 1973). Jean-Francois Medard (1982) elaborated the concept, used it in the context of Africa and thus spearheaded a new paradigm.

In Africa, holds Callaghy, not authoritarianism, but the absence of the state is a key problem. In Africa neo-patrimonial regimes are characterized by following characteristics (Bratton and Wallie, 1994; Callaghy, 1984; Lemerchand, 1981):

- State power is equated with will of the people
- Authority is viewed as absolute to be enjoyed by the leader without restraint and precluding any criticism
- There is no separation between private and public resources and people in power have the right to extract resources from people and distribute it for political ends
- Public institutions are both highly centralized and run through private discretion
- The state interference over the economy is so high that it has given rise to the grave problem of free riding and extreme rent seeking
- Public offices are the main source of rent
- Legal traditions and institutional forms are strikingly fragmented and weak
- Civil society is fragile due to dearth of broad-spectrum associational life, impersonal trust and social capital
- Collective action is fledgling.

This description fits well many third world states beyond Africa. This paradigm is particularly suitable for countries at lower levels of socio-economic development. It appears to explain Bangladesh situation better than the bureaucratic authoritarianism model. The paradigm, however, suffers from the limitations that it neglects external factors that contribute towards sustaining the neo-patrimonial regime. A major challenge here is to integrate external factors that greatly impinge upon such a regime.

### **Patron-clientelism**

The concept of patron-clientelism, born in the interstices of anthropology, has been a powerful conceptual framework for the study of politics in both developed and developing countries. It has been deployed for studying specific structural patterns of human relationships ranging from machine politics of US cities (Merton, 1957), criminal gangs to livelihoods at the margin of rural life. The importance of this research area is indicated in the fact that a select bibliography listed 553 entries by the end of 1970 (Roniger, 1981).

Patron-clientelism refers essentially to an asymmetrical relationship in which a powerful person provides reward to and protection for a weaker person or persons in return for loyalty, service and

support. It is a kind of relationship in which there is coercion, masked exploitation and consent through the aura of fictive kinship or primordial loyalty. Predominantly a feature of the simple or peasant society, it is also present in many modern and modernizing societies. In its political form, clients form a support base and vote bank for the patron in exchange for economic resources and other services that clients require.

Clientelism, argues Maiz and Requejo (2001), and flourishes in a social setting of general distrust. It represents an effort at creating fragmented social bond – personalized and particularistic confidence in the face of ‘dark social capital’ – instead of common confidence in others. Magaloni, Diaz Cayeros and Estevez (2006) have argued that politicians tend to diversify their electoral investment strategies by combining transfer of resources through clientelistic channels and public provision of goods under a situation where electoral outcome is uncertain. As they cannot be sure that the supply of goods and services that would be enjoyed by all, they tend to use clientelistic network to supply goods and services to safe constituencies and loyal party men with a view to minimizing risk of losing. Clientelism reduces the risk of losing because it benefits loyal supporters and punish opponents. Clientelism is widespread under conditions of poverty and scarcity of resources and tends to decline with economic development.

The clientelistic structure, however, is inherently unstable because of drain and exhaustion of resources of the patron or competition among patrons or political programmes or ideologies having greater appeal. A patron must be able to provide more and more rewards or incentives against his competitors or alternative institutions with greater incentives. Thus patron-client system has an inherent tendency towards generating resources through corruption or superimposing corruption circuits upon clientelistic networks.

### **Political Cultures**

Lipset (1963), Almond and Verba (1963) and Lucien Pye (1965) shaped the paradigm of political culture in early 1960s and the decade saw a flowering of research on political culture. They held that the concept of political culture meant that there was a durable and consistent pattern in people’s beliefs, values and attitudes about the political system of the country and that it predetermined the nature of political system. Almond and Verba (1963) in their classic study of political culture showed that the soul of democracy lay in what they called civic culture – norms and values that encourage rational activism in politics. It developed first in Great Britain and then flourished in the USA. The success of democracy in developing countries, which suffered from parochial culture, depended critically on the flowering of civic culture in these societies. But in the course of 1970s it suffered a setback as a consequence of a number of factors including the growth of radicalism, and rise of rational choice theory (Almond, 1994).

The concept of political culture has re-emerged in recent years in the context of the centrality of culture in a post modern society and the sweeping changes which are taking place in the political landscape of contemporary society as a response to multiculturalism and digitalization of the life world. The importance of political culture has been particularly viewed in the specific arena of democratic polity and the process of democratization. In recent years there has been increasing awareness that specific form of modernities and the pattern of political cultures of a country are the most important factors in the success or failure of democracy. From late 1980s Inglehart (1988) noticed a renaissance in the study of political culture that has continued to produce a significant body of new ideas. Huntington (1981) identified four historical periods of change, conflict and consensus in American political culture. In a milestone study Ronald Inglehart (1990) pointed out that greater affluence in the USA had produced a whole range of new political issues centered on lifestyle and culture. Issues of identity, sexuality, ethnicity, environment and similar other cultural issues had burst forth as new political agenda. In early 1990s Samuel Huntington (1993a) showed the cultural pattern of the global expansion of democracy in wave-like forms. He (1993b) also brought to global attention an image of contemporary history as the battlefield of

civilizations – clash of civilizations between democratic polities and non-democratic Islamic outposts.

Inglehart (Inglehart and Welzel 2003) has now developed a more refined index of self-expression values which more accurately predict his earlier scales of impersonal trust and life satisfaction. Self-expression values represent an emphasis on liberty, participation, public self expression, tolerance of diversity, impersonal trust and life satisfaction. These aspects of political culture at individual, national and cross-national levels largely explain the existence of effective democracy.

A society's prevailing attitudes on self-expression values dimension in about 1990...explain fully 75 percent of the cross-national variation in 1999-2000. This effect does not simply reflect other influences, such as economic development. The effect of self-expression values remains robust when one controls for economic development, experience with democracy, and even support for democracy...(Inglehart and Welzel, 2003: 69).

There is also now an emphasis on newer dimensions of political culture. In recent years the cyberspace is being constructed as political space and a new form of political culture – a new political community with heterogeneous interests. In this sense post modern political culture is inherently fragmented. The Internet is being used 'in a thousand social projects, many of which conflict with one another' (Agee, 2002).

The awareness of changing political reality in the age of globalization has led to changes in the scholarly perceptions of political culture. One significant change is the rejection of determinism. As Larry Diamond (1994:9) points out:

Three decades of research since *The Civic Culture* have shown that the cognitive, attitudinal, and evaluational dimensions of political culture are fairly 'plastic' and can change quite dramatically in response to regime performance, historical experience, and political socialization.

A second aspect of change in perspective is the view, as already mentioned, that political culture has many layers or forms which are historically shaped and thus diverse. Different historical conjunctures can activate different layers of this culture.

As Richard Sisson (1994) shows that key factors that shaped Indian political culture included:

- The principle of freedom of speech, assembly and movement had taken strong roots during the colonial times.
- The culture of liberal democracy had become the dominant ideology of the national elite or the middle class.
- Gandhi's strategy of controlled agitation-he called off any movement that sparked violence.
- Bargaining and compromises were struck within the framework of indigenous associational life.
- A tradition of conflict resolution through imposition or arbitration
- National elites were able to construct a vision of national community in colonial period that has survived through many vicissitudes
- There has developed a mass of responsive citizenry, which is reasonably well informed, involved and alert to hold the government accountable.

#### *Social capital and democratic political culture*

The concept of social capital has an extra-ordinary career since its formulation by James Coleman in mid 1980s. Although the paradigm of social capital had its origin in 1980s in the writings of James Coleman, it became highly influential through the work of Robert Putnam (1993; 1971; Putnam and Nanetti, 1988). Putnam's work became an exemplar of a theory applied



successfully to trace the different historical paths of associational life, local government and democratic and authoritarian forms political life in the north and south of Italy. The book has become a minor classic, given birth to a paradigm and stimulated massive research efforts across disciplines and all over the world.

Putnam defined social capital as trust, norms, reciprocity and networks that underlie associational life. Yet, there has been fierce disagreement about the precise meaning of the term and factors that create social capital. There has been strong warning about taking a naïve and romantic view of networks. Networks are embedded in community life, which is also punctuated by power struggles. Deviant subcultures and groups such as gangs have strong networks. Do they manifest social capital? Thus there is new demand for greater clarity of the concept.

These rightwing and leftwing takes on social capital are both upbeat, optimistic, in viewing social capital as an avenue either to outflank the state or to combine strong civil society, strong state, strong economy. Social capital has thus become a new terrain of rhetorical positioning and ideological contestation, which calls for greater analytic clarity (Pieterse, 2001:124).

These controversies have led to the problem of measurement at empirical level. How can we measure social capital and what is to measure? What is the relationship between agency and social capital? Paxton (2002) has developed a more refined measurement of social capital and found that social capital and democracy are closely related. Social capital assists democratic transition through developing anti-regime discourse and promoting anti-regime movements. Firstly, it helps the spread of ideas and values opposing the regime through social networks and ties and makes it credible. Secondly, it fosters democratic movement by providing resources, organizational space and leadership. It also assists in the consolidation of democracy. Increased participation in voluntary associations leads to greater political participation by people and intensity and quality of participation. It also aids socialization of future generations. Her quantitative analysis of a large sample of countries shows that social capital has a reciprocal relationship with democracy; it fosters democracy and democracy in turn fosters democracy. However, connected associations had strong positive effect on democracy and isolated associations had strong negative impact (Paxton, 2002).

Thus it is no wonder that the issue of social capital still has generated a great deal of interest. It is mainly because social capital creates a strong civil society, promotes and consolidates democracy.

### **Democratic transition**

It is in this context of regime analysis that the discourses of democratic transition or democratic consolidation have flourished. Although there has been considerable scholarly work in this area, there has been little by way of theoretical analysis apart from some initial mapping of the phases of transition or mechanisms involved in the process of transition (O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead, 1988). A landmark study of 26 countries by Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1990) provides historical narratives and a catalogue of factors which were deemed as relevant for understanding the process. The analytical or theoretical vacuum has been particularly felt because many post transitional democracies have not moved towards liberal democracy; they have remained suspended between authoritarianism and democracy.

Zakaria (1997) finds that about half of the countries between dictatorship and consolidated democracy including Bangladesh fall under the rubric of illiberal democracy. Illiberalism is not a passing phase; it is likely to be one of the permanent forms of democracy. Partisan state, and technocratic control of public space and lack of genuine pluralism characterize it. Illiberal democracy is a democracy where elections are not completely fair and free and civil liberties not totally guaranteed. In fact illiberal democracies are on the rise increasing from 22 percent to about 50 percent between 1990 and 1997. In 2002 Zakaria (Zakaria, 2002) found that the trend towards illiberal democracy had actually hardened.

Santiso(2001) has also argued that transitional democracies can be described as hybrid regime; restricted, uncertain, incomplete, illiberal or fragile democracies. These countries are characterized by unstable governance, economic uncertainty, hollow institutions, fluid political processes, and unconsolidated party systems. "Many emergent democracies have ended up, in a gray middle zone of so many transitions of that period, having neither moved rapidly and painlessly to democracy nor fallen back to outright authoritarianism" (Santiso, 2001:156).

Thus although these paradigms have generated a fruitful stream of research, they have remained descriptive, partial, nested and sketchy. The recent works on democratic transition manifest "a range of fundamental problems" that plague the research in this area. Firstly, Key concepts denoting dependent variables are defined in diverse and ambiguous way so that it becomes difficult to understand whether various scholars are addressing the same issues. Secondly, empirical studies have produced a bewildering variety of explanatory variables, which lack clarity and specification. Thirdly, studies based on a small set of explanatory variables have not allowed broader generalizations. It has seriously affected the growth of knowledge in this area of research.

This is particularly true for research on democratic consolidation. Although the idea of democratic consolidation has become one of the most widely used in the discourse on democracy, its popularity seems to have been built on the "quicksand of semantic ambiguity" (*Schedler, 1997*). He thinks that the concept has led to a state of conceptual disorder and it has increasingly been covered by dense fog.

Some simulate the use of DC[democratic consolidation, author] by including it in the title of some book or article but without making any further reference to it in the main text. Some try to give the term more precision by refocusing it from national political systems to political subsystems. Some try to do the same by disaggregating it into several dimensions. Some avoid the term and keep silent about it in order to introduce different terms into the study of new democracies, such as democratic governance or institutionalization. Some ... calls for more conceptual analysis. And finally, some question the very usefulness of the concept or even advocate the radical conclusion that we should get rid of it altogether (*Schedler, 1997:4*).

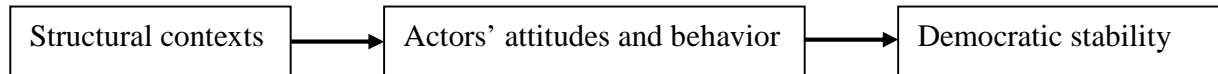
Phillipe Schmitter (1996) argues that no single rule or institution is sufficient for democratic consolidation, not even such cardinal criteria such as, majority rule, territorial representation, competitive elections, parliamentary sovereignty or party system. The key feature of democratic consolidation is the acceptance of the rules of competition for office, "cooperation and consent in the formation of government or opposition and contingency in the mobilization of consent and assent" (Schmitter, 1996:298). It is no wonder that many scholars have charged such ideas as nebulous.

Recently efforts are underway for salvaging the concept of democratic consolidation and make it operational (*Schedler, 1997*). *Schedler (1997)* has analyzed democratic consolidation in the context of a classification of regime types. By combining empirical and normative perspectives, he has divided political regimes into authoritarianism semi-democracy, liberal democracy, and advanced democracy. In this context democratic consolidation can be viewed in terms of five components.

- Avoiding democratic breakdown
- Avoiding democratic erosion
- Institutionalizing democracy
- Completing democracy
- Deepening democracy

*Schaedler (2001)* views it in terms of positive and negative delimiting of the concept. The positive component consists of completion and deepening of democracy. The negative component

embodies avoidance of breakdown and erosion. The conceptualizing of the term also involves a time dimension – past achievement in terms of stability and future prospects. The extent of consolidation can be assessed either internally through participant's perspective or externally through observer's perspective. It calls for multi-level causal analysis involving structural contexts, and attitudes and behavior of actors that lead to democratic stability.



Thus democratic consolidation can be measured in terms of a set of behavior which is observable, a body of attitudes which is measurable and institutional contexts in terms of incentives and constraints.

The author proposes that the best way to capture the confines of liberal democracy is to map out the action and behavior that show that the actors have withdrawn from the rules of the democratic game. From this perspective, he proposes three inter-related measures – violence, rejection of elections and transgression of authority.

#### ***Use of violence***

The concept of liberal democracy dictates that political competition should be conducted through a set of rules designed on the basis of consensus that reduces violence to the lowest level in social life.

- The assassination of political competitors,
- Attacks against the liberty, physical integrity, and property of political adversaries,
- The intimidation of voters and candidates,
- Violent attempts to overthrow elected officials,
- Ethnic and social cleansing,
- Riots,
- Destruction of public property

#### ***The rejection of elections***

If political parties

- Refuse to participate in democratic elections,
- Actively deny others the right to participate
- Try to control electoral outcomes through fraud and intimidation
- Do not accept the outcomes of democratic elections
- Mobilize extra-institutional protest, boycott elected assemblies,
- Take up the arms to overthrow elected authorities by force

#### ***The transgression of authority***

Liberal democracy is premised upon rule of law and both political leaders and the bureaucracy must obey the rule of law.

But democratic alarm bells go off when public officials start ignoring the legal boundaries of their office. When they start violating prevalent rules of rule making, rule enforcement, rule interpretation, or conflict settlement, democrats have to be on watch.. .as violations of rules and meta-rules develop into a recurrent practice in salient cases, the prospects of democracy darken (Schedler, 2001:72).

Democracy suffers from crises when such violations become chronic. There are three possible outcomes of such crises:

- Democracy breaks down;
- The democratic regime lapses into a permanent state of fragility
- Democratic actors undertake countervailing action and rebuild the fabric of democratic society.

Thus the outcome depends upon how the agency acts out under the given structural situation.

The gold test of democratic consolidation set by Huntington (1993) is two-turn over test in which a government has been changed through two successive elections with losers accepting the results. The underlying logic is the normative commitment to the spirit of democracy. Andreas Schaedler (2001) finds this test as inadequate and views that a set of broader indicators are necessary for assessing the state of consolidation within a regime and across the regimes.

One such important indicator crucially relevant here is institutionalizing competitive elections or electoral governance – an area which has failed to attract adequate scholarly attention.

However, Alexander (2001) argues that democratic institutions are not adequate for predicting consolidation. Formal political institutions like electoral systems, separation of power between legislative and executive or decentralization play two major roles for consolidation. Firstly, organizations are outcomes of interaction of self-motivated actors. Secondly, they serve as a platform for competitive groups to engage in future interaction and policy making. Thus the parliament provides space for “enhanced blocking powers” and prospect for future command over it and reduces the chance for “political battles”. But these two roles are not adequate because actors can change the institutions and their operation.

The discussion above shows that the challenge of theory construction in the area of democratic transition or consolidation is indeed great. A preliminary and essential task is to undertake paradigm-bridging so that fragmented research traditions can begin to cohere and congeal fuelling more fruitful empirical research that can serve as feedback for theory construction. A second task is to move away from the study of discrete causal factors or determinants and sheer historical narratives to a process analysis with the objective of exploring the mechanism through which a given political structure is produced and reproduced in specific space and time. Finally, there is the important task of integrating macro and micro analysis.

The section below provides an elementary effort at such a task in the context of recent crisis of democratic transition in Bangladesh. It is to be mentioned here that Bangladesh has passed two-turn over test as stipulated by Huntington (1993) and yet failed to consolidate her democracy.

### **The case of Bangladesh**

The post-colonial history of Bangladesh for a period of six decades from 1947 is an important example of what has been called “path-dependence”. Although the country as part of former Pakistan began with parliamentary government, it soon reverted to authoritarianism. In 1971 Bangladesh began its journey as a newly independent nation after a war of liberation, which exacted great sacrifice from people, with a parliamentary form of government. But the country soon plunged into a series of coups and counter-coups and got caught into “a legacy of blood” (Mascarenas, 1986). A protracted mass agitations extending more than nine years led to the fall of the last of the military dictators – General Ershad and the establishment of a parliamentary form of government in 1991. During 1980s political parties in Bangladesh numbered nearly 200 and party fragmentation was very high (Khan, Islam and Haque, 1996). But the general election in 1991 made it clear that the country had achieved a stable two-party dominant system which was particularly useful for an emerging democracy.

Although Bangladesh began its transition to democracy through great popular uprisings and with great hopes, it has not been able to consolidate its democracy even after three general elections. The Freedom House currently ranks Bangladesh as partially free with scores of 4 for political rights and civil liberties (Freedom House, 2005). In spite of regular elections, democracy has become largely ineffective in the country because of contentious politics between two major parties – Awami League (AL) and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Although the country has

great possibility for rapid development, its prospect has been marred by a political war between two major political parties of the country – between Sheikh Hasina's Awami League and Begum Khaleda Zia's BNP.

Democracy is strangled by a poisonous political war between Zia's right-of-center Bangladesh National Party (BNP) and the left-leaning Awami League. Rejecting any notion of bipartisanship, both parties seem to keep the nation perpetually on the verge of chaos alternating between state repression or crippling national strikes aimed at toppling the government, depending on who is in power. With politics often reduced to little more than a big brawl, violence infects much of daily life. Gangs armed with barbers' razors roam city streets, extortion is wide spread, beatings are routine. The bilious feud Bangladesh's leading women also hobbles the country. Asked about the hostility between her and Awami League leader Sheikh, Zia replies: "Ask her". For her part, Hasina accuses Zia of everything from staging "a drama" with the militant arrests to secretly being behind an attempt to have her assassinated in 2004 when a bomb killed 22 people (Time 10 April, 2006:16).

Thus the democratic phase of the country from 1991 clearly represents a cycle – a cycle of clientelistic and coercive politics when a party or alliance is in power and a cycle of agitations or mobilization politics when it is in the opposition. Both the major political parties and its alliances have shown this tendency. As a leading economist of the country has observed:

In response to the perceived unfair behaviour of the ruling party successive oppositions have moved on to a highly confrontational political path, leading to boycott of parliament, invocation of hartals and a relocation of opposition political activity away from parliament and into the streets (Sobhan, 2001:84).

### **Contours of the conflict: Elections and Parliament**

The present crisis of transition began when bye-elections were held in early 1994 in some vacant seats of the Parliament, especially the election in a constituency of Magura in the south-west of the country, the Awami League and some other opposition parties charged the BNP of 'massive rigging' and 'deceiving the voters and killing democracy by holding a mock election' (cited in Hasanuzzaman : 104). It also sparked off major mass agitations organized by the Awami League and several other opposition parties. There was demand for a neutral caretaker government for holding free and fair elections. There was an effort at mediating the impasse through the initiative of the Commonwealth Secretary General, but it failed. It led to the en masse resignation of the Awami League and other mainstream opposition members from the Parliament on 28<sup>th</sup> December, 1994. The BNP held general elections without participation of the mainstream opposition and an extremely low turn out of voters on 15<sup>th</sup> February, 1996. It led to greater political movements from the opposition including strikes and indefinite non-cooperation movement and ultimately the government passed the non-party caretaker government bill as 13<sup>th</sup> amendment to the Constitution on 26<sup>th</sup> March, 1996.

The next general election was held under the non-party caretaker government on 12<sup>th</sup> June, 1996 and the Awami League won the election. The BNP, like the Awami League previously, resorted to frequent walk outs and prolonged absence from the Parliament and making it largely ineffective. It undertook street agitations including strikes and hartals against the ruling party (Hasanuzzaman, 1998). In the general election of 2001 BNP and its allies won a massive victory. Again Awami League and its allies have resorted to frequent walk outs and abstinence from the parliament and a series of street agitations including strikes and hartals. In 2005, for example the Awami League abstained from the Parliament for 61 days out of 62 days when the parliament was in session (Transparency International Bangladesh, 2005). The main issues separating both the BNP and the four party alliance which heads the government and the Awami League and the fourteen party alliance are composition of the caretaker government and the role of the Election Commission and the head of the defense portfolio.

Firstly, the government has increased the retirement age of the judges of the Supreme Court from 65 to 67 through 14<sup>th</sup> amendment to the Constitution and thus allegedly has chosen a pro-BNP

person who would next head of the caretaker government as the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment to the Constitution stipulates that the last retiring chief justice of the Supreme Court be made head of the caretaker government. Secondly, The Awami League and the 14 party alliance headed by it wants that the defense portfolio should be given to the Chief Advisor instead of retaining it with the President as is the practice.

Thirdly, Awami League and its alliance wants reconstitution of the Election Commission, especially the resignation of its controversial Chief Election Commissioner, M.A. Aziz and a reliable electoral roll which, it claims, the present EC has failed to accomplish. The Awami League and its allies have firmly asserted that it will not allow the polls to take place if government fails to undertake the reforms. The reason for Awami League's firm stand on reforms is its entrenched belief that it was denied victory in the last general election by administrative mechanism or what it calls 'election engineering'. Some efforts at dialogue between the Awami League and the BNP have been undertaken, but it has not progressed much. Thus the next general election due to be held in January, 2007 looks little uncertain (Dhaka Courier, 28 July, 2006). The Awami League and its allies have started mass protests so that the government becomes forced to accept their demand and they have forcefully asserted that they will not take part in the general election unless their demands are met.

Thus the process of democratic consolidation in the country has ground to a halt on the issue of fair and free general election. It appears to be a simple issue. But it is only the tip of a whole range of historical forces and issues that have shaped the politics of the country. The contentious politics of today is neither bizarre nor irrational. From the political actors' perspective it appears to be the only rational course of action left to them under the prevailing circumstances. But if this contentious politics continues it may have serious repercussion on its governance, economic growth and political stability, especially in the context of threat from Islamic extremism.

It is in this context we present a preliminary analysis of the predicament of democratic consolidation of the country through an analytical framework and through the optic of political micro violence from 1991 to 2001. In recent years the study of collective violence or why people hurt and kill one another outside war has emerged as a major area of research in political science and political sociology (King, 2004). The study of micro violence is also extremely important in understanding the frenzied tailspin of a suspended democratic transition.

### **Analytical framework**

The analytical framework for understanding these phenomena or more broadly the illiberal democracy in Bangladesh deploys an integrated or multi-paradigmatic approach as discussed above. It particularly focuses on the concept of social capital and how it can be related to political discourses and political behaviour of political agents within the framework of patron-clientelism and which finally turn it into a neo-patrimonial regime in the form of dictatorship of the top leadership. In undertaking such a task, this paper has moved from positivistic and static analysis to a process analysis in which structures or discourses and human agents interact to shape a given political behaviour. Such behaviour may be path -dependent, but not essentialist. A change in the policy, incentive structures and rules of the game are capable of changing such behaviour.

The crisis of democratic transition, as it stands now, can be captured through the following figure (Figure 1). This figure represents a simplified version of the dynamic interrelationship of forces of the illiberal political regime that the country has. The ruling party tries to get the support of the citizens *by using* a clientelistic mode of incorporation – through the network of patron-client relationship. *They try to get support of the citizens through personal favours, particularistic services, and financial incentives.* The same mechanism is deployed to infiltrate the key institutions of civil society, which are likely to be threats for the regime. The two parties or their alliances have tried to penetrate and incorporate the civil society – its institutions such as schools, colleges, universities, professional bodies, trade unions and other associations so that such

associations are polarized or increasingly becoming polarized. This mode of incorporation is clientelistic or ideological and it makes these associations partisan and ineffective.

The ruling party forges a more embedded patron-client relationship with the bureaucracy so that the party can deploy it for coercion of the opposition and rigging the election. The loyal civil servants are rewarded with promotion, better postings and lucrative positions in the party in future. The recalcitrant civil servants are punished by frequent transfers, posting to difficult or less important portfolios. The opposition party/alliance also has their clients in the public administration who lie low, but support them in the hope for future rewards. In response to authoritarian attitude or state repression, the opposition party/alliance moves out of the parliament and occupies the political space of the street with the goal of venting out its anger and fury that often breeds violence and violence in its train brings the horde of mastans into the political space.

In fact the Parliament has been largely ineffective in the country (Ahmed, 2001; Ahmed, 2003). In spite of a good beginning, the Parliament was never made a centre of politics in the country. Sheikh Hasina, the opposition leader claimed that 90 out of 94 bills accepted by the Parliament that came into being in 1991 were introduced in the form of ordinances. The committee system did not work well although numerous meetings were held (Ahmed, 2001). The opposition charged that democracy of the country had turned into the dictatorship of the Prime Minister. There was growing confrontation between the government and the opposition. Between April 1991 and March 1994 the opposition parties individually or jointly walked out of the Parliament or boycotted it on 57 occasions. The opposition began a longer boycott of the parliament when a minister made derogatory comments about the opposition, which he refused to retract. Finally, the mainstream opposition resigned from the Parliament on the issue of rigging in the bye-elections. Since then streets have become arbiter of politics of the country (Hasanuzzaman, 1998; Ahmed, 2003). Every opposition in Bangladesh has deployed a variety of protest stratagems. A key instrument of protest is hartal. The number of hartals increased during the democratic era. A total of 827 hartals were observed between 1991 and 2002. The frequency of hartals was not much different between the governments of Begum Khaleda Zia's BNP (1991-96) and Sheikh Hasina's Awami League (1996-2001). Both parties called hartals with equal frenzy; each party accounting for about 12 percent of hartals during 1991 and 2002. The study of hartals shows that the country has manifested rise of demand groups, which resort to hartal and violence instead of pressure groups characteristic of democracy (Islam, 2005). The opposition also tries to bring the civil society into its favour for reinforcing its mobilization politics through ideological incorporation and prospect for rewards in future. It turns

major institutions of society into a cockpit of contentious politics. It is leading to deinstitutionalization, which is a great threat for democracy. Donors play an important role in affecting the fortune of the ruling class. Its policies and strategies and interventions ensure or jeopardize the stability of the regime to a certain extent. The donor resources constitute a major source of rent for the overarching 'political machine'. They have also certain leverages over other political parties or political process of the country, which have not been shown in the figure.

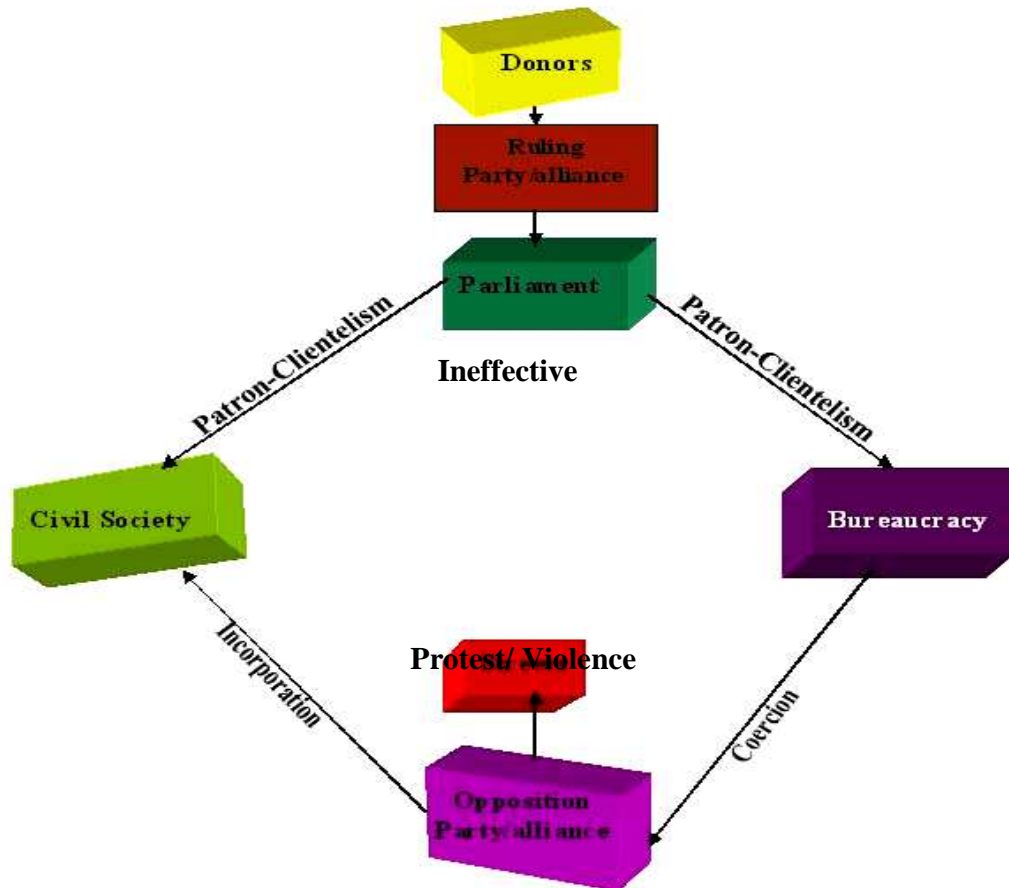


Figure: 1 The Ruling Party and the Opposition.

***Low Social capital and political culture in Bangladesh***

The issue of social capital is particularly important for Bangladesh because the country has been largely viewed as extremely deficient in social capital. This view is not based on empirical study of social capital, but from historical analysis of the pattern of rural settlements, its ecological context



and forms of institutions or anthropological studies that have identified lack of institutional life and high level of conflicts in rural society. There is very little research on social capital as such.

The colonial discourses produced the stigma of weak corporate life and factionalism in eastern Bengal. It did not provide any analysis of this phenomenon apart from hints that the deltaic ecology was a possible factor for it. Khan (1996; Khan, Islam and Haque, 1996 for a summary) has recently provided a fruitful analysis of lack of corporate life and consequently social capital in Bangladesh in terms of the structure of its villages. He finds that villages in Bengal are open villages in contrast to corporate villages found in other parts of South Asia. The villages in Bengal are characterized by dispersed settlements. The smaller settlements called *para* make up the fabric of social life and it has very little corporate life. There were two major reasons for it. Firstly, the deltaic ecology dictated a pattern of settlement which was dispersed. Secondly, the ecology did not demand a great deal of corporate activities. Artificial irrigation was not necessary in this region. There was hardly any need for common defense, and community-based protection or regulation of common property.

Thus there was no need for the development of institutional or administrative structure in villages. Khan argues that it does not mean that corporate life is not possible in the country. Corporate structures can be built up when need for it develops. In fact village solidarity was visible in cultural and religious ceremonies. Thus low village solidarity does not mark social or psychological deficiency; it is only contextual and contingent. Khan's analysis implies that the rural society in Bangladesh has low social capital.

This has led to a widespread belief, which has been underscored by Maloney in an essentialist vein (1986:52-53):

More specifically, the Bangladeshi can be said to be an individualist in the sense that he is pragmatic and opportunistic in his behavior. The term "individualism" here is not defined as the individualism that has evolved in European history, which implies intellectual freedom, voting, and other modern human rights. The Bengali is an individualist in the sense that he behaves atomistically to maximize opportunity through social relations, learns to find his own way in life, and does not depend much on either institutions or ideologies.

Bangladeshis will also probably never be able to organize themselves as East Asian societies do.... Bangladeshis could not conceivably organize themselves for economic production like the Japanese, Chinese, Koreans, or Singaporeans, nor could they work together to achieve the profound changes that have occurred in East Asian countries in the past few years... Even the capacity for organization found in the southern and western states of India is absent in Bangladesh....

A large number of ethnographies have also shown that villages of Bangladesh have no bounded residential system, centralized authority or corporate identity and thus suffer from institutional atomism (Rahman and Islam, 2002). Thus there is an overwhelming emphasis on the dearth of social capital in Bangladesh. This is both an essentialist and static analysis which is grounded neither in empirical facts nor historical accounts.

Rahman and Islam (2002) made an effort at exploring the issue of social capital and came up with some startling findings. Contrary to the received knowledge, this work showed that social capital was quite strong in some villages. Indigenous *samaj* and *shalish* were instrumental in preserving primordial social capital. New organizations and institutions were being built up as new forms of social capital. Short-term social capital was also being generated during the flood disaster.

Islam (2002) also found that in three villages three types of social capital were strong. In the haor area of Sunamganj, indigenous *samaj* was very powerful in preserving social capital in a harsh ecological niche of mono-agriculture. A key livelihood asset was fish that required high level of cooperation within the community. A village in Shariatpur boasted a religious complex which commanded free labour from several districts for its annual rituals. In the Comilla village a community based organization (CBO) was found to be playing a remarkable role without any NGO or donor support. It was providing micro-finance to the villagers. It was instrumental in bringing a large number of tube wells to the village. Most houses had sanitary latrines. There was

little conflict in the village. There was an agreement in the village that party politics should not be a factor in the development of the village.

Whatever the level of social capital in rural society, there is no doubt that the process of urbanization and modernization tend to disrupt or even destroy indigenous or pre-capitalist social capital – a phenomenon pointed out long ago by Ibn Khaldun in a different language. Ibn Khaldun, as Gellner (1991:502) points out, “was a supreme theorist of social atomization” who showed that the city, in contrast to the tribe, was “an atomized non-civil society of specialized producers.” What was wrong in Khaldun’s analysis was that modernity, as most classical sociologists underscored, leads to a new form of social capital and the birth of civil society. Thus the problem of social capital is acute in transitional society. All transitional societies manifest weak social capital. It is often in this context of transition that patron-clientelistic ties tend to develop.

It is not that Bangladesh is deficient in trust; it suffers from ‘possessive individualism’ (Macpherson, 1962) which was a characteristic feature of early capitalism in the West and as such a generalized feature of transition for to modernity in its move from one type of society to another. During this transition much indigenous social capital is destroyed and there is often a long time difference for a country to clock into a new or modern form of social capital. Bangladesh is currently suspended in this transition and hence there is low generalized trust or low professional ethic and it constitutes a very favourable niche for free riders and rent seeking.

More importantly, the cultural terrain in Bangladesh has several layers and a key divide is between orthodox Islam, and small streams of extremism within it and folk Islam which is syncretistic and contains elements of many religious traditions and inherently pluralistic. Extremism has historically flared up in times of societal crisis; but the tradition of cultural pluralism has remained a major force in society which found its culmination in the War of Liberation.

### **Class structure**

The class structure of the country has been historically shaped in the context of a peasant society characterized by zaminadari system that gave rise to a huge stratum of intermediaries involved in rent collection. During the Pakistan period the rich farmers did not turn into capitalist farmers like those in the West, they remained intermediary between the state and the peasantry (Shahidullah, 1985). A small class fragment of entrepreneurs and a growing service class emerged through windfall fortune and ‘contract or contact’ (Farouk,1982; Maniruzzaman,1980) The entrepreneurial pursuit in the country has been limited due to lack of cultural tradition, appropriate public policies and economic opportunities. Thus the dominant fragment of the middle class of the country has been described as state class or ‘new zamindars’ which rake in the collection of bribes ( van Schendel,1991:234). Although a small group of entrepreneurs has emerged by seizing new economic opportunities in sectors like garments, fishing, and pharmaceutical, the major fragment of the middle class has thrived on rent seeking in the public sphere.

### **Patron –clientelism**

Bangladesh has manifested patron clientelism like any other peasant society. In recent years traditional clientelism grounded in land has declined (Jansen, 1988), but political clientelism has expanded and almost encapsulated the state and civil society. It has two major forms-horizontal and vertical. In its horizontal forms the political leaders, especially of the ruling class produce, maintain or reproduce ties with the bureaucracy. In horizontal ties the patron becomes connected to a client for electoral and local support or to lower level officials for private political and economic gains. . Often patron clientelism takes the form of factionalism and sparks off factional conflicts (Khan, Islam and Haque, 1996). It thus turns into what has been called ‘dark social capital’ (Maiz and Requejo, 2001) fuelling corruption and violence. Patron- clientelism, in the context of weak regulatory framework, provides huge opportunity for rent seeking. The absence of explicit rules for collection of party funds makes it an indispensable aspect of party structure.

### ***Horizontal clientelism: the nexus between political parties and the bureaucracy***

One particular aspect of horizontal patron-clientelism is the link between the ruling party, politicians, and public administration. The party rewards the loyal civil servant by quicker promotions and profitable postings and with important positions within party after his retirement. The public administration, because of this political nexus and a variety of other reasons, resemble more a patron–client or factional structure rather than a rational organization as envisaged by Weber. One author found that seven types of factionalism have seriously compromised the quality and performance of the civil service (Siddiqui, 1996).

It is thus more like a patrimonial system in which recruitment, postings and promotions are guided by consideration of political loyalty rather than technical competence. Even a government report found that political consideration in promotion has dealt a death blow to the civil service (GoB, 2001). One survey indicated that 37 percent of the civil service respondents thought that political connection and nepotism were necessary for promotion (World Bank, 2002).

### ***Political parties and patron clientelism***

The structure of political parties in the country represents a congeries of factions held together partly by charisma, ideology and also by supremacy of the leadership. A powerful or even authoritarian leader is important for mediating factional conflicts and silencing factional protest. Thus the top leadership acquires some characteristics of patrimonial ruler.

The illiberal or semi-democracy rests on lack of mutual trust between two major political parties/alliances of Bangladesh that has led to what has been called contentious politics in the country. The argument put forward in this paper is that aspects of neo-patrimonialism and patron-clientelism remain in place or become reinforced by two sets of factors.

The first set of factors relate to voting behaviour. The parties have a culturally grounded belief that electoral victory can be achieved through developmental activities as well as through individualist welfare work, purchase of votes, intimidation, coercion and rigging. This requires maintenance of a patron-clientelist relationship and resource flow through this channel. In a transitional society like Bangladesh the norms of citizenship are varied where voting behaviour is often influenced by patron–client relationship or monetary incentives.

A second set of factors relate to the contentious politics in which workers and leaders of the opposition parties undertake high risks and undergo great sufferings as they go through the motions of protest against the government. When the opposition party / parties go to power, these workers and leaders have to be rewarded because of their services for the party. In terms of an indigenous discourse of justice the party becomes indebted to these people and their debt must be redeemed through material rewards. They cannot be punished if they transgress the law because of their past services and loyalty to the party. Thus a cycle of political suffering lead to a cycle of rent seeking when the party in question is in power. It sustains and even reinforces the patron-clientelism. The patrons must be constantly engaged in search for resources or benefits for redistribution among clients or a patron would lose his clients to his competitors. For the patron rent seeking is the quickest and easiest road to wealth and power that he needs for redistribution.

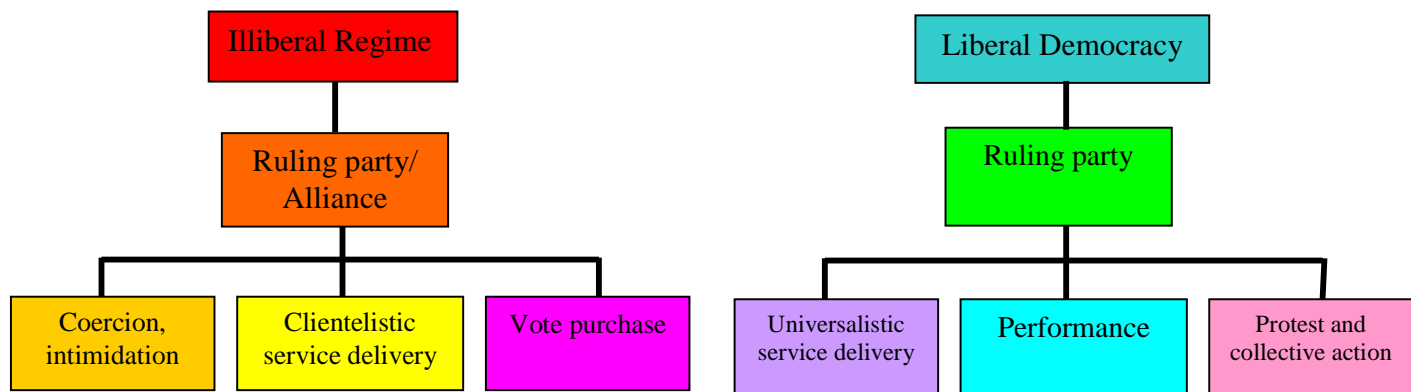
Thirdly, leaders face particular difficulty in trusting others in the context of low trust. There is always the spectre of conspirators within the party – a constant threat of protest or rebellion. It leads to a high level of centralization and absence of inner democracy in the party. Often factionalism makes it difficult to hold elections for party offices and office holders are imposed from above by the central committee or the leader. It also leads to the rise of inner sanctum

/sanctuary of trusted persons who are consulted for key decision-making. Thus there is always a shadow or parallel power centre – Informal in nature within the ruling party. This often comes into conflict with the structure of formal power.

Finally, there is also a historical divide in Bangladesh politics between Awami League as the representing the pro-liberation forces and those who believe that the tragic coup of 1975 saved the country from fascism in the form of BKSAL.

The horizontal clientelism has been a particularly effective instrument for harassment of the opposition leaders and workers through the law enforcing agencies and party activists and *mastans*. False charges are brought against opposition activists and warrants issued against by influencing the government machinery. “This partisan approach to law enforcement extends from top to the bottom of the political system and applies to the behaviour of both the parties when in office.” (Sobhan 2001: 90). It has, according to Sobhan, one of the most erudite observers of the politics in the country, led to the emergence of *mastaans* or musclemen as a key factor of politics of the country. In the context of factional politics they are regularly deployed in the constituency of a politician to maintain his hold in the area against rival candidates. This means he must have economic resources to support a body of clients and political connections with the government so that he can protect his men against the police. It has resulted “in a nexus between politicians, business, the *mastaans* and the law enforcing agencies” and it has become “embedded into the social structure of Bangladesh” and forced the citizens to “institutionalized anarchy” (Sobhan 2001: 90). It has propelled the very rich into the arena of politics. Today there has emerged in the country a group of people who invest huge amount of money for gaining political office so that they can get returns many times more through political connections. One political commentator who has inside information found that 48 millionaires spent about Tk.500 crores in the last election and others spent another Tk.200 crores. Two candidates in Dhaka are reported to have spent Tk.50 crores. He speculates that an amount between 1200 and 1600 crores of taka will be spent in the next election (Huq, 2006). It has led to the increasing marginalization of the professional and committed political leaders and workers within both parties.

The two parties or their allies thus deploy two different discourses of politics-clientelistic and protest. The clientelistic discourse is a pragmatic and private discourse that guides everyday political transaction. The public discourse is democratic which is deployed to judge the behaviour of the other. When a party is in power it tends to resemble a neo-patrimonial/patron-clientelistic regime, becomes engaged in rent collection, but expects that the opposition must follow democratic rules of the game. The opposition demands the ruling party should adhere to democratic discourse and rules of the game, but it follows the mobilization discourse and politics of protest to fight off neo-patrimonialism or residues of authoritarianism. Both parties feel they are justified in what they do because it is the other, which forces them to undertake a given stratagem.



**Figure: 2. Regime Type and Electoral Strategies**

The ruling party feels justified when it uses legal or extra-legal coercion because the opposition is out to destroy the law and order through its mobilization politics. The opposition party regards it as their democratic right to protest against undemocratic activities of the ruling party. It thus leads to the perpetuation of enemy discourse which has taken shape along the fault lines of political history of the country.

### **Enemy discourse**

The contentious politics between two major parties have been shaped by two opposing discourses or more correctly by an enemy discourse. The political discourse elaborated by the Awami League can be called the foundational discourse. It is based on Bengali nationalism, the Liberation War, formation of the nation state and the central role played by Bangabandhu in it, secularism, populism and similar other signifiers. In contrast the BNP has articulated the saviour discourse. It claims that it has saved the nation from an autocratic regime poised for a dynastic rule. It is the only force that can guard the sovereignty of the nation against the threat of India. It also asserts the centrality of Islamic values in social life. It elaborates Bangladeshi nationalism as distinct from historically shaped syncretistic Bengali culture. Thus The Awami League treats the BNP as 'malevolent other' which is poised to destroy the spirit of War of Liberation, secularism and pluralism of Bengali culture. The BNP, on the other hand, views the Awami League as the 'authoritarian other' which treats the nation as its property. As such it cannot be a force for progress and development of the nation (Islam, 2002a).

### **Data sources and methodology**

Two graduate students collected the data for the study from one newspaper. They checked one Bengali newspaper the *Sangbad* from 1991 to 2001 for any news that appeared under political party and conflicts. They undertook content analysis of every such news item in terms of a pre-designed checklist. The aggregate data are pooled from this raw data set. They also collected a sample of derogatory comments by political leaders and coded the key terms and their frequency of appearance. This is a preliminary data set and it has not been possible to re-check the data. Thus the data contain two types of bias. Firstly, it may not include all the cases reported in the newspaper which was chosen or all the cases that were reported in the press. Secondly it does not represent all actual incidents because the dataset only includes cases that were reported in the *Sangbad*. Thus the data presented here are partial and may underestimate the rage of partisan labeling and conflicts.

### **The shaping of enemy discourse**

Figure below shows how Awami League and BNP view each other. The perception of each party is selective. Each party attacks the other in terms of its weaknesses. The language of this attack is revengeful, stigmatizing and often personal. Most of these attacks manifested a common vocabulary. Similar or nearly similar words or labels were used by both the parties for castigating each other. The figure spells out the generalized perception that one party holds about the other. The analysis of the sample of words from the newspaper shows that certain key words appeared and reappeared. The most frequently used word is killer followed by terrorist and plunderer, vote snatcher, corrupt, liar, autocrat, traitor, unskilled, conspirator, partisan, oppressor, and nepotist, and *razakar*.

In enemy discourse the negative aspects of the other are highlighted, stereotyped, stamped with essentialism and elaborated so that the integrity of the self, self-identity or group identity or legitimacy of the in-group can be enhanced. The enemy discourse dictates that members of the

in-group must be protected and leaders must be invested with great power to fight off the other. It has particularly reinforced patron- clientelism and mobilization politics.

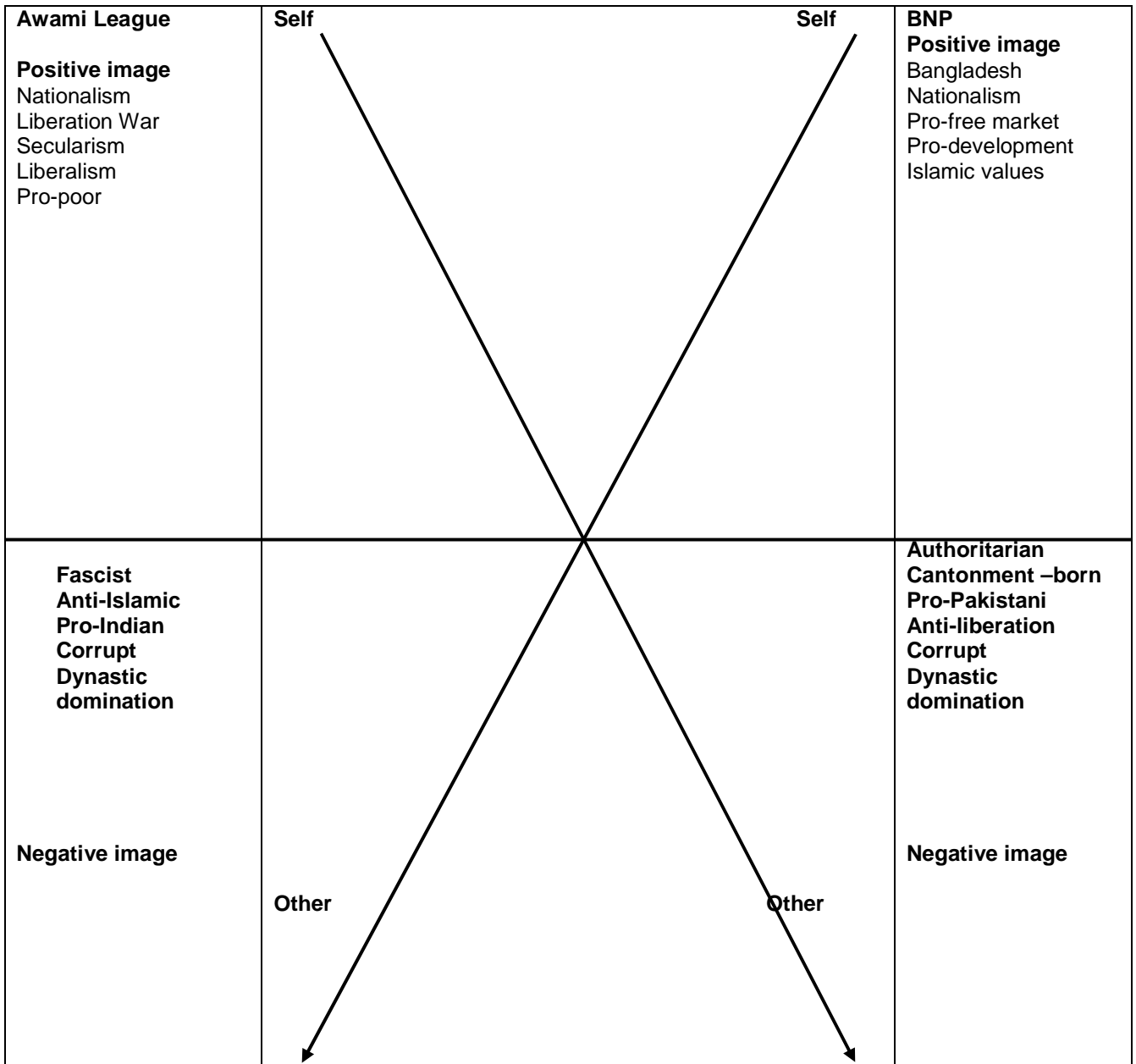


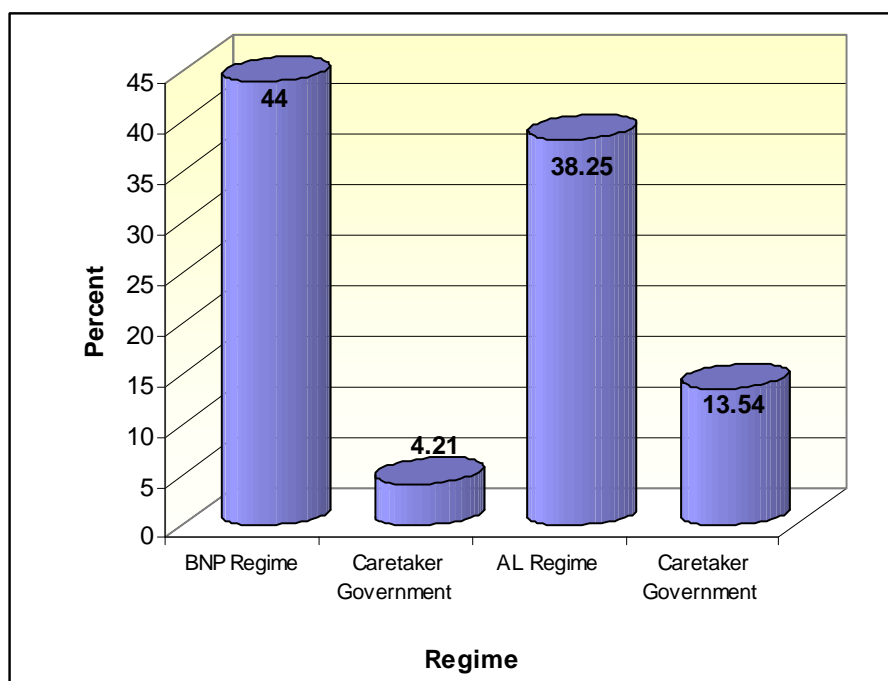
Figure 3: Enemy discourse: self and the other

The enemy discourse leads to actual conflict between two parties or their alliances. Table 1 and Figure 4 show that the total number of political party conflicts in Bangladesh was 2423 from 19<sup>th</sup> March 1991 to 9<sup>th</sup> October 2001. The number of political party conflicts during BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party) regime was 1066 (44.00%). During the caretaker Government of 1996 the

reported incidents figured 102 (4.21%). During Awami League regime the number of political party conflicts was 927 (38.25%). The number of political party conflicts during the caretaker Government of 2001 was 328 (13.54%). It is quite clear from the data that political party conflicts constitute a striking feature of political culture in Bangladesh. The political parties are extremely revengeful and vindictive.

**Table1: Political Party Conflicts in Bangladesh by Regime, 1991-2001**

| Government           | Number of Conflicts | Percent    |
|----------------------|---------------------|------------|
| BNP Regime           | 1066                | 44         |
| Caretaker Government | 102                 | 4.21       |
| AL Regime            | 927                 | 38.25      |
| Caretaker Government | 328                 | 13.54      |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>2423</b>         | <b>100</b> |



**Figure 4: Political Party Conflicts in Bangladesh by Regime, 1991-2001**

Figure 5 and Table 2 enlist reported causes of political party conflicts. It shows clearly that among different type of causes, attack on political activities stood out as the most significant cause of political party conflicts and accounted for nearly one-third of conflicts. More significantly, nearly 20 percent of political party conflicts took place due to internal feuds of factional clashes within a political party or its allies. The next important cause of political conflicts was *hartal*, strike and siege and these protest activities accounted for 18.50 percent of incidents. Election-related issues led to conflicts among parties and more than one-tenth incident took place due to it. Clashes also occurred when the opposition party or alliance launched non-cooperation movement against the ruling party and nearly 6 percent of the conflicts were sparked off by it. Tender and extortion also featured as a significant cause of political party conflicts.

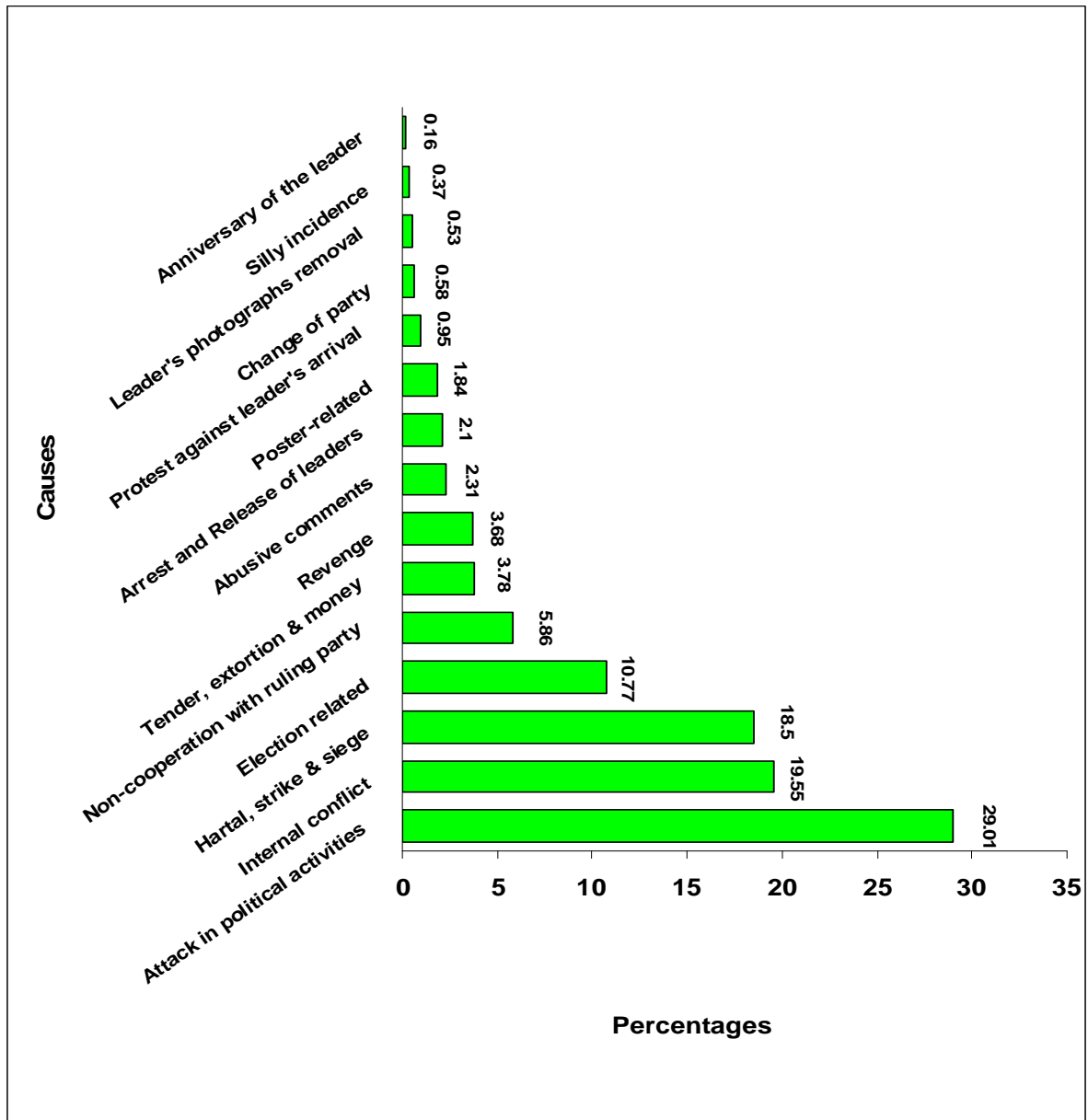


Figure 5: Political Party Conflicts in Bangladesh, 1991-2001: The Causes



**Table 2: Causes of Political Conflicts in Bangladesh, 1991-2001**

| Causes                            | Number      | Percentage |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|------------|
| Attack on political activities    | 552         | 29.01      |
| Internal conflict                 | 372         | 19.55      |
| Hartal, strike & siege            | 352         | 18.50      |
| Election-related                  | 205         | 10.77      |
| Non-cooperation with ruling party | 112         | 5.86       |
| Tender and extortion              | 72          | 3.78       |
| Revenge                           | 70          | 3.68       |
| Abusive comments                  | 44          | 2.31       |
| Arrest and Release of leaders     | 40          | 2.10       |
| Poster-related                    | 35          | 1.84       |
| Protest against leader's arrival  | 18          | 0.95       |
| Change of party                   | 11          | 0.58       |
| Leader's photographs removed      | 10          | 0.53       |
| Silly incidence                   | 7           | 0.37       |
| Anniversary of the leader         | 3           | 0.16       |
| <b>Total</b>                      | <b>1903</b> | <b>100</b> |

**Table 3: Political Party Conflicts in Bangladesh, 1991-2001 by Month**

| Year         | Jan.       | Feb.       | March      | April      | May        | June       | July       | August     | Sept.      | Oct.       | Nov.       | Dec.       | Total       |
|--------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| 1991         | 14         | 19         | 20         | 8          | 20         | 26         | 10         | 15         | 11         | 10         | 12         | 17         | <b>182</b>  |
| 1992         | 7          | 6          | 12         | 12         | 14         | 8          | 7          | 14         | 7          | 9          | 14         | 6          | <b>116</b>  |
| 1993         | 27         | 35         | 7          | 9          | 13         | 6          | 11         | 19         | 27         | 29         | 33         | 11         | <b>227</b>  |
| 1994         | 5          | 3          | 5          | 21         | 1          | 2          | 17         | 16         | 26         | 14         | 24         | 16         | <b>150</b>  |
| 1995         | 13         | 5          | 9          | 10         | 10         | 11         | 7          | 14         | 37         | 34         | 34         | 16         | <b>200</b>  |
| 1996         | 29         | 61         | 155        | 38         | 5          | 55         | 7          | 26         | 34         | 15         | 18         | 10         | <b>453</b>  |
| 1997         | 14         | 4          | 5          | 7          | 9          | 7          | 7          | 17         | 36         | 27         | 17         | 11         | <b>161</b>  |
| 1998         | 5          | 9          | 21         | 12         | 9          | 9          | 5          | 15         | 9          | 32         | 42         | 9          | <b>177</b>  |
| 1999         | 21         | 38         | 14         | 15         | 17         | 10         | 8          | 28         | 30         | 32         | 38         | 32         | <b>283</b>  |
| 2000         | 4          | 15         | 9          | 15         | 5          | 9          | 12         | 22         | 7          | 15         | 11         | 15         | <b>139</b>  |
| 2001         | 6          | 3          | 4          | 10         | 15         | 7          | 30         | 37         | 183        | 140        | 53         | 15         | <b>503</b>  |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>145</b> | <b>198</b> | <b>261</b> | <b>157</b> | <b>118</b> | <b>150</b> | <b>121</b> | <b>223</b> | <b>407</b> | <b>357</b> | <b>296</b> | <b>158</b> | <b>2591</b> |

In this table total number of political conflicts of 1991 & 2001 has been included.

Figures 6, and 7 and Table 3 refer to the distribution of political party conflicts in Bangladesh from 1991 to 2001 in terms of monthly and yearly fluctuations. Some months such as September, November, October and March have highest number of conflicts. Three years also stand out as very conflict-prone -1996, 2001 and 1999.

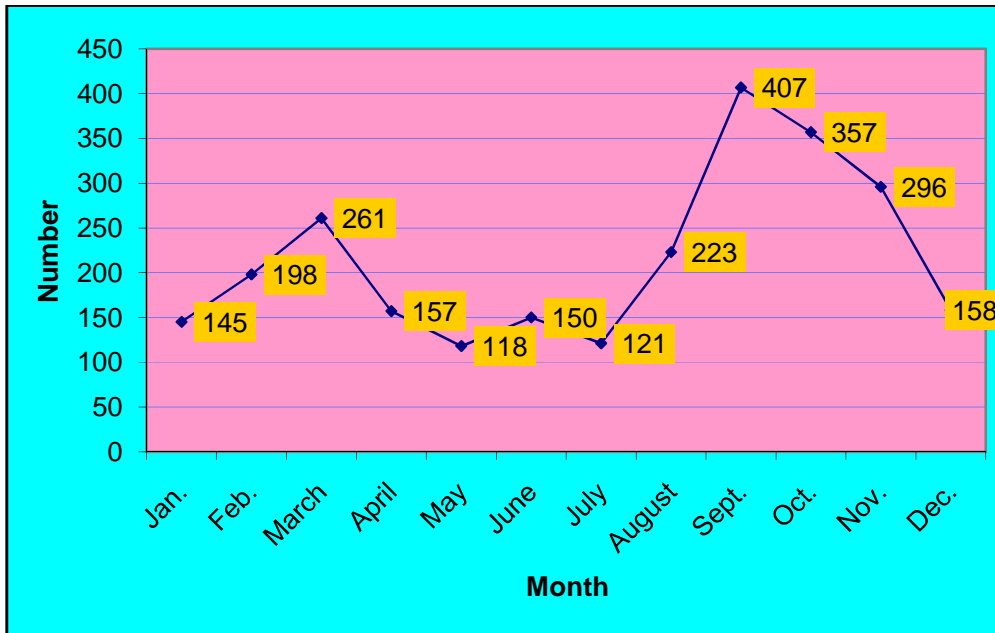


Figure 6: Political Party Conflicts in Bangladesh, 1991-2001: By Month

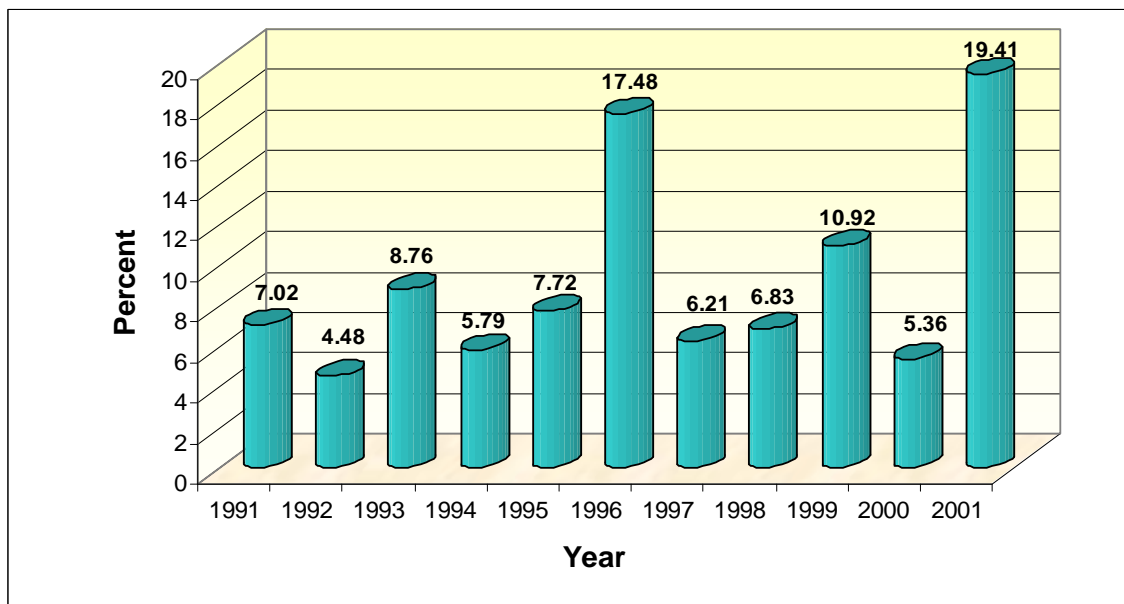


Figure 7: Political Party Conflicts in Bangladesh, 1991-2001: By Year

Map 1 below shows the geographical distribution of political conflicts in the country over a decade of democracy. It hardly requires any elaboration. Four major cities of the country, which are also divisional headquarters, constitute the key sites of violence with Dhaka and Chittagong heading the list disproportionately. Several other districts have also shown high level of political

violence. Mymensing, Feni, Sirajganj, Pabna, Kushtia, Comilla, Patuakhali, and Rangpur seem to be particularly prone to violence.



Map 1: The Landscape of Political Violence 1991 - 2001

**Conclusion**

Democracy in Bangladesh is at the crossroads. The country has achieved some success in economic development and its record of social development is quite laudable and it is poised for much faster economic development, if it can overcome its confrontational politics and consolidate democracy. The political parties have largely failed here. There are many alarming signs of

erosion of democracy in the country. The Parliament is largely ineffective. The civil service has become increasingly partisan, ineffective and corrupt. Successive governments have failed to achieve separation of judiciary from the executive. In spite of promises, state –controlled media have not been granted autonomy. Rather the government is known to be planning enactment for more stringent control of media, especially the cable TVs through which, critics of the proposed bill point out, government would be able stop broadcasting of any channel, if it desires. There is increasing distance between two major political parties regarding the caretaker government and the Election Commission. Recent newspaper reports indicate although 7 of the top leaders and 700 activists of the Jama'atul Mujahedeen Bangladesh (JMB), an Islamic extremist group which carried out over 500 bomb attacks simultaneously in all the districts of the country except one, have been arrested so far, an estimated number of 15,000 activists in the country are trying to get re-organized. Investigations so far have not been able to identify its sources of funding or its possible links with other militant organizations. The Awami League has threatened to boycott the election if its demands are not met. It has created an atmosphere of uncertainty and unease about the future of democracy in the country. There are some halting efforts at dialogue between BNP and Awami League. Thus Bangladesh does not seem to fulfill two of Sheddler's tests – effective election governance and renunciation of violence for settling political differences.

This paper has made an attempt at explaining why the consolidation of democracy has not taken place in the country. It has argued that the low social capital and hence low interpersonal trust of a transitional society together with a rent seeking middle class, expanding ties of patron clientelism that punctuate the political landscape, segmented citizenship values and historically patterned animosity of two major political parties of the country have sustained a neo-patrimonial regime and deep structure of constraints that blocks the road towards democratic consolidation in the country. It is in this context that the paper has focused on the nature of enemy discourse that has developed between two major political parties and the pattern of political micro-violence that smolders in the country. It has argued that micro violence tends to reinforce patron-clientelism and consequently rent seeking for maintaining private armies of mastans. The data on micro violence show that factional feuds within the party are no less significant than the violence between the parties. These factional feuds within each political party pave the way for dictatorship of the party leader and make it difficult to establish inner democracy within it. It indicates that micro violence is a major contributing factor in sustaining a regime of partial democracy or illiberal democracy that has come to power after 1991 in Bangladesh and that show many characteristics of neo-patrimonialism.

In contrast to this dark scenario, it is possible to imagine a positive view of the future. The political culture of Bangladesh has a strong tradition of syncretism that allows compromises and protest that tends to undermine all forms of authoritarianism. It is quite likely that in the end two parties or alliances will strike compromises for holding the next election. A new government will be formed on the basis of general election and the illiberal democracy will persist for some time before it disappears. There are several reasons for which it would not be possible to sustain neo-patrimonialism or its components in the country. With the disinvestment of public enterprises there will be fewer resources for capturing as rent. It will tend to undermine patron-clientelism. The middle class will find that there are other and greater opportunities than sheer rent. Politicians will also gradually realize that they cannot run an administration with the help of a horde of lackeys. With the growth of communication in all its forms there will be greater awareness among people and they will demand greater performance from the government. It will be increasingly difficult to buy votes or use intimidation against them. In the end the acid test for victory in the election will be performance in the knowledge sector, and economic and social development. It rests with key political actors of Bangladesh how long they will take to learn the lesson. If they learn the lesson soon enough and if they can construct a pro-development state instead what Evans (1995) has called predatory state, Bangladesh can quickly turn into an engine of growth and social development. Objective knowledge, insight and information enable human agents to move out of structural traps and carve out or choose new and better courses of action. Greater and more in-depth study of Bangladesh politics will assist in the choice for right direction. Tragedy will ensue if the choice is wrong.

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## Cultural Diversity, Religious Syncretism and People of India: An Anthropological Interpretation

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### Abstract

*Ethnic origins, religions, and languages are the major sources of cultural diversity. India is a country incredible for its diversity; biological and cultural. However, the process of synthesis and integration has been extensively at work in most parts of India. Indeed ethnic identities and even the culture traits of Indian people have never been frozen in time or in space, they have been in state of flux. Though each group or community has a distinctive identity and ethos of its own, it does not exist in a social vacuum. Rather, it forms part of an extended and dynamic network. The sharing of space, regional ethos and cultural traits cut across ethnic and sectarian differences and bind the people together. Thus, we witness a firm balancing between cultural diversity and syncretism pervading the foundation of Indian civilization. Indeed by extension, such cultural phenomena are observable, to lesser or greater degree, in the entire sub continental – civilizational arena.*

*The preexisting sub continental - civilizational continuum historically includes and encompasses ethnic diversity and admixture, linguistic heterogeneity as well as fusion, as well as synthesis in customs, behavioural patterns, beliefs and rituals. In the present era of growing cultural condensation, syncretism-synthesis is fast emerging as a prevailing event. This paper explores, by discussing ethnographic examples from different parts of India and beyond, the multi-dimensional and many layered contexts of reciprocally shared cultural realms and inter-religious and synthesized cultural formations, including common religious observances. Cases pertaining to adherents of major and minor religions, including Dalits and Adivasis are dealt with to determine the major trends in the sphere of syncretism. This paper is an attempt at building a broad perspective of diversity, convergence and dissemination of cultural practices and religious beliefs, highlighting the patterns and processes through which religions and cultures on both sides have been creatively blended.*

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Ethnic origins, religions, and languages are the major sources of cultural diversity. India is a country incredible for its diversity, biological and cultural. It is the natural resources that attracted to the subcontinent many streams of people at different times, from different directions; bringing together a great diversity of human genes and human cultures. Thus the bulk of the Indian population represents racial admixture in varying degrees. Unlike several other lands where the dominant human cultures have tended to absorb or eliminate others, in India the tendency has been to nurture diversity, which has been favoured by the diversity of the country's ecological regimes [Gadgil and Guha, 1992]. Powerful kingdoms and enumerable dynasties, contributed to the shaping of India's cultural regions. An important source of diversity among the people of India is the cultural identity of particular communities and regions. Despite maintaining distinct identities several *jatis*, sects, and communities have organic links with other segments of the population of the region, which develops a cultural persona over time.

Indian civilization has had a pluralistic character from the start. The pluralistic and composite ethos of Indian civilization, which began evolving during the Vedic period, was supplemented by the rise of Buddhism and Jainism, and was further reinforced during the early medieval period, which witnessed the early zenith in the Bhakti Movement. This composite tradition attained primacy during the late medieval period. Linguistic and philological evidences demonstrate the incorporation and adaptation of regional features into the mainstream of Sanskrit culture distinctly. Certain kinds of echo formations, which are characteristic of the Austric family of

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languages, found their way into the Indo-Aryan speeches. The presence of non-Aryan elements, especially Proto-Dravidian, in vocabulary, syntax and phonetics in Vedic Sanskrit is now fairly well established. The later Vedic texts indicate an even greater admixture of non-Aryan words.

The Vedic society was internally differentiated and it was pluralistic. It was a synthesis of Aryan and non-Aryan, including tribal elements. Since its very beginning Hinduism has been a "mosaic of distinct cults, deities, sects and ideas". Most records reveal that totemic deities such as fish, tortoise and boar were made into incarnations of Vishnu. Shiva was formed by a fusion of the Vedic Rudra with some non-Aryan deity. Shiva in its tribal and folk form is observable in several parts of peninsular India, including plains of northeast India, particularly in Assam -north-Bengal regions. Enough material exists which confirm the fact that Brahmanism immersed the deities of tribespeople and 'low-castes'. The popularity of the saga of Jagannath cult in Orissa and that of Vitthala in Maharashtra testify this. Similarly, serpent worship and phallus worship, which later found their way into classical Hinduism, were taken over from local communities. Unorthodox sects and cults, such as Shakta and the Tantric tradition, incorporated several esoteric features from indigenous, including tribal cultures (Momin 1996, Singh 2003, Das 2003). Thus, some interrelated critical foundations of unity may be delineated at the pan-Indian level. We may categorize them first as the Sanskritic Hinduism at the social structural levels and through a system of pilgrimage centres. Then we may consider a composite cultural tradition born out of the protracted interaction and exchange between Hindus and Muslims and adherents of other faiths through the length and breadth of the country. In this context one may notice social reforms and humanistic tendency as exemplified in the Sufi and Bhakti Movements. The secular-democratic philosophy, which is enshrined in the Constitution of the country and a Gandhian vision of Indianness, which was well founded during freedom movement, are manifestation and demonstration of our composite culture in modern India.

Since the late medieval period India witnessed a creative synthesis of Hindu and Islamic civilizations and thus grew a composite tradition, a pluralistic synthesis of the Indo-Islamic tradition including inter-faith convergence. There are two interrelated dimensions of the Indo-Islamic tradition. On the one hand, it manifested itself in syncretistic traditions of music, art, literature and architecture, and on the other, it found expression in folklore, dress patterns, food habits, names and surnames. If we turn to rural landscape we discover the distribution of material traits at the regional level indicating a certain complementarities in that it is marked by both local differentiation and interpenetration. Not only that a cluster or complex of material traits at the regional level unites different sections and communities (Bose, 1961), different communities have brought with them often innovations into regions of their adoption and internalized them effectively (Momin 1996, Singh 1985, 1994), though a proper mapping of same is unlikely to be accomplished shortly. This phenomenon is seldom subjected to a critical examination in a diachronic framework anywhere.

Language is an important attribute of a population, and has great relevance and significance in a multi-lingual and multi-ethnic country like India. The language literature generated by census over the last more than one hundred years has thrown much light on the ethnic and the linguistic characteristics of the population. The total number of mother tongues returned in 1961 and 1971 censuses was around 3,000, in 1981 around 7,000 and in 1991, it was more than 10,000. Tribal languages cannot be dismissed as dialects; many of them have a growing literature and at least two have their own scripts. Their multiplicity is baffling. Consider the case of Nagaland, formerly a district but now a State. It has as many as twenty different languages. The Kohima station of All India Radio used to broadcast in twenty-five languages, besides Nagamese, the lingua-franka.

The pan-Indian, civilizational dimension of cultural pluralism and syncretism encompasses ethnic diversity and admixture, linguistic heterogeneity as well as fusion, and variations as well as synthesis in customs, behavioural patterns, beliefs and rituals. The process of synthesis and integration has been extensively at work at the regional level (Das 2003). Though each group or community has a distinctive identity and ethos of its own, it does not exist in a social vacuum. Rather, it forms part of an extended and dynamic network. Often, interaction, exchange and

integration characterize inter-community relations. The sharing of space, regional ethos and cultural traits cut across religions and sectarian differences and bind the local people together. It is now revealed and established more vividly those cultural and religious practices in diverse eco-cultural zones of India have historically converged and people shared common traditions extensively. Thus, we witness a fine balancing between pluralism and syncretism pervading the base of Indian culture. While enough literature exists on this aspect of cultural manifestation in historical writings, not much is known about the religious syncretism and its stretch in contemporary India.

## II

Hardly a central theory in anthropology, "syncretism" has recently re-emerged as a valuable tool for understanding the complex dynamics of ethnicity, interconnectedness and post-modernism. In the present era of increasing cultural condensation, syncretism is a prevailing event. The sociologists and social anthropologists have thrown much light on the variety of religious forms through their studies of belief systems, rituals, symbols and meaning all over the world but they have not paid adequate attention to the phenomenon of syncretism, though we find a few exceptions (Raymond Firth, 1970:87). In anthropological literature the Cargo cult has been described as a form of syncretism. Cargo cults are essentially syncretistic, blending the "Christian doctrine" with "aboriginal beliefs" (Worsley, 1990). Anthropologists have also included the blend of African, Native American, and Roman Catholic saints and deities in Caribbean "voodoo" cults as instances of syncretism. Though the process of syncretism provides an independent field of study, it was nevertheless ignored by the anthropologists and when discussed it was imperfectly included within "the study of acculturation" (Kottak 1991:407).

Acculturation results when groups of individuals come into continuous firsthand contact, (with "changes in the original culture patterns" of either or both groups (Redfield, Linton and Herskovites 1936: 149). In much of anthropological studies these days the acculturation concept is stated to be replete with shortcomings. Indeed in different societies the pre-change culture traits, culture patterns and religious customs survive in greater or lesser degree and therefore "acculturation" persists in such societies only as an incomplete and imperfect process.

Shaw and Stewart (1994), have observed that within anthropology, where notions of the 'purity' of traditions have not had much credibility for some time, syncretism has been ascribed a neutral, and often positive, significance. Recently, there has been criticism of concepts such as 'cultural purity', wholeness or 'authenticity'. In post-modern-anthropology in which syncretic processes are considered basic not only to religion and ritual but to 'the predicament of culture' (Clifford 1988: 14-15) identities no longer presuppose continuous cultures or traditions. Everywhere groups improvise local performances from (re-) collected pasts. Organic culture (is indeed) reconceived as inventive process or creolized 'interculture' (Clifford 1988: 14-15).

Syncretism has always been part of the negotiation of identities and hegemonies in situations such as conquest, trade, migration, religious dissemination and intermarriage. The growth of a western-dominated world economic system, however, was accompanied by the growth of a Western-dominated world cultural system (Hannerz 1987, 1992), in which processes of capitalism and cultural hegemony transformed not only relations of power and production but also experiences of personhood, of the body, gender, time, space and religion. The appropriation of totalizing and globally spread processes such as capitalism, commodity consumption and 'rationalist' models of development is often inseparable from the appropriation of totalizing and globally spread religions... (Shaw and Stewart 1994). Van der Veer argues that there are debates over syncretism in societies in which identities are defined through religion. Since India combines these by being a secular state in which religious affiliation partially defines cultural identity, it makes sense that syncretism and multiculturalism are often equated in Hindu political discourse (1994).

Hendry (1999; 12) has observed that in complex societies, people have come to live with apparently conflicting worldviews increasingly. In Japan a sick person simultaneously consults a diviner as well as a doctor, and may also visit a shrine or temple to pray for recovery (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1984). Religious movements and plethora of religious ideas, in varied historical phases, motivated the people and brought them closer towards numerous religious cults, sects, reform movements and diverse belief systems (Das, 2003). The underlying assumption seems to be that people need solace and assurance about fulfilment of all their wishes ultimately; hence they solicit refuge and sanctification of their expectations through their trust on varied religious and sectarian dogmas. Syncretism as this author has elucidated elsewhere is a matter of degree, some societies have blended prominent aspects of two religious dogmas, in others only certain aspects of the original or adopted religion/sect has been retained and internalized. It is shown that syncretism pertains to a commingled religious sequence whose ill-defined frontier shapes its fundamental collective character (Das 2003a). Mingling of exterior religious beliefs with pre-existing religious belief of people may not be regarded as an aberration. It is also not a system within system but the survival and situationally determined growth of multifaceted religious beliefs systems existing as a rational order.

### III

Ethnic identities and culture traits of Indian people have never been frozen in time or in space. They have been in state of flux. This and similar processes may be determined by re-interpreting and re-evaluating the data of People of India (PoI) project. Based on data collected under the countrywide People of India (PoI) project (1985-1992) the Anthropological Survey of India had compiled initially a list of 6748 communities. After checking them in field, finally 4635 communities were accepted for study. These communities were studied by 500 scholars in 3581 villages and 1011 towns, spread in 421 districts and 91 cultural regions. Information was collected for 775 cultural traits. For comparison, data gathered under another project of the Survey, Material Traits Survey (1959-61), supervised by Nirmal Kumar Bose, was used, as far as possible. As regards ethnic/cultural/linguistic identity, PoI data revealed that people perceive their distribution at regional (state), inter-regional and national level. More than one hundred communities, including Nagas, Mizos and many others, perceive their distribution across international borders. We found that among all People of India, 16.2 per cent are S.C.s, 13.7 per cent S.T.s and about 70.1 per cent other communities, which included OBCs, and minorities. Nine religious categories (Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Jainism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism and Tribal Religions) are the faiths proclaimed by Indian people.

The people of India identify themselves through various markers. The major markers are male dress, female dress, male shawl, female shawl, turban, male headgear, female headgear, male ornaments, female ornaments, male body marking, female body marking, male tattooing, female tattooing, flag and emblem. Every second community identifies itself as such. A flag is the identification marker for 41 communities spread over 17 states. North-east India has a large number of the communities with female dress as the identification marker. Central India uses tattooing more frequently as a marker. Ornaments used by females as identification markers occur sporadically in most parts of India. Significantly, turban and female headgear in Jammu and Kashmir and male and female shawls in Manipur and Nagaland are important identification markers (Das and Imchen 1994).

India's population is largely concentrated along the major rivers or in the coastal belts. Parts of the hilly terrain of the north-eastern states, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and northern parts of Uttar Pradesh have a thin population density. In the coastal area a large number of communities have fishing as their primary occupation. The Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs are markedly absent in coastal areas. A few communities live in the high rainfall and low rainfall zone. Agriculture flourishes in this zone. The snowfall zone of the north-western Himalayas is mainly

inhabited by Buddhists, and by Hindu and Muslim communities which comprise pastoral nomads. It is in this entire belt that we witness strong processes of syncretism. The Arabian Sea group of islands has Muslim populations such as Manikfan, Thakurfan, Koya, Malmi, Melacheri, Raveri and Thakru, while the islands in the Bay of Bengal have Negrito and Mongoloid components in their tribal populations, such as Jarwa, Onge, Sentinelese, Shompen, Nicobarese and others—besides a very large population of immigrants (Singh 1996).

A community is internally divided into a number of units, viz. lineage, clan, gotra, phratry and moiety. The existence of social divisions is almost universal, particularly among the scheduled castes (99.9 per cent), scheduled tribes (97.0 per cent) and to a slightly lower extent among the 'other communities' (96.4 per cent). Clan organisation is almost ubiquitous. About two-thirds of the Indian communities have clans, including 115 Muslim communities. Generally equated with local notions of gotra, biradari etc. clan organisation exists in almost all states but is reported on a lesser scale in the states of Jammu and Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh and Kerala. A clan is either patrilineal or matrilineal. Traditionally, the Onge and Jarwa have been divided into a number of bands. Lineage is a characteristic feature of all categories of communities and all occupational groups in rural and urban areas. A nuclear family is the most widely prevalent type of family (69 per cent) in India. In spite of the responsibilities shouldered by women, their status among two-thirds of the total Indian communities is perceived as being low as compared to that of men. Most of the tribal and Buddhist communities do not accord women a low status (Singh 1992(2002), 1996).

#### IV

There is probably more diversity of religions in India than any where on the earth. Apart from having representations from almost all the major religions of the world, India was also the birthplace of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. It was also the home to one of the oldest religions of the world, Zoroastrianism. While India is the cradle of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism, Islam too has a long tradition of existence. So also Judaism, Christianity and Baha'ism have their followers in India. As early as by the 12th century, India began to have Islamic bases as wave after wave of Islamic groups came down to India. And the confluence of the two religions gradually produced a cultural syncretism, which is exemplified by the Urdu language – an amalgam of Persian and Hindi. Out of the fusion of the two cultures arose new religious denominations characterizing the Hindu-Islamic interface. The best example of this synthesis is the Ahmediyas – a sect that abides by the Koran and the Prophet, yet practicing idolatry, which is a decidedly Hindu custom. Ahmediyas in some areas are not recognised as "proper Muslims" (personal communication Dr. S. I. Ahmed) because of their syncretic traditions, but then we have several Muslim communities in West Bengal who are not derecognized as Muslims, even though they continue to worship of Hindu idols, besides following Islam (personal communication Dr. Saumitra Barua). Inter-faith convergence which is revealed here has its parallels in other parts of India ( for regional studies of Muslims of India see Roy and Rizvi 2003). Christianity came to India with St. Thomas who came to India in 50 A.D. and brought the teachings of Jesus along with him – even before the Messiah was adopted by Europe. Contacts between India and other cultures have led to the spread of Indian religions throughout the world, resulting in the extensive influence of Indian thought and practice on Southeast and East Asia in ancient times and, more recently, in the diffusion of Indian religions to Europe and North America.

In the anthropological study of religion in India, the major emphasis has been on descriptive account of religious customs and their association with ethnic groups, including the tribes, the themes of purity/pollution in relation to caste system, descriptive concepts relating to religious phenomena and the modernization processes. Milton Singer, who along with Robert Redfield and Surajit Sinha, studied the 'anthropology of Indian civilization', states that the Great Tradition of Indian civilization may be identified with what Srinivas calls "Sanskritic Hinduism" which has an all-India 'spread' and to which Monier-Williams called "Brahmanism" . Singer also used Srinivas's concepts of "All-India Hinduism", "Peninsular Hinduism", "Regional Hinduism" and "Local Hinduism" in his various studies. Srinivas's "Sanskritization" model through which lower castes

and tribal groups are brought into the Hindu fold with elements from the Sanskritic tradition of Hinduism (Srinivas 1952, 1968), is clubbed together by Singer with model of "Hindu method of tribal absorption" (N. K. Bose 1953). Singer uses the term "popular Hinduism", to include within it numerous beliefs and religious practices observed among tribal people, including the worship of numerous godlings, animal sacrifice, witchcraft and magic (Singer 1972: 45). 'Tribal religions' indeed remained essential element of Hinduism in the writings of American and Indian anthropologists belonging to Chicago school, and this tendency largely survives. Singer as per his own admission is indeed not sure about the basis and persistence of "Lower Level" popular Hinduism. Singer quotes Surajit Sinha (1959) who says that "the culture of tribal India represents a "folk" dimension of the "Little Tradition" of Hinduism, while the culture of Hindu peasantry represents "a mixture of folk elements with elements from the greater and Sanskritic tradition of Hinduism" (Emphasis added, Singer 1972:46). With new data that are with us now it is felt that this whole perspective indeed calls for a reappraisal.

Little over a century ago, Alfred Lyall (1899) wrote that 'Brahmanism' is all over India a necessary first stage for the outlying tribes towards Indian civilization or admission to the citizenship of the 'Great Hindu community'. He pertinently stressed that such movement very rarely implied any ethical change, or even a formal abandonment of one ritual for another, it is usually a rapid sliding into Hindu customs and an attempt at social assimilation. Alfred's ideas were seminal which were picked up and explored in regional situations by Indian ethnographers later. Alfred's polemic was, however, part of a debate whether or not Brahmanism was a proselytizing religion, which in turn would justify a similar role for Christianity in India. Of the four major modes which H.H. Risley (1892 p.242) proposed as part of Hinduization process were "a tribe or its section enrolled as a caste, in the ranks of Hinduism" and "a tribe is gradually converted to Hinduism without losing its tribal designation or abandoning completely its tribal deities". In fact perusal of Sir Alfred Lyall's (1899) description shows that Lyall had already spoken about them. Kulke has made important contribution in this regard, particularly by examining the Orissa situation Indologically. At first he narrates the stories of 'tribal' deities who become ishtadevatas or chosen tutelary deities of tribal chiefs, in Hindu-tribal frontier areas. It is this intended intermixture of various levels within one cult, which makes these deities so important in socio-religious context---provided this broader context is studied (Kulke 1993, 114-115). Indeed our report on Binjhal Zamindari system and religious syncretism in western Orissa, awaiting completion of writing, deals with this very issue critically.

In a recent review, K.S. Singh (2003) discards the views of the Orientalists and anthropologists, who described 'tribal religion' in terms of a set of 'primitive values' surviving in Hindu religion, and the sureness of tribal religion being swallowed up by major religions, acclaim equally made by colonial scholars and Indian anthropologists alike. In his view nothing has happened. It was indeed J. H. Hutton, an administrator-anthropologist, who was the first to have reconstructed tribal religion as an integrated whole. He is credited rightly with having liberated tribal religion from the waste paper basket of 'animism', identified the parameters of its autonomy and the range of its linkages with Hinduism. But like most census officials he too was prone to describe tribal religion as the "surplus material not yet built into the temple of Hinduism" (Hutton, J. H. Census of India, 1931, Vol. I, p. 399). Indeed W. G. Archer had at one stage blamed the Hindu enumerators for returning tribals as Hindus, and pointed out that the census questionnaire was even skewed to achieve this. One may speculate why this was not contained. Singh however adds a corollary: Was this because the census enumerators were only recording a process? Singh opines that many elements of tribal religion are as alive, even vibrant as ever. As studies have recently shown tribal religion has not lost its distinct identity in spite of its long years of interaction with Hinduism and Christianity. It has maintained its system of beliefs and practices including propitiation of spirits, magic and witchcraft, its priesthood and its calendar of fairs and festivals, which reinforce the tribals' sense of identity. Recent trends even suggest the revival of many of pristine elements of tribal religion by those who have gone out of its fold (Troisi, 1979, Singh 1985, also see Das, 1989, 1983, 2003). In fact branding variously pre-existing religions of tribal communities, as "essential ingredients of Hinduism" will be a serious negation of empirical findings. Several studies have revealed that tribespeople in many parts of India closely resemble

peasant societies; even though they exist outside Hindu social order. Continually pre-existing multi-religious, multi-linguistic and multi-ethnic situations in India demand more value-free conceptualizations and objective models. Old theories indeed seem to serve limited purpose in our understanding of multicultural Indian situation today. What indeed lie behind India's multitudinousness are a variously and continuously interactive process of discoverable interculturalism and a vibrant process of syncretism shaping our composite culture. This will be the main thrust of our argument below.

#### V

On account of various levels of culture-contact, adoption and incorporation, the tribes of India had often borrowed cultural traits and religious practices of various sects and major religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity. H.H. Risley had noted long ago in 1873 that the tribes all over India are gradually being transformed into castes. However, the tribespeople were never swallowed up by any cultural or religious adoption/incorporation. They indeed perpetually adhered to original religion. Native religious specialists also continued to operate in such societies. This author has observed this fact in vast parts of central and eastern India where tribes live in abundance (Das, 1988). The same fact was also noted in Ahom society in upper Assam regions; where the Hinduization process hardly operated in entirety (Das and Gupta, 1982). Indeed several reformist Bhagat movements and sects such as Mahima dharma, which have large tribal supporters, could never erode the native religious beliefs of the tribes. Eschmann and other scholars (Eschmann 1986, Das 2003) have spoken of several stages in which tribes could be placed in terms of their cultural or religious adoption/incorporation. Eschmann (1986) has made a valid point that Brahmanical incorporation of tribal deities and "Cults" occurred more frequently in post-Buddhist times. In fact no notable research is yet available about Buddhist-tribal culture contacts. Many western Orissa tribes exhibit remnants of Buddhism, assimilated within tribal religion. This author has done fieldwork recently in a tribal dominated village of Ganiapali (actually Gyan Palli), in Bargarh district of western Orissa, where excavated Buddha idols, since their recovery, are being worshiped by the tribal priests, mixing tribal ritualistic procedure with utterances of Buddhist shlokas, as recorded by us. In medieval times when Bhakti cults came to gain ground a process of Hinduization came to occupy centre-stage. Brahmans, often with considerable economic interest, developed Rajput myths for tribal chiefs, and offered them Singh title of Khatriyahood. Slowly tribal royal deities were also absorbed, transformed and rechristened as Hinduistic deities. Thus the Samalei tribal deity has been accepted into the Hindu pantheon and renamed as Samaleshwari in Sambalpur. The fact remains however that tribal priesthood associated with Samalei could never be eroded completely. What is more the tribals in whole of western Orissa continue to propitiate Samalei tribal deity in typical tribal manner involving animal sacrifice. At the same time today when the ritual model is hardly important in any part of India, the Binjhal Zamindars have done away with "Singh" title or no value is attached to such title. The Binjhal today strictly prefer to remain attached to their old tribal position. Tribal priesthood has not only been reinstated- old tribal festivals and rituals are being enacted and celebrated in greater zeal, and even caste Hindus endorse them and participate in them. It is in situations like this that we clearly see a syncretistic phenomenon in operation, particularly looking from the tribal angle. As we discussed above there are various stages in which the process of syncretism is observable empirically. In regional set up such process may look static trend, though it may prove to be bendable, when analysed thoroughly. In some of the best ethnographies we are told of an "intermediary stage" in which tribal societies are placed. This is actually presupposing and accepting uni-laterally a "straight attainment of a pathway" of culture change (say Hinduization), which was sadly often proclaimed as 'acculturation' (Das 2003). This is an arbitrary and prejudiced attitude. More critical studies indeed have shown 'Hinduization' to operate only ineffectually, incompletely and often haphazardly, in most cases. For Eschmann "Hinduization" acts (restrictively) only on the level of Hindu village cults that is in such village communities, where tribal groups constantly live together with caste Hindus.

The next decisive stage of Hinduization is reached, when an aboriginal cult (either from the intermediate stage of a village cult, or directly from the tribal level) becomes incorporated into a Hindu temple. Such a "temple" is distinguished by three characteristics, daily performance of puja, recognition by all castes and more than local importance". Eschmann further says, "The temple level may be a definite stage of Hinduism, but not necessarily the end of the process of Hinduization .... one may identify the foci with the main stages of Hinduization – tribal cult, tribal cult with elements of Hinduization, Hindu village cults, temples of sub regional importance, and great temples of regional importance". Eschmann has rightly observed that tribal goddesses are often identified with Durga, who continues to accept animal sacrifice and assures fertility, even though they retain their original tribal names. Only at a second stage we see a Brahman called to impart the prana pratistha – mantra. Mangala, Pitabali, Hindula, Baunthi and Stambhesvari are such "incorporated" tribal goddess of Orissa. Stambhesvari has existed as a tribal goddess since about 500 AD. She was tutelary deity of the Sulki and Bhanja dynasties and widely worshipped in West Orissa (Kulke 1975). Stambhesvari or Khambhesvari (in Oriya) "lady of the post", is represented and worshipped through stones only. In the shrine at Bamur, Khambesvari is represented by a simple stone worshipped daily by a Dehuri priest of Suddha, a tribe. In the neighbouring culture area of Chhattisgarh this author, after prolonged observations, found that: "--the tribal priest Baiga not only ministers to the "Twenty One Village Deities", he also handles the cases of the illness. Baiga and such other shamans, Guniya and Ojha, who form the principal category of priest-sorcerer/shaman in Chhattisgarh, simultaneously guide caste Hindus and tribespeople. If, at interactional level, the tribal and Sanskritic elements were to be considered, than it may be surmised that 'Sanskritization' had scarcely begun even in the past in this region, where tribalization process remained unbroken (Das 1988, 2001). K.S.Singh has tried to see the vital tribal presence even in established hubs of major religions. He says while the spread and influence of Vaishnav ideas upon the tribal societies is better known, the roles of tribes in major shrines of India are less known. Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh, Guruvayur in Kerala, Kamakhya in Assam and Jagannath in Orissa, are important centres of Hinduism and which have emerged as symbols of cultural identity at the regional (and national) level, in which local communities including tribes are involved.

## VI

According to Rajani Kothari more than any political system, it was the civilizational framework, which provided the unity amongst the people of the land in the past. Sharing of space and culture traits indeed has been an ancient phenomenon in India, mainly on account of internal movements, migrations, pilgrimages and regular cultural – exchanges. People visited sacred centres all over the country and thus a process of continuous interaction operated continually at the grassroots level in all historical phases. Regular exchange and sharing of cultural and religious traits, thoughts and ethos contributed to cultural synthesis. Based on data collected under People of India project, which is mentioned above, Singh has described Indian society as a "honeycomb" in which communities are engaged in vibrant interaction, sharing space, ethos, and cultural traits (Singh 1992 (2002): 111).

The Pol survey has identified 91 cultural regions all over India. Culture regions are not shown to be static units but are in a state of continuous flux. What is significant about this study is pinpointed identification of communities in terms of their multiple adoptions- adaptations of linguistic, religious and other cultural traits in a given 'culture' region'. Andhra Pradesh has the largest number of Hindu communities (340) followed by Tamil Nadu (299), undivided M.P. (285) and Orissa (259). Gujarat has largest number of Muslim communities (87) followed by undivided U.P. (70) and J & K (59). T.N. has 65 Christian communities followed by Andhra (29) and Manipur (23). Even though Pol has revealed existence of greater adherents of 'tribal religions' in Eastern India, Viz. Orissa(58), Bihar/Jharkhand(46) and W.B.(41), in other parts of India too there are followers of 'tribal religions' often included under major locally prevailing religions. In North-East (Das 2003), for example, the 'tribal' Hindu/Christian and Buddhist groups continue to hold old

tribal religious beliefs. Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh have the largest number of Jain communities; Punjab, Chandigarh and Delhi have the largest concentration of Sikh communities; whereas Buddhist groups are mostly located in north-east India, viz. Arunachal (18) and Assam (11). A number of communities have segments, which follow different religions. For example, there are Khasi segments following a tribal religion, Christianity and Islam. There are the Jat Sikhs and Jat Muslims too (Singh 1996). Among religious groups the followers of Sikhism (36.2 per cent) widely perceive their distribution at an inter-regional level, followed by those of Hinduism (22.0 per cent), Islam (21.1 per cent), Jainism (15.0 per cent) and Christianity (13.9 per cent), and so on. Among occupational groups the most widespread at an inter-regional level are those pursuing business and trade (23.7 per cent) (Singh 1996). Communities following the Buddhist faith have the highest number of communities (17.2 per cent), which perceive them transnationally. They are followed by Muslim (7 per cent), Christian (5.6 per cent) 'other religions' groups (4.0 per cent) and so on. Most of the communities are from the northeastern part of India. Mizoram has the highest percentage of communities (47.1 per cent) which identify themselves transnationally followed by Sikkim (44 per cent), Tripura (34.6 per cent) and Meghalaya (11.1 per cent). Some of the communities which identify themselves across the international boundaries are: Arab, Shia Imami Ismaili, Sindhi of Andhra Pradesh; Manipuri, Bengali of Assam; Pathan, Sheikh, Syed of Bihar; Gurkha/Gorkha of Haryana and Himachal Pradesh; Chinese, Christian of Himachal Pradesh; Afghan, Syed of Jammu and Kashmir; Faqir of Karnataka; Sikh, Bohra of Maharashtra; Syrian Christian, Rajput of Rajasthan; Bhotia, Lepcha, Sarki (Nepali) of Sikkim; Latin Catholics, Khoja of Tamil Nadu; Bhotia, Irani of Uttar Pradesh; Armenian, Syed, Chinese of West Bengal; Indo-French, Indo-Vietnamese of Pondicherry and so on. Gujarat; Ahir, Jogi/Jugi of Haryana; Jain, Acharaj of Himachal Pradesh. Jati Purana, which deals with the origin and distribution of communities, exists in respect of one-sixth of the communities; most of whom profess Jainism or Hinduism.

Most of the communities of India are migrants who recall their immigration in folklore or history. Our data on migration is based on peoples' memory of their movement, whether it was short distance or long distance (Singh 1996). The minorities generally profess Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Jainism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism and 'other religions'. In almost every state one religious group or the other has a minority status. The Hindus are a minority in Nagaland and Jammu and Kashmir, and the Sikhs are a minority in most of the states/union territories, except Punjab and Chandigarh. The Anglo-Indians, i.e. people of Indian through British parentage, are distributed mostly at urban centres. They are all Christians. Muslims are mostly engaged in organized and unorganized services, as also in business (Singh 1996).

Each major religion is sub-divided along the lines of religious doctrines, sects, and cults. This is true both of indigenous religion – Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Jainism – and of introduced religions, especially Islam and Christianity. The Hindus are broadly divided into Shaivite (worshippers of Shiva), Vaishnav (worshippers of Vishnu and his incarnations), Shakta (worshippers of the Mother goddess in various manifestations), and Smarta (those who worship all three-Shiva, Vishnu, and the Mother Goddess). Even among them there are sub-divisions based on doctrinal differences and details of ritual. Sects and cults add to the complexity of Hinduism. The Indian Muslims are divided broadly into the Sunni and Shia communities. The majority of Indian Sunnis follow the Hanifi School. The Shias have their own Imami law. In addition, there are fourteen religious orders, of which the Chisti order, the Suhrawardi order, the Shattari order, the Qadiri order, and the Naqsbandi order are important. Indian Christians are divided into Roman Catholics and Protestants and into many denominational churches. Though Sikhism is a synthesizing religion that emphasizes egalitarianism, it has not been able to undo some of the less wholesome aspects of the "caste" system. For example, the lower Jatis converted to Sikhism are known as Mazhbis; they live in separate hamlets. Khushwant Singh, the eminent writer on Sikh history and himself a Sikh, has observed that equality within the community has never meant marriage across traditional caste lines. The Jat, the Kshatriya, the Brahman, and the artisan castes continue to have separate identities and are still endogamous. Buddhism was spread widely in India once, but with the revival of Vedic Hinduism, it lost its hold



in the country of its birth. Buddhism in India had a two-tier structure and not the conventional four-fold Varna division; in the upper tier were placed the Brahman, the Kshatriya, and certain categories of Grihapatis, and in the lower tier were tribal and other marginal groups (S.C.Dube 1990). Jainism is mainly found in northern and southern States. They have two main divisions: Digambar – unclothed, and Shwetambar – white robed. The Jain community is divided into jatis. An earlier study (1953) estimated nearly 60 endogamous groups among the Jains. The Parsis first came to India in the eighth century A.D. from Persia. The Jewish faith, like Christianity and Zoroastrianism, has been established in India for over a millennium. The small Jewish population had two main settlements – one in Cochin (in Kerala) and another in Maharashtra. In Maharashtra the number of Jews is larger, some 14,000 people. Now known as Bene Israel, for centuries in the Konkan villages they were called Shanwar Telis – oil-pressers who did not work on Saturdays – for oil-pressing was their main occupation. They were treated like Hindu Telis, but they observed some Jewish dietary regulations and festivals. The tribes constitute an important section of India people and many of them have a close affinity with Hindus, sizeable groups have converted to Christianity, and a few have adopted Islam. Most of them still retain their tribal identity.

The Indians who converted to Islam in most of the cases remained in the same social status as they had before their conversion to Islam. Hindus from the higher Varnas remained at the higher levels of Indian society. Hindus from the lower levels of the hierarchy thought that by converting to Islam they would come out from the Hindu hierarchy system, but in most of the cases they remained in the same hierarchy level after they converted. Among the Muslims of India there has developed a two-tier hierarchy, called Sharif Jat, and lower class, called Ajlaf Jat, includes Muslim converts from lower castes. Other religions which were established in India - Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism - also have some marks of caste system, even though they oppose caste system. Sikhism rejects caste system. But different Jats who adopted Sikhism act according to traditional Jat lines. The different Jats normally marry within caste lines. The Jains also have separate communities who marry within the community lines. The Buddhist in India have a two-tier hierarchy and just like in the cases of Christians and Muslims it is also related to the status of the community to whom the person belongs. On the other hand the Mahar communities of west India, who were 'untouchables' (but converted to Buddhism), prefer, to recognize themselves as Mahars, as an important segment of the local caste ridden society, because of different social-political reasons.

In the People of India study (1985-1992) a large number of communities has identified themselves in terms of dual religious configuration, such as Hindu-Sikh, Hindu-Muslim, and Hindu-Buddhist. Thus amongst the people of India all those having Hindu-Sikh segments are: Bania, Bazigar, Khatik of Haryana; Chuhra, Chamar, Megh of Himachal Pradesh; Banjara of Maharashtra; Punjabi of Orissa; Gujjar, Gagra, Ahluwalia, Bairagi, Kumhar, Bauria/Bawaria of Punjab; Sonar, Banjara, Chamar-Jatav, Chippa of Delhi; Saini Bazigar, Chamar of Chandigarh; Chimba of Jammu and Kashmir. Some of the communities with Hindu-Muslim segments are: Bohra, Manka of Gujarat, Ranghar of Himachal Pradesh; Mirasi, Sonar, Rajput of Punjab; Bhil-Tadvi of mahashtra; Cheeta and Singhwala of Rajasthan; Sabar of West Bengal, Orissa; Bihari of Assam, Meghalaya, West Bengal, Nagaland, Sikkim; Koch of Tripura; Cheintz of Jammu and Kashmir; Siddhi of Karnataka; Arora, Taga of Dadra and Nagar haveli. Some of the communities with Hindu-Buddhist segments are: Gurkha/Gorkha/Nepali of Assam, Haryana, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh; Chamar of Haryana; Swangla, Kinnaura, Khas of Himachal Pradesh; Mahar of Maharashtra; Koli of Rajasthan; Gurung, Tamang of Sikkim; Bhotia, Limbu, Tamang of Uttar Pradesh; Mahar, Tamang of West Bengal, Chakma of Mizoram; Indo-French of Pondicherry (Singh: 1992(2002), 1996). There are communities such as the Khasi Muslim of Meghalaya and the Nicobarese of Andaman and Nicobar islands which have segments professing three or sometimes four religions, such as Islam, Christianity and tribal religion. The communities with segments professing Buddhism and tribal religions are: Singpho, Turung of Assam; Khampa of Himachal Pradesh; Lepcha of West Bengal; Na, Sherdukpen, Singpho of Arunachal Pradesh; Mag/Magh of Mizoram. The communities with segments professing

Christianity and tribal religion are: Karbi/Mikir, Mizo-Hmar, Munda, Oraon, Riang of Assam; Kharia, Munda, Santal of Bihar; Nahal of Madhya Pradesh; Anal, Chote, Gangte (Singh: 1992(2002), 1996).

India has emerged as the centre of many socio-religious movements which have arisen from the need felt by various communities to reform their customs. According to our data, one-eighth of the communities have been affected by such socio-religious movements which also include conversion from one religion to another. Many pre-change religious practices survive among communities after they have embraced other religions/faiths; among the scheduled castes it is 3.3 per cent and among the scheduled tribes it is 5.5 per cent. The pre-conversion practices survive among the Christian communities (16.2 per cent), Buddhists (10.8 per cent), Sikhs (8.5 per cent), Jains (4 per cent), Muslims (2.9 per cent), Hindus (2.7 per cent) and 'other religious' groups (5.4 per cent) (Singh: 1992(2002), 1996). About two-thirds of the communities engage sacred specialists from other communities, such as Brahmans of all grades, and the Deori, Baiga and Paharia who serve tribal and village communities by performing rituals. The Sevak Brahmans of Rajasthan are also priests in Jain temples where they perform rituals. There are about one thousand communities which avail of priests from dual systems. The role of sacred specialists includes officiating over life cycle rituals, propitiating deities, curing ailments, and so on. A high proportion of Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Jain communities engage sacred specialists from other communities, whereas sacred specialists from the same community are common among the Christian, Buddhist and some 'other religious' groups. The pastoral and non-pastoral nomads mostly engage sacred specialists from other communities. Among the rural, rural/urban and urban communities too sacred specialists from other communities are extensively engaged (Singh: 1992(2002), 1996).

The 'analysis of cultural values and practices' of communities (caste/tribe) in terms of culture traits the Pol survey indicates 'significant commonalties' (Singh, K.S.1992, Yogendra Singh 2000:30). Communities in India share common culture traits irrespective of their distinctive religious traditions, even though the religious groups are themselves segmented (Muslims have 584 communities, Christians have 339 communities, Sikhs –130, Jains-100, Buddhists-93, Jews-7, Parsis-3 and tribals-411). According to Pol survey there is very high correlation of traits between SCs and STs, between STs and Hindus, between Hindus and Sikhs between Hindus and Buddhists and between Hindus and Muslims. There is a phenomenal growth in bilingualism in India during last two decades (1961 census – 9.7 percent, 1971 – 13.4 and according to Pol survey done in 1985 = 64.2 percent bilingualism). It signifies expansive syncretistic growth in cultural interaction. Yogendra Singh has studied the Pol data. He says "the fact that the local cultures of castes, ethnicity and communities dispersed into over four thousand entities (4635 communities are identified and studied) which lend itself to rationalization of culture zones into 91 configurations affirms the presence of linkage and interaction between the local and trans-local cultural manifestations (Y. Singh 2000: 46-47). In a recent publication, "Culture, Religion and Philosophy: Critical Studies in Syncretism and Inter-Faith Harmony", this author has compiled and presented over twenty case – studies examining thereby the varied manifestations of syncretism in religious experiences of diverse people of India (Das, N.K. 2003 - 'Introduction: An outline of Syncretism'). The above-mentioned studies explain that despite contradictions and diversities, there exists vibrant sharing of cultural and religious traits. Many significant culture changes have taken place in India since independence. While on the one hand ethnic and regional self-consciousness or identity of castes, tribes, and minorities and other groups is increasing, there is prevalence of many integrative-cultural processes. In India now there is 'increased inter-regional migration' which makes it possible for regional cultural traits, cooking patterns, cultural performances, ritual forms, styles of dress and ornamentation to flow to other parts and mix together. A basic sense of harmony prevails which dissolves our animosity and ultimately contributes towards shaping our cultural uniformity.

## VII

One phenomenon that crosscuts and pervades all differences of language, religion, region and gender is caste --- the most influential feature of Indian society. Caste in the works of European scholars became almost the exclusive focus of the sociological writings on India. Caste came to be exclusively equated with the Hindu religion, even though a proper definition of Hindu religion was always lacking. However the caste system remains an important feature of the Hindu social system and it even operates in Muslim, and Christian societies to a considerable extent, generally in non-ritual sphere, even though marriage institution may be depending on such system crucially. The caste identity of the tribe is a debatable issue as far as the 'ritual dimension' or 'marriage alliances' are concerned and more importantly in modern age of contempt and disapproval shown towards caste factor even in most rural India, under impact of politicisation / democratisation and 'secularisation' of society at large, any generalisation based on old conceptual models is replete with risks. Here we may repeat ourselves about the status of 'tribal religion' whose recasting and autonomous existence is ascribed to Hutton's efforts during early 1930s. The 19th century perception of Hinduism may again be restated in the words of Sir Alfred Lyall who said, "Now just as the word Hindu is no national or even geographical denomination but signifies vaguely a fortuitous conglomeration of sects, ---, hereditary professions, --- castes, so the religion of this population of Hindus is at first sight a heterogeneous confusion"(quoted in Singh 2003). Thus Hinduism does not have any element of a structured religion; in fact it is loosely structured and that is why it has been resilient and tenacious enough to survive and expand (Das 2003, Singh 2003). It is probably the very quality of Hinduism which leads to syncretic traditions to grow, in diverse regional set up.

The people of India belong to thousands of caste (jatis and upa-jatis), and among the Hindus they are hierarchically ordered named groups into which members are born. Caste members are expected to marry within the group. Particularly noteworthy are differences between caste structures in the north and the south, especially in the realm of kinship systems. Offensiveness and rudeness, which characterised this system, led to dissent and reform within the society. Quests for equality, salvation and social recognition remained integral parts of such reformist movements. Most of these movements that aimed at reorganizing the society were couched in religious terms and were great source of syncretistic tendencies, and humanism (Das 2003, 'Introduction'). During medieval period (Thirteenth to Seventeenth century) Hinduism underwent a drastic transformation. Focus was now on one god. The religious sect founded by Ramanuja (1017 – 1137 AD) was intended to propagate Vishistadvaita school of philosophy. The followers of Ramanuja styled themselves as Shri Vaishnavas. Ramanuja propagated the doctrine of qualified Monism in which self-surrender and grace (prapatti) formed the central theme (Gnanambal, 1970). While Sankara and Ramanuja had pan-India impact, the movement of Madhava (14<sup>th</sup> century AD) was confined to south India. Ramanuja understood that to engage in a three cornered fight against Buddhism, Jainism and the Pure Monism of Sankara; he had to simplify and liberalize the recruitment procedure. Ramananda (1400-70), a follower of Ramanuja, having settled down in Varanasi, established his own sect, Ramanandi. Ramananda strongly opposed the injustices of the caste system and opened his sect for all, and his twelve personal disciples are said to have included women, an outcaste Dalit, and even a Muslim. The Ramanandi sect has great historical importance as it created the conditions for growth of innumerable sects from within the Ramanandi sect. The Ramanandis paved the way for the Sikhism, which has grown as a distinct religious order, and Kabirpanth. Kabir (1440-1518) started out as a disciple of Ramananda, but later developed his own characteristic eclecticism. Vaishnavism, Hatha Yoga, Vedantic Monism, and Sufism influenced Kabir's theology (Jordan 1975). Among the Saivites, the sect of the Lingayats was led by Basava (14<sup>th</sup> century AD). The adherents wear a Linga (Phallus) suspended on a string round their neck. Lingayats cannot be called Hindus since they do not accept the differentiation of castes, the pollution of birth, death, menstruation, contact or look. The Lingayat women have equal ritual status with men (Gnanambal, 1970).

Both the Bhakti and Sufi saints had helped to recast and reorient the prevalent value system of the time. These saints propagated the fundamental equality of mankind. These saints patronized the nirguna theological stance, based on a notion that the divine is formless, without qualities. A directness and unorthodoxy that was to give form to the priorities of new-sprung religious thought and practice typified the wave of Bhakti. Much as Bhakti did, the Sufism deemphasized the role of the clergy and elevated the love between a devotee and his god to ecstasy. Studies have revealed that the Pir and Darvez in different periods played a positive role in bringing about synthesis between the Hindu and Muslim cultures. The Fakir Darvez, Qualandar, and Baul of west Bengal are all known wandering mendicants of India. Followers of Bhakti movement in twelfth and thirteenth century included the saints such as Namdev, and Kabir. Like Kabir, Nanak identified himself with the most deprived sections in the society. Like Kabir, Nanak also denounced attachment to rituals (like prayer, fasting, bathing, image worship) and forgetting true faith in god. According to main philosophy of the Sikh religion there is only one god. Guru Nanak taught that the Hindu, Muslim and people of all religious denominations are children of the same god. Influenced by the school of "devotion" (bhakti) of Ramananda, Kabir, Namdev and having assimilated the philosophy of Sufism and Islam, Guru Nanak gave a true syncretistic form to Sikh religion. Indeed the leaders of several reform movements belonged to the lower economic classes and Dalit castes. Reformist leaders emerged among the Muslims and Tribals also. These rebellious saints were products of processes of dissent and reform. They reformed the rituals, deemphasized the supremacy of the Brahman priests and preached egalitarianism (Das 2003).

## VIII

India's epic and Puranic traditions have diffused throughout India and beyond and have been readapted, recreated and re-interpreted by tribal groups in local milieu in terms of local ethos. Even when the tribes have come in little contact with Hindus they have internalized aspects of Ramayana/Ram-Katha in their folk tales. Some tribes also identify themselves with anti-heroes, such as Ravana. Elwin was first scholar who described the aboriginal Purana. Jesuit scholar Fr. Camil Bulcke collected not only tribal (Indo-Aryan and Dravidian) versions of Ram-Katha, but also Buddhist and Jain versions of Rama Katha.

The Munda tribe offers an indigenous etymological explanation of Sita -'found under (ta) the plough (si) '. Ravana is described as a noble hero who belonged to a clan of the Munda tribe. The Pradhan, an occupational group belonging to the Gonds, have an account of Lakshmana which is different from the ideal younger brother portrayed in the classic Ramayana. The Mech tribals in Assam trace the Hindu-Muslim conflict to their version of Rama-Katha, according to which Lakshmana ate beef, became a Muslim and begot two sons, Hasan and Hussian, who were killed by Lava and Kusha (Roy Burman 1958). Singh (1993) says the spread of Rama Katha and its readaptation illustrates yet another facet of India's cultural formation – the interaction of homogenizing influences with vibrant local cultural systems, which makes our pluralism a living and ongoing process. In Assam, the Bodo Kacharis have reconstructed the Ramayana. Beyond Assam Rama Katha was carried outside India by the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century and was readily accepted by Mons, Khmers, Khotanese and Mongolians giving rise to newer versions of the epic incorporating local traditions. The Ramayana travelled to South East Asia and other remote areas through a band of intrepid missionaries as also through sailors, traders and settlers who travelled overland through Assam to South East Asia. The local versions that have developed in Sri Lanka, Siam, Laos, Burma, Tibet, (even though they maintained the basic structure of the story), introduce slight variations by adopting and mixing strains from their local cultural milieu (Swami Bangovinda Parampanthi, 1993). The Khamti Ramayana is of Buddhist religious affiliation. The Rama of Khamti Ramayana is a Bodhisattva who manifests himself in this form to punish and subdue the sinful and tyrannical Ravana (B.Datta 1993). The Tai people who migrated later, after arrival of Ahoms in Assam, such as Tai-Khamptis, Khamyanas, Aitons, Tai-Phakes and the Turungs also brought the Tai Ramayana (Shyam 1993). In these examples, which have linkages

in far South East Asia, we witness a process of blending of elements of Hinduism and Buddhism, particularly observable in adoptions and reinterpretation of Rama-Katha.

## IX

The Dalits, the scheduled castes/ communities of India, have often contested the religious oppression and rigid religious authoritarianism in different parts of India. In order to seek spiritual democracy in different historical phases, they often adopted several regional sects and religious orders including the Sikhism and Buddhism. There are Dalit castes such as Mahar and Balahi (Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh) who have adopted Buddhism and Jainism respectively. The Balai (Rajasthan) have adopted Dadu Panthi sect. The sect shuns idolatry and believes in the unity of god. The Balmikis of Delhi are divided into several endogamous religious groups, such as Hindu Balmiki, Sikh Majhabi, and Muslim Mussali (Singh, 1995: 101-109). The Bazigars (Punjab) have adopted Sikhism. Earlier they venerated the Pirkhana. They visit gurudwara and at the same time they also celebrate Holi, Diwali, Dashahra and Lohri. The Banjaras (Himachal Pradesh) are divided into the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. The Hindus and Sikhs inter-marry; hence there has been a great deal of admixture between their religious life and practices (Singh, 1995:130). The Bedia (Orissa), called Bedia Kudmi, profess both the traditional religion and Hinduism. They were participants of Medi movement of Orissa. The Bhangis of Gujarat consider Balmiki Muni as their god. They are also followers of Kabir, Ramananda and Nanak. The Chamar profess different religions and sects. In Himachal Pradesh, they are Ravidasis and also Nirankari Sikhs (Singh : 1995:311). In Haryana the Julaha are the followers of Kabir though some Julaha have adopted Buddhism, and some follow Sikhism and even Christianity. In Punjab they are Ramdaasi Sikhs. The Jatav are one of the foremost of the Dalit castes whose struggle for emancipation continues through varied movements. They refuse to be called Chamar. Most of them have adopted Buddhism. A common blend of beliefs and practices of Hinduism, Buddhism and "Ambedakarism" shapes their cultural life (Singh 1995:328). It has brought about a unique consciousness in every Jatav notwithstanding an individual's formal affiliation to a particular faith. The Dhanak of Delhi profess Hinduism and Satnam dharma. They are also followers of Arya Samaj, Radha Soami and Kabir panth sects. The Satnamis of Chhattisgarh state also refuse to be called Chamar and they regard Satnam-panth as a distinct religion even though they continue to celebrate Diwali, Dashara and Holi festival without involvement of Brahman priests (Das 2000).

The Dhanak of Delhi profess Hinduism and Satnam dharma. They are also followers of Arya Samaj, Radha Soami sect, and Kabir panth etc. The Doom of Punjab are either Sikhs or Hindus. There are also Arya Samajis among them (Singh, 1995:430-490). The Julaha of Delhi and Chandigarh are divided into two groups, Kabirpanthi and Julaha. The Kabirpanthi Julahas derive their name from Kabir. The Hindu Julahas also follow Kabir teachings. There are both Hindu and Sikh Julahas among them. In Jammu and Kashmir, the Kabirpanthi are also known as Bhagats. The Khatik of Himachal Pradesh are divided into Hindu and Muslim, but in Haryana, they are also Sikhs. The Koli of Rajasthan follow Hinduism, Buddhism and Kabirpanth. The Christian Madigas of Tamil Nadu observe pre-conversion Hindu life cycle rituals and share water sources and burial grounds with other (Hindu) Dalits. The Mazhabi (Majhabi/Mazabi/Mazbi) of Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh follow Sikhism. Some of them have become Nihangs (Singh, 1995 : 923). The Hindu religious customs are also observed by the Mazhabis in Rajasthan. During the nineteenth century, the Matu Sanga, on the one hand, and the Brahma Samaj on the other hand, played important roles in uniting and uplifting the Namasudra of West Bengal. In Assam they are followers of Damodardeo Sect and Vaishnavism (Singh, 1995:980). The Koch in West Bengal, Assam and Tripura are Hindus. Many among them have become Muslims (Singh, 1995:740). They are also known as Rajbanshi. The Rajbanshis of North Bengal have spread into the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. The Rajbanshi took part in the Tebhaga

movement of 1946, and now they are involved in a regional Kamatapur ethnic-separatist movement, mostly concentrated in North Bengal.

The Mahars of Maharashtra call themselves Neo-Buddhists, after their adoption of Buddhism in 1956, under the leadership of Dr. B.R.Ambedkar, but elements of Hindu religion and caste system persists among them in entirety. The Neo-Buddhists are also referred to as Nav Buddhist. They are found in Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Punjab. They celebrate festivals connected with Buddhism and birth anniversary of Dr. B.R.Ambedkar. In Karnataka they have converted from Mahar, Holeya and Madiga communities. But in Karnataka the Neo-Buddhists celebrate most of the Hindu festivals and venerate Hindu deities. The Panchama, the Fifth One, have been described as "avarnas" and "untouchables", hence they are placed outside the four varna scheme, and hence they declare themselves the fifth Varna. Panchama is a generic term. It includes many endogamous groups. In Andhra Pradesh many Panchamas have embraced Buddhism (1995: 1045). The Rehars of Himachal Pradesh are followers of a Shaiva sect, but they believe in supernatural powers residing in forest, high hills and water sources. They employ sacred specialists from the Brahman and Sipi communities respectively (Singh, 1995:1117). The Badaiks are also called Chik or Chik Badaik. The Badaik priests are called Pahan. These priests are drawn from the Munda and Bhuiyan tribes. The Badaiks, as observed in the field by this author in Orissa, draw elements from both Hindu as well as local tribal religious practices (Das 1998).

The above critique suggests that religious syncretism persists in an inconceivably vast number of Dalit communities of India extensively, particularly among those who have shifted their religious allegiance.

X

#### CONCLUSION:

In this paper an attempt is made to comprehend the synthesized structure of Indian civilization through the vantage point of syncretistic religious and cultural traditions of India. Syncretism refers to the synthesis of different religious forms. In Indian context religious synthesis/syncretism has had a positive implication as a foundation and form of resistance to cultural dominance. The case studies show how religious ideas, rituals and cultural traits mediate between diverse ethnic communities, religious communities, sects, and cultural regions and give rise to a complex unity. The complex cultural unity of India is built up through protracted inter-relationship of the diverse cultural traditions, both literate and pre-literate. We have primarily depended on data of Pol project to establish certain of our arguments. The People of India (PoI) data have reestablished the truth of unity in India's diversity. It has provided a scientific basis to the identity of Indian communities, and it also revealed the multiple patterns of bio-cultural and linguistic linkages, which define ultimately India's pluralism. We have compared some of the main findings of Pol project with other available data, as also with more recent writings which help us substantiate our basic supposition of this paper. As a people we are one of the most diverse people in the world. There are 4635 identifiable communities in this country, most of whom have their unique dress patterns, languages, forms of worship, occupations, food habits and kinship patterns. Some of the major fundamentals of this paper, based on our re-interpretations of retrieved data from different sources, and which have bearing on our basic themes of diversity and syncretism, are that large numbers of populations show diversity in biological traits. Most Indian communities have a mixed ancestry, and it is today impossible to separate our roots. Indian roots derive from a mixed ancestry that includes the Proto-Australoid, Paleo-Mediterranean, Caucasian, Negroid, and Mongoloid. Every community recalls its migration in its folklore, history and collective memory. All received the regional ethos of the area that they settled in, and contributed to its local traditions. Indian culture has enriched itself by adopting elements from diverse sources. Language is an important source of diversity. There are as many as 325 languages and 25 scripts in use, deriving from various linguistic families - the Indo-Aryan, Tibeto-Burman, Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic,

Andamanese, Semitic, Indo-Iranian, Sino-Tibetan, and Indo-European, apart from thousands of dialects. At least 65% of the communities are bi-lingual; most tribal communities are tri-lingual. The numerous mother tongues are important instruments of cultural expression and preservation of diversity. Language contact through bi-lingualism is a major vehicle for social and cultural interaction and creolisation. A total of 85% of the Indian communities are rooted in their resources. The lives and livelihood, the occupations, dress patterns, the songs and hut settlements of the different communities cannot be really separated from their landscape, climate and occupations deriving from their resources. The "rootedness in the eco-cultural zone is an outstanding characteristic of our communities; no matter what religious label attaches to them". Even the migrants seek to identify themselves with their local environment except in the matter of languages they speak at home or in marriages. Only 3% of the communities derive their names from religious sects, while 71.77% live within a single regional or linguistic boundary and are rooted in its ethos. About 55% of the communities derive their names from the traditional occupations they pursue, while 14% have their names associated with their environment i.e. mountains, plains, river etc., and 14% from their places of origin, such as Gond, Alhuwalia, Kanpuria, Chamoli, Arandan, Shimong. Many surnames derive from occupations pursued, offices traditionally held, and original villages, cutting across community boundaries and region. Singh, Acharya, Patel, Naik, Prasad, Gupta, Sharma, Khan are examples. Popular cultural expression cuts across religion. 775 cultural/material traits have been identified (in Pol) - relating to ecology, settlement, identity, food habits, marriage patterns, social customs, social organization, economy, and occupation, linkages, and impact of change and development, which reveal a sharing of traits across religious categories. Hindus share 96.77% traits with Muslims, 91.19% with Buddhists, 88.99% with Sikhs, and 77.46% with Jains. Muslims share 91.18% traits with Buddhists, 89.95% with Sikhs. Jains share 81.34% traits with Buddhists. The Scheduled Tribes share 96.61% traits with OBCs, 95.82% with Muslims, 91.69% with Buddhists, 91.29% with Scheduled Castes, 88.20% with Sikhs (K.S.Singh, 1996, Identity, Ecology, Social Organisation, Economy, Linkages and Development Process: A Quantitative Profile). Markings of identification by different communities are mainly non-religious. In dispensing their dead, 3059 communities cremate them; while as many as 2386 bury them. Many communities follow both practices. So is the case with many marriage symbols, food habits, dress, dance and musical forms. Clans bearing names of animals, plants or inanimate objects cut across religions, language, region etc.

As we discussed above in India there has been continual interaction between communities and they have constantly maintained cultural linkages, particularly by sharing of resources, traits, and space (observable at grassroots level) and these trends indeed shaped the unique patterns of India's composite heritage and cultural unity. India's constitutionally enforced secular democracy remained more of a distant anchor for our diversity rather than a convention in action. Citing the People of India project data, Asghar Ali Engineer says that there are large numbers of communities who profess mixed religions. There are twelve communities among Muslims who admit to be Brahmins, 24 communities who declare themselves as Kshatriyas, 6 as Vaishyas and 11 Muslim communities as Sudras. Among Christians too we have such caste groups, 8 professing to be Brahmins and 48 as Sudras (Pluralism & Civil Society, [www.islam21.net/pages/keyissues/key3-21.htm](http://www.islam21.net/pages/keyissues/key3-21.htm)). It can be stressed ultimately that our culture which is often provided a polarized identity is a pluralist culture and we have deeply influenced each other in practically every field.

Rosalind Shaw and Charles Stewart (1994), the editors of the volume, *Syncretism and Anti-Syncretism*, have observed that within anthropology, where notions of the 'purity' of traditions have not had much credibility for some time, syncretism has been ascribed a neutral, and often positive, significance. In anthropology as a matter of fact now the essentialising of culture is generally dismissed. What is more there has been increasing criticism of concepts such as cultural purity, wholeness or 'authenticity'. In post-modern-anthropology in which syncretic processes are considered basic not only to religion and ritual but to 'the predicament of culture' (Clifford 1988: 14-15) identities no longer presuppose continuous cultures or traditions. Everywhere groups improvise local performances from (re) collected pasts. Organic culture reconceived as inventive process or creolized 'interculture' (Clifford 1988: 14-15). These scholars

feel that although syncretic processes currently loom large in new writings, there seems to be an uneasiness about the term in post-modern anthropology: we hear far less about culture as syncretic than about culture as collage, as creolized, as fragmented, as 'interculture', as subversive hybrid invention (Shaw and Stewart 1994: 2). We have made a particular mention of acculturation theory and its limitations in studies in India. What are especially problematic about the concept of 'acculturation' are its teleological and quantitative assumptions, proceeding along a continuum towards some ultimate completion. Indeed, one problem with the continued utilization of the term acculturation - a formulation originally coined in 1920s, and regrettably constantly used by Indian scholars, is the "linearity" (Gutmann, M.C.2004). Since 1950s most anthropologists have discovered sufficient reason to discard the term, especially owing to its excessively monochromatic implications. Indeed very seldom it is possible to trace culture change in such a unidirectional and unidimensional way (Gutmann, M.C.2004). If we recast the study of syncretism as the politics of religious synthesis, one of the first issues which needs to be confronted is what 'anti-syncretism': the antagonism to religious synthesis shown by agents concerned with the defence of religious boundaries. 'Authenticity' or 'originality' do not necessarily depend on purity both pure and mixed traditions can be unique. Van der Veer argues that there are debates over syncretism in societies in which identities are defined through religion. Since India combines these by being a secular state in which religious affiliation partially defines cultural identity, it makes sense that syncretism and multiculturalism are often equated in Hindu political discourse (see Shaw and Stewart 1994). Shaw and Stewart (1994) agree with Richard Werbner who, argued that the term 'syncretism' should be limited to the domain of religious or ritual phenomena, where elements of two different historical 'traditions' interact or combine.

Nadel (1954:7-8) has rightly observed that however the sphere of 'things religious' is defined; there will always remain an area or border zone of uncertainty making it difficult to portray the dividing line between religion and non-religion. This statement seems truer for Indian context where pluralistic cultural religious traditions provide solid syncretistic coherence. In dealing with religion one deals with many different things. Religion is an affair of the community and anthropologists indeed are more competent to do empirical study of religion in its social context. The fact remains that the notion of 'community' has itself been subjected to analytical deconstruction (Haim Hazan, 1995; see also David Morley and Kevin Robins, 1995). Cohen (1985) has reduced 'community' to its symbolic boundaries. Here it may not be out of place to restate that cultural practices are integrated in religious practices and vice-versa. Throughout in our above account we have tried to elucidate in a broad anthropological-historical perspective mingling and fusion of religious/culture practices and traits as observable in day to day life.

Gauri Viswanathan in an article titled "Beyond "Orientalism": Syncretism and the politics of knowledge" (SEHR, volume 5, issue 1: 1996) has reviewed the issue of syncretism from a broad historical -sociological angle. Beginning the arguments around "In an Antique Land", by Amitav Ghosh, Viswanathan finds it disturbing to see Ghosh's twist to a culturally and religiously hybrid medieval past and its engagement with the romance of syncretism, as a solution to sectarianism, nationalism, ethnocentrism, and religious intolerance. Does syncretism offer truly global possibilities for a merging of religious difference, or is it a code word for the incorporation and assimilation of "minority" cultures? Is syncretism indeed the language in which, as Ghosh claims, people "once discussed their differences". Peter Van der Veer has established that the historical roots of syncretism's semantic association with transdenominational universalism lie in the rise of Protestantism and the decline of the absolute authority of Catholicism; and he further argues that syncretism's subsequent identification with cultural relativism accompanied the spread of colonialism and the politically charged contact with alien religious cultures that colonial expansion promoted (1994). Viswanathan, while putting the 'state' and 'law' above other considerations, argues that this syncretism gets transferred to the secular plane of plural identities, (thus) allowing for the creation of a homogeneous national identity, mediated by law. This point indeed may require valid data based evidences and justification, particularly in reference to India. Viswanathan is particularly insensitive to any official data, such as Nandy's use of 1911 Census wherein the Muslims of Gujarat identified themselves as "Mohammedan Hindus". Contrary to



what Viswanathan and many sociologists believe, Nandy rightly concludes from this example that there existed "a prior state of harmony" between Muslims and Hindus which was disrupted by the colonial state (1990, emphasis added). While equating the syncretism of Ghosh's narrative voice as analogous to Matthew Arnold's culture, Viswanathan suggests that both culture and syncretism have been able to deal with difference by amalgamating difference to a totalizing, homogeneous whole. Syncretism in the review presented by Viswanathan is closely seen from certain basic 'difference' perspective, viewed at larger macro -national level. This approach will eventually lead us to miss the core of very process of coming together of practices and beliefs of people (in cultural –religious sphere) which result in multiple levels of syncretic traditions to be seen in unique manner in places like south Asia. Christophe Jaffrelot has recently advanced the concept of "strategic syncretism" as a sub-category of the invention of Hindu tradition and Hindu ideology. Such an ideology is syncretic, argues Jaffrelot, because its content is supplied by material taken from the cultural values of groups who are seen as hostile to the Hindu community (1993). Christ no longer is a threatening alien religious figure, but made into an Indian god. Indeed, 'indigenization', (discussed elsewhere by this author, Das 2003) is the term comes close to what is stated above.

Societies in various parts of India have evolved through dialogue and interactions at many levels. The multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious society like India could survive because of dialogue and exchange of ideas. Scholars agree that the great heritage of Indian civilization spanning over 5000 years is sustained broadly through its pre-dominant agricultural and rural character of its population. Appadurai finds the use of traditional techniques and folk knowledge as critical for survival of Indian farmers. Similarly, playwright Girish Karnad sees continuity in indigenous Indian dramatic forms and finds a sense of energy in folk theatre. For Girish Karnad, the past coexists with the present in a parallel form. Similarly, Muslim painter, Gulam Mohammad Sekh revealed a close convergence of Hindu and Muslim rituals in family custom and ceremonies.

The reality, however, is that every culture has, in fact, ingested foreign elements from exogenous sources, with the various elements gradually becoming 'naturalized' within it. As Said (1979) argues 'the notion that there are geographical spaces with indigenous, radically "different" inhabitants who can be defined on the basis of some religion, culture or racial essence, proper to that geographical space is a highly debatable idea' (quoted in Clifford, 1988: 274). As many authors have noted (for example, Appadurai, 1990; Bhabha, 1987; Hall, 1987), cultural hybridity is, increasingly, the normal state of affairs in the world, and in this context any attempt to defend the integrity of indigenous or authentic cultures easily slips into the conservative defence of a nostalgic vision of the past – what Salman Rushdie (1982) has described as an 'absolutism of the pure'.

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## Female Criminality in Nigeria: A Historic Review

Comfort O. Chukuezi\*

### ABSTRACT

*The paper looks at women in Igbo society and their involvement in crime and criminal activities over the years. It argues that more women are now getting involved in criminal activities than before. Poverty as well as change in the traditional roles of childbearing and rearing of women to economic occupations are identified as the main reasons for increase in female crimes.*

*The need to encourage women in the form of education and training programs, employment opportunities to reduce poverty and income disparities that exist in the society is advocated in order to ameliorate female criminality and save our society from moral decadence.*

### INTRODUCTION

Over the years Nigeria has been witnessing unprecedented rise as well as sophistication in criminal activities. The new wave cuts across all sections of the society, involving men, women and children. The society overtime, has devised means of controlling crime and dealing with those who deviate from its norms and values. In pre-colonial times women were more or less restricted to their traditional social roles. The communal system of living added to the internal and external mechanism for crime control (mainly of ridicule and public disgrace) kept the level of criminal activities by women low.

With the introduction of a money economy and emergence of private property during the colonial period, some women began to seek employment outside the home. With increased labour force participation for them, some had the opportunity of getting involved in criminal activities (Adler, 1975; Simon 1975).

The tilt in female crime became apparent after independence and particularly during and after the Nigerian civil war. It has since assumed different forms and styles. Women have been known to be accomplices to criminals. They no longer come as accomplices, but as active collaborators and sometimes leaders of the gang. They no longer contend themselves with hiding weapons for male counterparts but operate with the weapons as well (Sunday Champion, May 9, 1999). This shift may not be unconnected to the economic situation in the country where there is the quest for materialism and the get-rich-quick syndrome.

This paper focuses on the historical development of female criminality in Nigeria particularly in the Igbo society from pre-colonial time till date and what factors have influenced criminality among the women. It also systematically examines the factors and the problems they portend for the Nigerian nation and by extension to the nascent democracy.

### PRE-COLONIAL PERIOD

The mode of production in pre-colonial times was a subsistence one. People produced only the barest necessities of life. The economy was not based on money. Division of labour was by sex. Women were restricted to the traditional social roles of bearing and rearing of children and as such were required to lead exemplary lives. Particularly, women were associated with pacifist roles. They tried to restore social equilibrium when anti-social behaviour was on the increase (Green, 1964:91). Although offences such as stealing, infanticide and witchcraft were common crimes among women then, internal and external mechanisms for enforcing moral code were enough deterrent for those who had intent to deviate. Offenders were publicly ridiculed through being made butt of songs or being forced to parade through the whole village with

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instruments of their offence. So effective was this device as a deterrent for further offence that Uchendu (1965:17) wrote:

*The concept of good life among the Igbo is so built on transparency theme that individuals dread any loss of face. The major deterrent to crime is not guilt-feeling but shame-feeling.*

In fact, a prerequisite for joining women's meeting then was the promise that the woman should not steal. A man would ask his future mother-in-law whether the girl he has in view steals, and would explain to her that it is a law in his place that married women found stealing would be fined by other wives in the village (Green Ibid:90).

In pre-colonial Igboland urbanization was unknown. People lived in villages, village groups and clans with the result that respect for religion, law and custom was induced partly by the sanctions of reward and punishment and partly by the influence of the family, elders and near kinsmen (Afigbo 1981:342). This also made it possible for people's lives to be organized around such gods and institutions as were important to the community. There was hardly any thing like living in anonymity or living and individual existence to the extent that is possible today in the urban centres. If one were not known by name, his family and lineage were and so could be reached when the need arose through the head of the family or lineage.

The lower incidence of reported crime committed by women during the pre-colonial period according to some researchers is attributed to their restricted social roles, the mechanism for enforcing moral codes and the rural based pattern of living.

## **COLONIAL PERIOD**

British Colonialism and imperialism in Africa introduced money economy and emergence of private property. This contributed to some changes in the economic and social lives of the people. Particularly the traditional social roles of women of child bearing and rearing were affected, as some women had to seek employment outside the home to cope with family responsibilities. As women go out to work there is tendency to get involved in some form of illegal activities or behaviour which may have influence on them. For instance both Alder (1975) and Simon (1975) agreed that there is a relationship between the changing roles of women and the increase in the number of crime they commit. Simon particularly examines the evidence regarding demographic trends and changes in labour force participation on the part of women in America. She argued quite plausibly that as labour force participation increases opportunities to engage in criminality should expand for them as well. In particular financial and white-collar offences ought to become more common on the part of women.

Under colonial rule some towns grew either as commercial or political centres or both. Each of these towns became important as soon as they were made administrative capital, division or province. They acquired the status of an urban area and thereby attracted migrants from the rural areas. In urban conditions of existence one is released from all the intricate and intimate links which tend to hinder the development of rugged individualism. Also one comes across people who have ideas, styles of life and behaviour, techniques etc., which are quite different from those obtaining in one's village. One therefore stands a chance of learning things new – good or bad.

There is also the tendency for some women who migrated from villages to town to learn bad habits and commit crimes.

### POST-COLONIAL OR INDEPENDENCE PERIOD (1960-1966)

The emergence of private property as a result of the capitalist mode of production encouraged corrupt practices during the First Republic in Nigeria. So long as private property exists, so will the urge to illegally appropriate resources also persist. Turner (1978:167) observed that Nigeria's economy then was dominated by import-export business largely of cash crop and mineral products. The economy was presided over by the representatives of foreign firms or Multinational Co-operations (MNCs). They made their wealth through bribery and other corrupt means, to exercise control over state officials and this made them have a lot of influence over the economy. Nigerian politics was thus transformed into a form of business through which actors sought to have very strong influence over the state. Nearly all business was involved in politics because the state had become the main source of finance and contracts, and nearly all politicians were in business (Rimmer, 1978:148-149). Bribe taking soon graduated into outright graft, while plunder of government coffers became a prominent feature of the system. It was difficult to identify where affairs of the state ended and where activities of the individual, especially business deals started. Those who were marginalized in the struggle for 'social surplus' of which women were in majority, had to look for other ways to survive. Some were used as decoys and lures for crimes. Others took to prostitution and other social vices to survive.

The civil war in Nigeria (1967-1970) compelled women in Owerri to double their roles as mothers and breadwinners of their families. Women suffered untold hardship as they toiled to feed the family. Some ended up stealing and committing all sorts of crime as a result of hardship. The war gave way to the oil boom. The money from the oil boom facilitated corruption on a larger scale, as there was increased desire for material possession by the people. Those who could not cope with the struggle hence lived in poverty in the midst of plenty.

### THE SECOND REPUBLIC (1979 – TILL DATE)

The growth in women's poverty is also a consequence of the economic crises of the 1980's, which were particularly harmful to the poorest socioeconomic groups. The curtailment of social services, such as healthcare, childcare and family planning brought about by the multilateral bank stabilization and structural adjustment policies – macroeconomic reforms designed to alleviate developing country debt and economic stagnation created more burden for women.

Official corruption has become the order of the day since the military rule after the second republic. The culture of extortion by all forms of security agencies, most pronounced being the police, has become so wide spread that most Nigerians now see it as a way of life. Bribery or what is commonly called 'settlement' is now a necessary condition for one to be attended to in most of the nation's public offices. A retired Supreme Court judge, Honourable Justice Chukwudifu Oputa in an interview with *African Concord* in 1994 took the issue further as he explains that:

*Corruption is a virus, which has affected not only the judiciary in Nigeria but every facet of Nigerian society from head to toe. Nigeria is corrupt. Why single out judges? Is there any office you go to and get things done without paying a tip? The answer is no.*

Buffeted by economic hardships and with a growing loss of confidence in government, the few Nigerians still with noble virtues are themselves fast developing itchy fingers; all in a bid to survive the hard times. For now the dominant philosophy is the brutish feeling of every man for himself - survival first and moral later.

### SOCIAL CONTROL MEASURES

Control mechanisms for crime and delinquency exist at two levels – the internal and external social control.

### *Internal Social Control*

This is based on the process of socialization which one undergoes provided it had been successful. Success is measured in the individual's ability to identify, internalize and comply with the social norms and standards of the groups or community. The process of identification requires that the values of a particular group become crucial to the extent that he identifies with the group and uses its standards as a model for actions and personality development. There exists the reference group, which may be positive or negative. Where positive, conformity to standards of society is enhanced, but where negative, deviation from the norms of wider society may result. The process of non-compliance or norm-complaints depends on whether the weight of the definitions favourable to violation of law and vice-versa. Conformity is rewarded while deviance is punished.

In Owerri, a social stigma is usually attached to women who were found to be criminals or those who were not properly socialized to conform to the accepted ways of the society. Usually men avoid marrying from such families.

### *External Social Control*

The pressure to conform in this case is exerted to the situation on which the person acts on the actor himself. External social control has to do with the role of the state. There are laws and modalities for checking crimes and criminals in Nigeria. There are also punishments for different offences. However with the phenomenon transformation and the level of sophistication of crime in the country, people have devised ways and means of circumventing some laws and getting away with some criminal offences. For instance some writers explain that some crimes by women do not get to their appropriate quarters as Pollak (1950:58) noted:

*The types of crimes they commit are less likely to be detected, when these crimes are detected, they are less likely to be reported to the authorities. Moreover when crimes of women are reported, the offenders have a better chance than men of avoiding arrest or conviction because of lenient double standards that is applied to them*

In Nigeria most of these crimes by women are under-reported or not reported at all. Some times they are closed before they get to prosecution stage by relations or friends who feel that women should not be disgraced publicly. Law enforcement agencies themselves appear to be ineffective sometimes in dealing with crime situations. Most of these crimes, particularly white-collar crimes are under-reported, under-recorded and suffer a lot of attrition in the hands of the police.

### **Crime Prevention**

The crime policy of the Federal Military Government was draconian especially with regards to armed robbery and other capital offences (Orakwe, 1987:7). Since the promulgation of the decree number 47 of 1970, mandatory death sentences have been pronounced on anyone found guilty of armed robbery. Armed robbery and firearms tribunals were set up in every State to try armed robbery cases by decree and pass death sentences on those found guilty. There is no right of appeal to superior courts. However the State Governors have power to annul, commute or uphold such sentences. By imposing the ultimate penalty the idea was to scare fledging armed robbers and nip new initiates in the bud. But more than thirty years after the imposition of the death penalty the malaise has increased significantly. Robbers have become more vicious in response to death penalty, believing that it is either their victims' lives or theirs. As a result they do not hesitate to kill their victims. This has made them even more successful in their operations.

Apart from the death penalty decree, Nigeria as a nation is now more determined than ever before to fight heinous crimes. Policies have been formulated to demonstrate their unalloyed



commitment to the cause. The Guardian of 29/7/96 shows some of the elements of the policies. The legal framework for the crusade include:

- Stiff penalty for Dangerous Drugs Act which covers usages and illicit drug trafficking.
- The 1995 Comprehensive Drug and Financial control policy, covering anti-money laundering laws in all ramifications of control, including bilateral and multilateral agreements, the Vienna Convention 1998 and the European initiative.
- The Promulgation of a decree known as Advanced Fee Fraud and other related offences – decree number 13 of 1995; under which even an attempt of a scam letter is a punishable offence – promulgation of ‘failed banks and financial malpractice’s decree number 8 of 1995’; for prosecution of all those responsible for failed banks.
- Further in 2002 Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), was established by the Federal Government to check and punish those that misappropriate public funds.

These decrees notwithstanding, those with less human resilience and with propensity to negative tendencies could no longer cope with the harsh economic conditions in the country, turn to crime as a way of life; since the welfare system to ameliorate some of these problems is non-existent.

However, government provided such programs as the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) and the Better life Program for Rural Women (BLP) in 1986 and 1988 respectively to alleviate and improve on the living standards of the people. SAP which was meant to stabilize the economy and make it self-reliant increased the hard economic conditions in the country. Prices of basic necessities on the national scene rose with adverse impact on the poor and female sectors of the population.

The Better Life Program which was initiated to assist rural women to be self-reliant and better aware of their potentialities was not properly actualized to the level where it could positively and in a sustainable way change the conditions of women.

## CONCLUSION

Nigeria in fact has a complex political history; frequent abrupt changes in government have led to sharp changes in economic and social policies. These have for most part impacted adversely on the population and have worsened income distribution. The exploitation of the nation’s oil resources and management of the great oil windfall have significantly influenced the evolution and perception of poverty. The provision of job opportunities for Nigerians may be one way of stemming crime rate.

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## The Interrelationship between Poverty, Environment and Sustainable Development in Bangladesh: An Overview

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### Abstract

*This paper attempts to focus on some of the issues and problems related to poverty and sustainable development in Bangladesh from the perspective of environmental protection and ecological balance. It has been argued that poverty alleviation and environmental protection are in harmony to reinforce sustainable development. This paper is an attempt to analyze the development scenario that aims at reducing poverty. However, in spite of the best efforts of government and NGOs the various indices of development in the developing countries have already faced difficulties in the context of achieving their goals and targets. This paper argues that instead of contributing to sustainability most of the development programs having a negative effect on overall environment and society.*

### Introduction

Bangladesh is a country with total population of 135.2 million, GDP of US\$56.4 billion and per capita income US\$417 (UNDP, 2005). It faces tremendous challenges in coping with the infrastructure and service requirements of its growing population, with a total public expenditure of US\$ 819.1 million. About 77 per cent of its population lives in the villages, but almost 31 per cent households have only one or less than one acre of land to cultivate (BBS, 2003). National rate of calorie intake is approximately 2,120 kilo calorie. More than 27 per cent of the households are getting below 1800 k calorie (BBS, 2003). The projected population of the country is about 250 million by the year 2035. About 31.2 per cent population has below US\$1 income per day (W.B., 2006). Access to food, sanitation, pure drinking water, health care, education and social security are obviously inadequate in both urban and rural areas of Bangladesh. For example, the public expenditure on health and population is only 6.4 per cent of total public expenditure. And the total health subsidy for the poor as a percentage of per capita expenditures is only 1.4 per cent (2003). The total expenditure on per capita health and population is only US\$ 12.2 (UNDP, 2005)<sup>2</sup>. But this does not portray the real poverty situation of the country: the silent feature of poverty is much more devastating in the events such as floods, cyclones, droughts, and other natural disasters. In these contexts government, NGOs and other development agencies concentrates more and more on poverty alleviation. Unfortunately, however, severe environmental degradation in Bangladesh, is often lost sight of in the poverty agenda, and should be linked with poverty. Even the recently introduced Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP)

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has been criticized for giving less attention towards environment. It is necessary to alleviate poverty keeping environment in mind through proper use of the natural resources. It is also necessary to have ecological balance to make development sustainable and poverty alleviation more effective.

The pertinent issues raised in the present paper are: whether we have learned about the analysis of poverty, and, even more important, about the effects of attempts to reduce poverty have any lessons for the way we approach the analysis of the environmental sustainability? It may, however, be mentioned here that such systematic analysis of environmental phenomena, at least in the social sciences, is only of recent origin.

### **Definition of the Key Concepts**

In this paper three independent concepts are being used as major variables. These are poverty, sustainable development and environment.

#### **Poverty**

The World Bank defines poverty as “the inability to attain a minimal standard of living” (World Bank, 1990:26). Poverty is generally defined in the following two ways: 1. lack of “means” in relation to “needs” and 2. lack of “means” in relation to “means” (Sen, 1999:12).

Sociologists distinguish between relative and absolute poverty. Absolute poverty occurs when people fail to receive sufficient resources to support a minimum of physical health and efficiency, often expressed in terms of calories or nutritional levels. Relative poverty is defined by the general standards of living in different societies and what is culturally defined as being poor rather than some absolute level of deprivation. When poverty is defined relatively, by reference to the living standards enjoyed by the bulk of a population, poverty levels vary between societies and within societies over time (The penguin dictionary of Sociology, 1994:328). Poverty is a complex problem and is product, at least, in part, of political process and policy development. As such it is also a political and a moral concept, which calls for political action. Poverty is thus not the same as inequality although the two concepts are interrelated.

#### **Sustainable Development**

The idea of sustainable development has attracted both developed and developing world with very different interests. Now-a-days, the term ‘sustainable development’ is used over a wide range of affairs from the world of commerce to the realm of social and human welfare in both developed and developing countries. The questions often asked are: “to what extent is to be sustained?” or “how the idea of ‘sustainable development’ be translated into principles on which

practicable and effective policies can be based and which will reverse current unsustainable trends of resource depletion and human oppression in developing world?" (Hossain, 1998).

The idea of "sustainability" received serious attention in the so-called Brundtland Commission Report, 'Our Common Future' (1987). The report defined sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs." Brundtland's way of seeing the ends of sustainability has many attractive features (Sen, 2000:2). In broad terms the concept of sustainable development encompasses: a) help for the very poor because they are left with no other option but to destroy their own environment; b) people centered initiatives are needed; c) human beings are the resources (Tolba, 1987). In fact it is a kind of development that is likely to achieve lasting satisfaction of human needs and improvement of the quality of human life (Allen, 1980).

### **Environment**

It is difficult to define environment. The word 'environment' is a vast one: ranging from microbic action to the size of world population (Nasreen, 2000). Environment has been defined as "the aggregate of all the external conditions and influences affecting the life and development of an organism" (The Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary). The aim then, with either individual organism or communities, is to distinguish between factors arising from outside the system and factors inherent in the system itself. This sounds simple enough, but in practice the distinction between organism and environment is not always easy to make (International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, 1984:91).

### **Sustainable development: Theoretical Perspective**

Sustainable development first came to prominence in World Conservation Strategy (WCS) in the year 1980. It achieved a new status after the publication of 'North and South: a programme for survival and common crisis' in 1983 (popularly known as Brundtland Commission Report) and 'Our Common Future' in 1987. In June 1992 sustainable development gained greater attention at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). The last World Summit (August-September, 2002) further emphasized the importance of the issue of sustainability. In Bangladesh, as in many developing countries, the concept 'sustainable development' is a highly discussed topic but very little action is taken on the basis of these discussions.

The definition given by Brundtland Commission, while useful in drawing attention to the concern with the long term implications of present day development, ask as many questions as it answers. What constitutes "needs" and how will these change over time? What reductions in the options

available to future generations? What options are acceptable and what are not? The operational aspects of sustainable development were not answered by the Commission, although the report itself gave strong hints that the environmental degradation resulting from today's economic policies was a major source of concern from a sustainability view point (Markandya, 2001:2). Here we have found serious economic and environmental debates. From economic perspective, some of the earlier contributors (Pearce, Markandya, and Barbier, 1990) suggested sustainable development should imply that no generation in the future would be worst of than the present generation. In other words society should not allow welfare to fall over time. In the last 170 years or so, some OECD countries have achieved a slow rate of economic growth of 1-2 percent per capita annum increase in terms of Gross Domestic Product. (Maddison, 1995). Bangladesh, like many other developing countries, is advocating a high increase of GDP, but the number of landless people is increasing, unfit for the high rate of GDP. According to GOB, 57 percent of rural people are landless and live below poverty line. This is amply demonstrated in the data below.

**Table 1. The Rate of Landless People in Bangladesh**

| Year | Landless People(in percent) |
|------|-----------------------------|
| 1947 | 14.30                       |
| 1970 | 19.80                       |
| 1975 | 32.00                       |
| 1984 | 46.00                       |
| 2001 | 68.8                        |

Source: Islam, 2005

Economists have turned to looking at changes in the stock of wealth, where wealth is defined to include natural, human, physical and social capital (World Bank, 1997). If society's wealth per capita is declining, future generations have to live with less resources with the present level of consumption. Unfortunately it is quite difficult to measure all these forms of capital for any one country and even more difficult to do so in a way that permits comparison across countries (Hamilton and Clemens, 1999 and Hamilton, 2000). To show that the present tendencies in consumption behavior are unsustainable it supplements the idea of sustainable development by indicating that many consumption habits would have to be changed because they would interfere with the requirements of sustainable development (Sen, 2000:6). In the instrumental context, sustainability of consumption can help to illuminate the constraints that operate in pursuing long run development in general and improving sustainable development in particular. Indeed, even the danger of over population can be optimistically viewed. In this context, Bangladesh and other developing countries that have high population could follow the sustainable consumption policy to alleviate poverty to overcome the population problem itself. Sen (2000) further argued that it is

also true that the rate of population has been falling too, and while fertility rates have declined unevenly across the globe, the lessons from the more successful cases can be learned and used in other countries as well. Thus the traditional concept of sustainable development provides some warnings about human capital, natural resources and environment. The modern economic development, on the other hand, that occurred through technological advancement jeopardizes the ecological and economic sustainability. Lopez (1992:74) also refers to both "external" factors and "internal" factors that degrade the environment. Markandya (2001) further refers that per capita economic development degrades the environment and natural resources, a function of population policy changes and changes in institutional arrangement.

A popular line of reasoning among researchers begins by noting that a number of undesirable agriculture related policies have been introduced in the recent past, especially in developing countries. As a consequence of these policies, according to this line of argument, there had been an increased proliferation of environmental degradation causing miseries to the poorer communities. Following this line De Janvry and Garcia (1998) list the proximate causes of environmental degradation by the poor as presented below:

- Soil erosion due to excessive agricultural crop and serial production.
- Semi-proletarianization of the rural population and a collapse of local institutions due to agricultural modernization.
- Degradation of natural resources including forestry as a result of migrants seeking law (Janvry and Garcia, 1998:7).

According to Dasgupta (1995, 1996), 'as common resource management system break down, individuals are more able and willing to make family size decisions that does not take full account of social costs of child rearing with use of common resources treated as a free good' (Dasgupta,1996:8). It may be stated that a "self correcting" mechanism can exist, which implies that institutions evolve so as to respond to a deteriorating rural environment by increasing the level of cooperation over common resources (Markandya, 2001:9). Undoubtedly the most controversial of the internal factors is that of population growth. Many commentators point to the effects of increases in overall population in terms of pressure on land and increase in environmental degradation (Janvry and Garcia, 1988). From the experience of Kenya the colonial policy in the developing world and the load of population could be explained by a number of factors (Tiffen et.al, 1994). The problem is to know how much of this was due to a) the opening of land for all users, b) investment in infrastructure, c) access to non farm employment opportunities, d) technological development that were brought in from outside the region, and e) price incentive for products that were relatively environmentally benign. This inevitably leads to the question as

to whether the reduction of population growth into half lends to consequential change in land that could be more environmentally beneficial.

### **Poverty and development**

Poverty has devastating effects on people's life especially on physical, psychological and economic aspects. Poor people suffer from physical pain that comes with too little food and long hours of work; emotional pain stems from the daily humiliations of dependency and lack of power; and the moral pain comes from being forced to make choices such as to use limited funds to save the life of an ill family member, or to use the same fund to feed children (Narayan, 2002:3). Poverty remains a major challenge for our planet in the new millennium in spite of global efforts for poverty alleviation. The global poverty discourses over the last 30 years have been shaped by meta narratives of high radicalism, a massive head count ritual, a less visible drama of exclusion and an elusive search for program impacts. Poverty has been viewed as "individual deficits", social disadvantages and denial of specific rights or access to minimal resources. Poverty studies have thus mostly focused on the change in such deficits or disadvantages (Islam, 2003:1).

There have been different estimates on the level of poverty in Bangladesh. Poverty studies mainly concentrate on the measurement of poverty and the estimation of its magnitude. For this purpose, two methods are used to estimate poverty line, a) calorie intake and b) cost of basic needs (CBN) method. Two types of poor are distinguished under calorie intake, a) hard core poor; having less than 1,805 kcal per person per day and b) absolute poor; having less than 2,122 kcal per person per day. (GOB, 2001:55).

The CBN method constructs poverty line, which represent the level per capita expenditure at which the members of households can be expected to meet their basic needs, food and non-food. The allowance for non-food consumption yields two poverty lines, a) lower, which incorporates a minimal allowance for non-food goods for those who could just afford the food requirement, and b) upper, which makes a generous allowance for non-food spending for those who just attain the food requirement (GOB, 2001:55-6).

In a study of the Asian Development Bank (1997), urban absolute and hardcore income poverty lines are determined at Taka 3,500 (US\$88 equivalent) and Taka 2,500 (US\$63 equivalent) per household per month respectively. Thus the concept of poverty and its measurement has remained heavily economic and all poverty measurements ultimately boil down to income poverty. Even human development index (HDI) and gender related development index (GDI) have an income component. Thus a cultural construction of poverty has remained in oblivion.



Reducing poverty is the central theme of development dialogue in Bangladesh. According to government statistics poverty has declined in the 1990s, but still it remains at the greatest challenges to the nation. Both the lower and upper poverty lines indicate a statistically significant decline in poverty after 1991-92. The incidence of the very poor declined from 43 percent of the population in 1991-92 to 36 percent in 1995-96; the incidence of the poor declined from 59 to 53 percent. Although poverty has declined in both rural and urban areas, rural poverty is still higher than urban poverty. Reducing the poverty of the very poor in rural areas (which was 40 percent of the rural population in 1995-96), remained a massive challenge. The growing inequality associated with economic growth in Bangladesh does not imply that growth should not be pursued. Rising inequality has reduced the rate of poverty reduction. Over the period 1991-92 to 1995-96, inequality raised the least with agricultural growth, and as a result the net elasticity of poverty with respect to growth was the largest in agriculture. Public expenditures reduced poverty, but their targeting and efficiency requires further improvement. Government programs, such as Food for Education, Vulnerable Group Development, Test Relief, and Rural Maintenance are well targeted. A detailed assessment of Food for Education, the fastest growing program, shows that it raised primary school attendance and is also cost-effective, as measured by its long term impact. The role of NGOs in Bangladesh is unique: vital resource for faster poverty reduction can be achieved by them, but more is to be done to support partnership with Government. Bangladesh is pioneer in innovative NGO programs. The report made by World Bank that was presented as executive summary of the 1998 on Bangladesh poverty assessment. This report is part of a long term process of capacity building and mainstreaming of poverty analysis in Bangladesh. Its findings suggest five pillars of a possible poverty reduction strategy accelerating economic growth, promoting education for the poor particularly primary education, and more specifically for girls; investing in poor areas to take advantage of strong location effects on poverty reduction; improved targeting of public expenditures and safety nets to reach the poor better; and forming further partnerships with NGOs to reach poorest and not-so-poor in ways designed to make a stronger attack on poverty ([www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)).

The Nobel laureate economist Amartya Sen has noted that in recent times Bangladesh experienced an unusual sharp reduction in fertility rates. This is associated, it appears, with a variety of factors, including the expansion of family planning opportunities, greater involvement of women in economic activities (for example, through micro-credit movements), and much public discussion on the need to change the prevailing patterns of gender disparity, the greater social and economic role of women in Bangladesh has been widely noted (Sen, 2000:10).

A convenient starting point for a strategy of poverty reduction would be initiated if the multi-dimensional nature of poverty is taken into consideration. Consequently, it would call for sub-

strategies to address four problems: a) lack of economic opportunity, related to low economic growth, the level and distribution of physical assets such as land, human capital and social assets, and market opportunities which determine the returns of these assets b) low human capabilities, related to improvements in health and education indicators, especially among specific socio economic groups. c) low level of security, related to exposure to risk and income shocks, which may arise at the national, local, household or individual level and may be due to natural disasters as well as socio economic factors, and d) lack of empowerment, related to the capacity of poor people to influence state institutions and social processes that shape resource allocations and public policy choices. (Frederick and Zaidi, 2004:1). These are the most common features of Bangladesh poverty alleviation scenario without the notion of environmental concern.

The major portion of the development scenario has been prescribed by the World Bank, IMF and other development agencies as a part of top-down approach, which is obviously not environmental friendly. Here the question of sustainability has been raised to a greater extent.

During the 1970s, when Bangladesh come into existence as an independent nation, many scholars and observers either termed it a baskets case or were worried about its economic viability(Kissinger,1973;Arthur and Nicoll,1975; Khan and Hossain, 1989) But the nation ,since then has made some progress in population control, food self-sufficiency, and innovative community level approach to poverty alleviation and economic and social development, in addition to the restoration of the democratic system of governance (:Khandker et al,1994;World Bank, 1998.)

Most of the Governments of Bangladesh have concentrated on a vigorous countryside program of poverty alleviation. Firstly, fundamentalists may sometimes oppose the poverty alleviation program such as women employment and women emancipation. But the overwhelming majority of the rural people from all walks of life are highly appreciative and supportive off all poverty alleviation programs. Second, making foreign aid available is the key concern of foreign donors in poverty alleviation program, and the availability of simple, cost effective, and modern technologies have made poverty alleviation program a viable proposition. Money and resources themselves, though necessary, are not sufficient for an effective poverty alleviation program, since political and economic inequality distort its actual implementation capacity. Therefore the process is slow in showing progress in poverty alleviation (Amin and Pierre, 2002: 26).

The overall performances of the public sector, the largest leading sector concerned with delivering basic public services in health, education, agriculture and poverty alleviation in rural Bangladesh, is far from satisfactory. Many of these government agencies are inefficient,

ineffective, with no accountability, and therefore, unable to deal with the backlogged and emergency needs of the people.(The World Bank,1998). As Blauner and Wellman (1973) poignantly observe in a not altogether different contexts, the authority of the poor and the powerless to diagnose group problem and interpret culture and lifestyles (Pivots around notion of group self definition and self-determinations [and is] central to the consciousness of the racially oppressed. This means that the rural poor of Bangladesh must be treated as subjects and not, as it now seems to be the case, objects.

It may, however be mentioned here that many of the NGOs who prefer to practice poverty alleviation, in effect have turned themselves into business organizations which help them to accumulate capital. In fact from the very initial stage of capital formation foreign assistance played a dominant part and thereby raises questions as to their bonafide in proposed aim of alleviating poverty.

### **Environment and Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper**

Being directed by IMF and the World Bank, Government of Bangladesh has finally produced the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) in October 2005<sup>3</sup>. Although Government declared that the PRSP has been finalized in a participatory way, many believe that such participation was restricted to bureaucratic dependency. The non-participation of politicians in the process has been identified as one of the major weaknesses. Because poverty has been identified as a political issue, the non-participation of political leaders and of people in finalizing PRSP makes Government's good wills questionable. However, the discussion on environment in the PRSP has been done under the 'Supporting Strategy IV: Caring for the Environment and Sustainable Development'. PRSP has been emphasized on the achievements in reducing poverty and way forward through different activities.

The issues included in PRSP on environment are: Conservation of Nature, Agricultural Land Degradation and Salinity, Biodiversity, Public Commons (resources), Rural Energy and Afforestation (including tree plantation) and Urbanization Related Environmental Issues. To combat pollution PRSP also included discussion on air pollution, water pollution, rural water and arsenic pollution, noise pollution and International aspects of environment. Some policy agendas for 2005-2007 have been identified in the strategy paper such as ensuring sustainable employment for the poor, coordinating among all the policy and planning related to environment, emphasizing the environmental analysis while planning and implementing projects and focusing on achieving main goals such as increasing the opportunities of poor for production, collection of

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<sup>3</sup> Unlocking the Potential: National Strategy for Accelerate Poverty Reduction, General Economic Division Planning Commission, GoB, 2005.

natural resources to improve health and nutrition, increasing access of poor to common resources and increasing the participation of poor in forest resource management. The processes of implementing such strategic goals have already been started through projects under NEMAP and SEMP.

Implementing Act for saving environment, proper utilization of environmental law, decreasing deforestation, saving bio-diversity, controlling air pollution, improving the waste management system, improving the livelihood and environment of slum dwellers, mainstreaming environmental issues with other relevant policies, activities and projects are the other aims of PRSP related to environment. Some process and policy agendas have already been taken to achieve such goals.

However, whatever hope PRSP raises, there are limitations regarding its discussion on environment. For example, by the name of saving biodiversity such areas were identified (be it Sundarban or Hakaluki haor or Gulshan-Baridhara), where many of the poor people live and maintain their sustenance. PRSP does not provide any suggestion regarding the alternative for their sustenance or ensuring their participation in the process. The possibility of poor people's access to village common property resources is hardly possible as either there is no common resource in rural areas or the poor do not have access to it.

Although the discussion on environment in PRSP has been included as a supporting strategy, it has included 'social forestry' under the major strategic block. However, there is no clear direction in PRSP on various debatable issues related to forestry such as the negative impacts of foreign tree species on environment, Eco-park etc. Increasing the intensity of cyclone and rising of sea level as a result of global climate change also did not receive due attention in the PRSP.

There are some highlights on the water management in the strategy paper which includes the limitations of using underground water or encouraging using surface water. However, the increasing marketing system of water and people's continuous dependency on bottled water have been ignored by the PRSP. Moreover, the problem of arsenic contamination in groundwater, one of the major concerns of most people in Bangladesh, has not received proper attention and is restricted to three sentences only.

The discussion on rural energy resources in PRSP did not provide any specific direction on how to encourage people to use renewable energy through reducing dependency on non-renewable energy. The participation and access of the poor to alternative techniques of energy use has not been elaborately discussed. Moreover, PRSP did not give importance to implementing the renewable energy policy 2002 of GoB, where the use of biomass, hydro electric power, and solar energy has been emphasized.

Finally, PRSP ignored the international context of environmental problems. In many occasions poor people are blamed as the polluters of environment, which should not be accepted. This is because the degradation in the environment is done more by the industrialized countries than the poor/non-industrialized countries. There is no such discussion in the PRSP. Moreover the reservation of rich countries in implementing the Quito protocol and regional problems, such as planning of river linking project, constructing Tipaimukh or other barrages by India, have not been mentioned<sup>4</sup>.

### **Environment and economic development**

Economic development should help reduce poverty and improve the environment. But the unplanned development activities contribute to severe environmental degradation in developing countries. A significant problem in environmental regulation in developing countries arises from difficulties in controlling small scale enterprises, because of their limited financial and human resources, and low-level of technology. (Markandya, 2000:12). The vulnerable are often the users of marginal resources and also dependent on the common resources of the community in which they live. (Dasgupta, 2001:10). Hence it is these groups that are most impacted when deforestation, soil erosion and other negative incidence occur, often as a result of natural disasters. (Dasgupta, 2001:10). We can here show a silent feature of infrastructure development activities such as construction of roads, railways, set-up of modern industrial units, massive industrial plantation, plantation of exotic trees, tea plantation, construction of office buildings, settlement of people in the hilly areas, unplanned and haphazard urban and industrial development process, modern agricultural production system and trade and commerce and business etc. that created tremendous ecological imbalance due to indiscriminate utilization and destruction of natural resources.

Moreover, excessive and indiscriminate use of pesticide and chemical fertilizers have negative externalities as they adversely affect agricultural land as well as environment. Also these chemical pollutants through runoff and seepage contaminated ground and surface water.

The unplanned development activities have a serious negative impact on capturing fisheries due to substantial reductions in flood prone areas, which get inundated regularly. Unplanned intensive tourism causes severe threat to forest and affects the daily life of the local people including *adivasi* community. It also means that it affects our environment.

A gas field was discovered just beside the boundary of the west Bhanugach forest reserve (WBFR), an area of about 10 hector was cleared and fenced off within 100 meters of the forest.

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<sup>4</sup> Nasreen, Mahbuba, PRSP and Environment, *Poribesh* (BAPA Newsletter), 4<sup>th</sup> year, First issue, January-February, 2006.

There a narrow metal road was constructed inside the forest, which has become extremely busy. As a result the whole area has become crowded because of this massive activity. After one and half years of experimentation with digging for gas, the whole gas field exploded. The gas burned for nearly 15 days. This explosion had adverse effects on the wild life and the environment, the only the cause of which was exploitation and not real development activities.

More recently, Government of Bangladesh has taken an initiative to establish a number of eco-parks in Modhupur of Tangail district and CHTs. But it would really have a devastating effect for the indigenous people of the territory. It will uproot hundreds and thousand of *adivasi* people along with the loss of sustainable livelihood for the sub center.

Development, environmental issues and global politics are highly interrelated. Environmental degradation in the developing countries is associated with several factors: urban congestion, industrial pollution, toxic waste disposal problems, sewage pollution, over grazing, denudation of forests and above all political unwillingness. There is increasing pressure on the environment due to activities of farming of marginal lands, gathering fuel wood supplies by the poor for commercial use in towns and for personal consumption, or even exports to the developed world. (Shiva,1992:118). Being at the bottom of the socio-economic structure the poor get the worst of everything including pollution. To these problems of population growth and poverty we can trace almost all our major environmental problems. Various environmental problems are being found in the third world countries due to: 1. a major drawback of the third world countries is that their political process involving environmental issues are not considered relevant data thoughtfully gathered, and these restrains the flexibility needed to move towards achieving specific objectives.2. Absences of consensus on environmental goals leave us with different perceptions of environmental protection. With the limited awareness in these countries "priorities" is a word that carries all diverse economic, political and religious beliefs. 3. The design of law itself is also a problem and very often the people pay without receiving environmental or social benefits of corresponding values. 4. Regulatory agencies are battered from all sides by interest groups and very few bureaucrats are fired if they fail to act appropriately (Shiva, 1992:135-6). Economic growth is not necessarily good. Underdeveloped and effects of development have led to a series of environmental problems in Third world countries which even if local in nature can lead to multifarious effects at the regional and global levels as environment operates in the forum of an integrated system.(Shiva, 1992:126). Developed countries are blaming the Third world countries for environmental degradation. But the 80 percent of global resources are consumed by the developing nations with the consequent harmful environmental degradation. From the eco-political point of view, the top down approach of poverty alleviation caused this ecological imbalance. Governments of the poor countries are not capable of taking the right decision to

protect their environment due to tariff barrier, foreign aid, grants, loans, and the politics of international trade. If the people of the developed world change their consumption pattern, it would balance the ecology and environment of world system.

### **Gender, poverty and sustainable development**

The concept 'gender' is widely used in the development discourse in Bangladesh. In the highly stratified society the relational analysis of gender inequality and development is still far from the desired goal. In Bangladesh poverty is gendered and women are the poorest of the poor. Women face number of problems due to their gender identity.

It is evident that globalization has failed to address the issues of economic and environmental sustainability, particularly in the agricultural and informal sectors. Moreover, globalization tends to increase income inequality between different sectors and groups. The rising tide of Globalization has not lifted all women. The poor, less educated and credit-constrained women may not see most of the benefits of globalization at all. Majority of women are unlikely to benefit from liberalization policies because these programmers do not take account of gender specific impacts (Nasreen, 2004). However, the issues related to gender and sustainable development has been ignored or less emphasized. It is evident that the policies of sustainable development are not gender neutral. It has been emphasized that gender differences and inequalities may influence response to sustainable development and challenges.

### **Environmental degradation: the experience of Bangladesh**

Bangladesh is facing serious environmental degradation due to global warming, ozone layer depletion, unplanned urbanization and arsenic contamination in the ground water. The various aspects of this degradation and its reflection on development agenda are discussed below:

#### **A. Impact of Global Warming**

Over the past 100 years, the broad deltaic region of Bangladesh has warmed by about 0.5 degree centigrade. In the future, Bangladesh may get warmer and wetter. Bangladesh is projected to be 0.5 to 2.0 degree centigrade warmer than today by the year 2030. The best estimate is a 10 to 15% increase in average monsoon rainfall by the year 2030. The possible physical effect from global warming and climatic change pose such threat to Bangladesh that damages to coastal infrastructure could reach as much as 12 per cent of GDP by the year 2010; increased incidence and diseases, increased sea level rise and flooding and other natural

hazards, changes or degradation of eco systems, changes in water supply to urban settlements and changes in cropping patterns and other agricultural activities could result in drop in rice production by as much as 10 per cent. It is estimated that due to the predicted rise in sea levels, the 65 per cent of the population who are currently vulnerable to floods, may increase to more than 90 per cent with the possibilities of about 5 million people being severely affected by inundation.

### **B. Droughts and Aridity**

Among the environmental problems in Bangladesh, land degradation due to aridity and loss of crops due to drought may have caused more human sufferings than any other problem in this region. Drought area covers almost one third of Bangladesh, particularly the north-western part. Evaporation rate in most of these areas is high for more than 7 months than the participation rate. Extraction of ground water for irrigation purpose is not adequately recharged. Consequently the aquifer level of ground water is going down steadily.

### **C. Floods**

Historical trend shows that the country experienced 30 damaging floods between 1954 and 1998, of which 12 were severe and 5 were catastrophic. The occurrence of flood experienced by Bangladesh is deemed to be the worst in the globe, both in terms of duration and damage. Abnormal floods submerge about 60 percent of the land, damage crops, property; disrupt economic activities and cause diseases and loss of life beyond all proportion. (Nasreen, 2004).

### **D. Ozone layer depletion**

Ozone layer protects the earth from potentially damaging doses of ultra violet B radiation. In 1985, the first ozone hole was discovered over Antarctica leading scientists to rush to find the cause of this radiation which is responsible for a wide range of potentially damaging human and animal health effects, primarily related to the skin cancer, eye damage and suspension of the immune system, damage crops and disrupt the marine food chain- all of which forecasts human ecological and economic disasters of global significance.

### **E. Unplanned Urbanization:**

Urban degradation, including urban water and sanitation, solid waste disposal and worsening transport related or vehicular air pollution, make the cities of the country a place for dangerous health hazards. Dhaka, particularly, the capital, a home of 10 million people has been converted into a gas chamber due to emission of huge untreated and poisons gases and identified as one of the least healthy cities in the world. It has been estimated that 25,000 deaths are caused annually from air pollution related health impacts. Unplanned high rise buildings, inadequate drainage and



sewage infrastructure, rural to urban migration leading to mushroom growth of slums, poor transport network as well as mismanagement of traffic and transportation, lack of urban land use control and unplanned industrial activities in residential areas, poor solid waste management and conversion of lakes and open spaces into other uses are some of the factors responsible for unsustainable urban growth.

#### **F. Arsenic contamination in the ground water**

Arsenic contamination of ground water is the upcoming catastrophic disaster for Bangladesh. Officials admitted that some 80 million people, i.e., more than the 65% of the country's population are now at risk of arsenic poisoning. Arsenic affected 61 of the 64 districts where arsenic levels have been found to be above 0.05 mg/liter, the nationally accepted standard in Bangladesh (Nasreen, 2002).

#### **G. Environmental impact of shrimp culture**

Ecological effects of shrimp farming include mangrove conversion into ponds, use of chemicals, artificial food supply in shrimp field leading to water pollution and chemical residue runoff, dumping of pond effluent into water bodies which affect neighboring ecosystems and allowing intrusion of salt water in the shrimp field gradually affects the homestead plants, trees and other vegetations. In addition to having an impact on bio-physical environmental costs, shrimp farming has also a multi dimensional social costs. Expansion of extensive shrimp farming brings more agricultural land under saline water. Shrimp field also encroaches upon mangrove forest land whether legally or illegally. This initiates a process of self destruction by breaking the natural food chain with the destruction of mangroves due to increasing encroachment with consequent multifarious natural disaster.

#### **H. Energy Disaster and Environment**

An immense fire at the Magurchara gas field, caught on 14 June, 1997, from an explosion devastated a large part of the forest and several tea gardens in the gas field vicinity of Sreemongal under Maulovi Bazar district in the eastern part of Bangladesh. The air was filled with the raw smell of burnt trees, gas and soil. Added with it was the order of hydrogen sulfide emitting from the gas well. Many wild animals were suffocated by the poisonous gases. The unprecedented fire, which continued for several months, caused irreparable environmental disasters and hazards in the region. A cluster of forest dwelling *Khasia* population has suffered from eviction, economic, social, cultural and psychological trauma. Moreover, nothing is known about the impact of radio active materials on large number of people and other species.

Again very recently similar disaster in another gas field namely in Tangratila caused even greater hazards both in the environmental, socio-economic as well as human sufferings. This gas field has burnt for couple of months and no instant effective measure was taken by the concerned authority.

The Tengratila gas field, located in Sunamganj, was allotted to Niko Resources, a Canadian company. An explosion in the Tengratila gas field in January 8, 2005, led to 30-40 million cubic feet of gas burning per day. The explosion was heard from miles away and panic-stricken residents fled from their homes. The fire resulted in burning of gas worth 50-60 million dollars. The damage to the soil and ecology may be even greater. Petrobangla blamed the operator, Niko Resources, for not using appropriate equipment and procedures in the drilling process. It was alleged that Niko had not qualified for gas blocks in the 1997 bidding process but was given the gas block outside the regular bidding process, because of its connections. Later, in 2003, it bought Block 9, arguably one of the most prolific gas blocks in Bangladesh, from Chevron Texaco.

Many causes are attributed to the above mishap. In addition to lack of adequate regulations or their enforcement, the government seems to have given exploration contracts to companies with inadequate technical and financial resources. Often these companies have poor safety and environmental records (Nasreen, 2005).

#### **I. Tannery waste**

The tannery wastes include liquefied arsenic, solid sodium sulphate, lime, ammonium sulphate, sulphur and formic acid, ban chromium sulphate, fat liquors, preservatives, color pigment and finishing products. These liquid wastes are extremely harmful to aquatic plants and animals. The pollution has its impacts on the aquatic resources too. The fish resources have drastically decreased. Tannery wastes or pollutants contaminated the water used by the dwellers of Dhaka city. Chemical tests have detected heavy metal like copper, aluminum, mercury etc. Laboratory test has detected copper in various fish species cultivated in the water of Buriganga and canals of Dhaka city. Germs that cause jaundice, fever, diarrhoea and other water born diseases had already been found in water.

#### **J. Deforestation**

The causes of deforestation in Bangladesh are due to heavy demands for forest products and fuel wood, and conversion of forest land to such other uses as agricultural, industrial, urban

development and of infrastructures for transportation, energy production and so on. According to one estimate, forest cover in Bangladesh has declined from about 15 percent of the total area to 5 per cent (Nasreen and Hossain, 2004). Out of a total area of two million ha of forestland, less than half is covered with trees, the estimated rate of deforestation being 8,000 ha per year. About 40 per cent of forestlands have reportedly been lost from 1960 to 1990. Deforestation rate was 0.9 per cent in 1970, but rose to 2.7 per cent in 1984-90. Some sources quote satellite surveys and note that forests are declining at a rate of nearly 70,000 ha per year and Bangladesh has less than 0.02 ha of forest land per person, one of the lowest forest-man ratios in the world. If the current trend continues, forests are likely to disappear altogether in the next 35-40 years or even earlier. The implication of continued deforestation is that valuable species may disappear forever. The environmental effects of deforestation are soil degradation, flooding, erosion and above all the danger of climate change (Nasreen and Hossain, 2004). In fact, unplanned urbanization and the commercial logging of woods caused severe environmental degradation and ecologically imbalanced situation in Bangladesh.

#### **Sustainability: miracle or myth?**

Sustainable Development as a concept of Brundtland Commission is criticized by many contemporary scholars both in practical and theoretical framework. The eminent economist and noble laureate Amartya Sen (Sen, 2000:4) focused on the following specific issues:

The Brundtland Commission report presented and defended the crucial understanding that sustainability includes an obligation to future generations. But the concept of sustainable development must necessarily include consideration of intergenerational justice which is missing.

The report combined consideration of intergenerational justice with a concern for the poor in each generation, but it ignores issues of inequality and poverty within each generation.

Unlike some earlier statements on environmental preservation, which focused on conserving specific resources "leaving the world as we found it" the commission shifted attention to conserving the ability of each generation of people to meet their respective needs. Sen (2000:4) argued that the relation between resources and outputs could vary with technical progress.

In fact the idea of needs and their fulfillment are in under serious question marks. Because the consumption level is high or low in different territory, it is impossible to put a common idea of sustainability that should be achievable specifically for the poor country. Sen (2004) also specified Brundtland's framework for better modification. With this freedom-oriented modification, we can see sustainable development as development that promotes the capabilities of present people within compromising capabilities of future generations. And it will provide a broad vision

for all concerns. Though the current sustainable development is advocating a new type of development agenda, i.e optimum exploration and consumption of natural resources, unfortunately the high exploitation and high consumption of resources as well as unequal distribution of resources have created some problems that demand more than this type of sustainability.

### **Conclusion**

Environmental issues need to be dealt with the participation of all concerned, with the government and citizens at the relevant levels. This, unfortunately, is almost absent in Bangladesh. Moreover international organizations and multinational corporations most often are pressing the government to adopt unsustainable policy, which cause serious degradation to the environment in developing countries including Bangladesh. Although poverty alleviation in Bangladesh has been considered as necessary, it must be mentioned that unplanned poverty reduction and development strategy becomes less effective and less sustainable. It is true that there is a need to change the pattern of consumption, especially within the upper and middle class people. To this end the government has taken many policies most of which are not favorable to agriculture and environmental development, rather cause deterioration in the environment. There are also development policies which are identified as anti-poor strategy. According to the Environmental Sustainable Index 2001 Report, Bangladesh has been ranked in 99th position. It scored 14 out of 100 countries in reducing vulnerability. A number of criticisms have emerged against conventional sustainable development approach in context of reducing poverty and maintaining sustainability in resource management.

People of Bangladesh are looking for self sufficiency in food production. Food security is peoples fundamental right to determine their access and benefit sharing over their food, agricultural resources that maintain their livelihood. Such an abject state of affairs looks for no debate or definition of the concept related to sustainability, but a real sustainable Bangladesh without poverty and without degradation of natural resources. The nature of interrelationship between poverty, environment and sustainable development is a complex one and all these variables needed to be analyzed from the social, economics, political, cultural and resource management perspectives. In Bangladesh, we have adopted western development model in the context of poverty reduction, population control and sustainable resource management. But this kind of development models has failed to reduce poverty, population growth as well as environmental sustainability in a meaningful way. A number of factors are involved in this failure which includes lack of good governance and political institution, corruption, western development model, unplanned use of natural resources, defective industrialization and urbanization process, social

disparity, exploitation, inequality etc. There is a need for comprehensive strategy to maintain sustainable resources as a means to reduce the poverty.

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**Annex****Bangladesh Macro-Economic Statistics**

|  | 1991/92 | 1992/93 | 1993/94 | 1994/95 | 1995/96 | 1996/97 | 1997/98 | 1998/99 | 1999/00 | 2000/01 |
|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| GDP (In billion US\$)                      | 31.3    | 32.0    | 33.9    | 37.9    | 40.7    | 42.3    | 44.0    | 45.7    | 47.1    | 47.1    |
| Total Population (In million)              | 113     | 114.9   | 116.9   | 118.8   | 120.8   | 122.6   | 124.5   | 126.3   | 128.1   | 129.1   |
| GDP per capita (In US\$)                   | 277     | 279     | 290     | 319     | 337     | 345     | 353     | 362     | 368     | 368     |
| Total Public Expenditure (In million US\$) | 4,076.0 | 4,151.8 | 5,092.5 | 5,475.1 | 5,670.9 | 5,639.3 | 5,688.5 | 6,196.4 | 6,849.5 | 6,930.0 |
| Revenue Expenditure (In million US\$)      | 2,083.9 | 2,164.0 | 2,277.5 | 2,524.9 | 2,867.3 | 2,880.6 | 3,130.2 | 3,445.7 | 3,617.6 | 3,800.0 |
| Development Expenditure (In million US\$)  | 1,483.6 | 1,607.1 | 2,197.5 | 2,517.4 | 2,416.7 | 2,550.4 | 2,391.1 | 2,565.5 | 3,025.2 | 2,940.0 |
| Other Expenditure (In million US\$)        | 508.5   | 380.7   | 620.0   | 435.3   | 389.3   | 208.4   | 167.2   | 185.2   | 208.7   | 170.0   |
| Total Public Revenue (In million US\$)     | 2,589.8 | 2,925.4 | 3,122.5 | 3,733.8 | 3,753.7 | 4,072.6 | 4,183.9 | 4,113.6 | 3,989.3 | 4,510.0 |

Source: UNDP, 2005

## Home Delivery Practices in Rural Bangladesh: A Case of Passive Violence to the Women\*

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### Abstract

*Child delivery at home is a very common and an age old practice in the rural Bangladesh normally carried out by untrained women leading to numerous complications and often death of the pregnant woman. This paper argues that such home delivery system is in effect is an act of violence perpetrated against the women and is the result of the discriminating gender relations existing in the society.*

### 1. Introduction

The delivery of a baby is an important phase of the reproductive cycle of the pregnant women. It may occur at different places which may include hospital, clinic, as well as home of the pregnant women. Traditionally the practice of home delivery has been going on for a long time in rural Bangladesh.

When a delivery is conducted at home by a non trained person without the use of standard instruments the practice may be called home delivery. In the context of rural Bangladesh different people are found to conduct home delivery in a traditional manner. Sometimes it may be the mother, relatives or the neighbor of a pregnant woman. Generally the older women are found in this task. Quite often the *Dhai* or the traditional birth attendant, in short TBA, is the first priority for the villagers of rural Bangladesh.

From the medical point of view there is risk in the home delivery of a baby. The risk emanates from the unhygienic practices such as the use of unwashed hands or the non use of antiseptic medicines. The absence of necessary medical knowledge and facilities may also prompt the application of force to deliver the child with the probable implication of physical injury both to the mother and the baby. In case of prolonged labor there is the risk of causing injury to the urinary bladder and female genital system leading to different types of fistula such as vesicovaginal fistula or rectovaginal fistula (VVF, RVF). Some studies have found that this type of injury may eventually lead to the breakup of the conjugal relationship between husband and wife.

Violence is an act against an individual which may lead to the physical, mental and psychological impairment of the victim. In the extreme case of violence there may also be the eventual death of the individual. The destruction of property or other important materials necessary to the

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functioning of life is also a part of violence<sup>7</sup>. In a definition that captures the phenomenon in a general term we find the following: "...a violent action is one which involves doing harm, injury or damage to a human being ...to things which are owned, i.e., property, and the harm or injury conceived of is characteristically physical, or at least, quasi physical...causing suffering and affecting health" (Arblaster 1975: 225)

In the context of gender discrimination in different countries the meaning of violence against women incorporates different layers of existence as would be clarified in the following: "The most general expression of women's definition of violence in relation to individual men is being unable to avoid becoming involved in situations and, once involved, being unable to control the process and outcome. With strangers, this definition covers behavior that are visual only (for example, chasing, flashing), verbal (for example, abusive and threatening language), physical (including sexual attacks) and any combination of these elements" (Hanmer 1996:8)

In the context of rural Bangladesh the magnitude and types of violence against women is established on ambiguous premise. In the eyes of many people, including the rural women, the scale of violence against women won't be very wide, while in the eyes of the 'sophisticated' people or those engaged in women's rights movement its magnitude is large<sup>8</sup>. The unavailability of easy information in this regard further shows its complicated nature and the difficulty to capture it in empirical terms.

Despite the difference at the awareness level or the way incidence of violence is perceived in society, there are numerous reports in the newspapers about the incidents of acid burning, wife battering and even killing in the rural areas. Obtaining a consolidated number on the incidence of violence against women is not an easy task since such recording has not been done. But absence of reporting does not mean that the incidents of violence against women are few in number.

## **2. Objective & Methodology**

This paper will focus on the practice of home delivery and try to link it with the phenomenon of violence against women. However, this broad objective will be addressed by reviewing a number of associated issues described below.

i. Explaining that violence is a social construction in the sense that it depends on the awareness of rights and the sensitivity of the people to call it an act of "violence";

ii. Ascertaining women's rights in rural Bangladesh and the phenomenon of violence;

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<sup>7</sup> In communal violence the destruction of property is a common scenario.

<sup>8</sup> The introduction of Nari Nirjatan Ain may be seen as the consequence of the movement of the women's rights activities. There is a clear cut rural and urban divide with regard to the understanding of the violence against women.

- iii. Exploring the phenomenon of home delivery practices in Bangladesh along with causes and effect;
- iv. Establishing the linkage between the practice of home delivery and the act of passive violence against women;

The methodology in a sense is eclectic in nature. The paper is put together by collecting the necessary information from different sources and studies of different periods. A few case studies are borrowed from other field works of the authors while an important source of secondary information was the relevant survey report of NIPORT. Discussion with the relevant experts has also featured as a source of information in this paper.

### 3. Violence against Women: A Social Construction

In this paper we would reinforce the point that the concept of violence against women is a social construction. Different elements of society particularly the power structure and cultural condition, the level of development (e.g., women's educational access or occupational condition) of society

#### **Zohara's Plight**

Tamijuddin is a cultivator in a village of Tangail. He has small amount of land and occasionally rents land from outside. He himself cultivates his land. Generally he goes to the field early in the morning and comes back for lunch in the afternoon. One day his wife Zohra was gossiping with the neighbor and delayed the cooking of the meal. Tamijuddin flared up for the delay in cooking and started beating his wife. His neighbors did not react to it and accepted it as a normal behavior of Tamijuddin to Zohra.

may also be relevant factors for the evaluation of the relationship (i.e., conceptualizing the notion of violence and the societal structure). The women in rural Bangladesh are subject to different kinds of abusive acts but these are hardly labeled as acts of violence. For example, every now and then husbands hurl abusive words at the wives even when there is a trivial deviation from the routine activities or carrying out of some activity not

consistent with the 'expected role' of the women. To illustrate these arguments we have presented here two brief cases gathered from field studies at different occasions from the districts of Tangail and Rangpur. In the first case we have shown that a peasant in Tangail whose name is Tamijuddin beat his wife Zohra because she delayed the cooking of the mid-day meal. The response of the neighbor is interesting. No one of them took exception to the act and accepted it as Tamijuddin's normal behavior and Zohra as responsible for carrying out the household chores including cooking. On the day Zohra was gossiping with her friends and forgot to finish the cooking timely leading to her husband beating her up. It was a minor deviation from her routine activities, but Zohra's husband did not accept it. She has to follow her daily routine like a 'machine'; she cannot spend some light moments of pleasure. There is no protest against such behavior, neither from the kin, in-laws nor the neighbors.

In the second example, Shamima was hurled abusive words by her husband Ohab when she criticized his sincerity about the wellbeing of the family. She gave Ohab her savings for a fruitful investment which he almost wasted through incompetent handling. Shamima pointed out his inefficiency in front of a close neighbor, to which Ohab reacted sharply, which resulted in his hurling volleys of abusive words. However, both Shamima and the neighbor took it as a normal behavior of a 'husband' towards his wife. This shows the cultural condition of rural Bangladesh where such behavior of the men towards the women get approval, and is not defined as an act of violence. In the next section we focus on the relationship between the level of awareness about women's rights and the perception of violence against women.

#### **Shamima's Argument**

Shamima puts her best to reduce the pressure of poverty in her family. Little by little she saved some money and gave her husband Ohab to invest in a business which he did not care to utilize properly. When Shamima criticized his insincerity he did not spare a single abusive word towards her. However, Shamima and her neighbor took it as a normal behavior.

Strong voices are raised against violence against women by the women activist and the individuals serving the cause of discriminated women in Bangladesh. There is also an urban predominance in the protests waged against the violence against women. Urban predominance is understandable since women's empowerment, in relative terms, is greater in the urban areas. Already there are a

few significant achievements made by the women's rights activist against women's discrimination and violence. One such example would be the enactment of the law *Nari o Shishu Nirjatan Protirodh Ain*, for the protection of women and children against violence. If we take into consideration the background of the women's rights activists it is found that they represent the 'advanced' section of the society. Such enlightenment or advanced awareness played an important role for them to identify that the women in our society, particularly in the rural areas, are subject to different kinds of violence although they hardly raise their voices against it.

Now, the question is why certain acts against women are perceived as violence by one group of people, but not by others? It is because of the variation of the societal condition that there is lack of uniformity with regard to the way violence against women is portrayed in our society. While there is the effect of urban/rural, educational and occupational divide in perceiving violence, it may also be further understood if we look at the similar developments in the West. In the introduction we have already mentioned how in the West various behaviors towards women have been portrayed as acts of violence against women. The difference may well be perceived in terms of educational, occupational and economic empowerment of the Western women<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Often the Western woman is considered as a prototype of an empowered woman. Women's empowerment started in the West long before. While we use the notion of Western women we are also aware of the fact that there are still many evidences of violence against women in the West.

#### **4. Women's Rights in Rural Bangladesh and the Issue of Violence against Women**

In the previous section we argued that the concept of violence against women is a social construction and in this section we try to find out to what extent it is related to the establishment of the women's rights in rural Bangladesh. Through different development interventions the condition of the women in rural Bangladesh has improved, which have contributed to the establishment of women's rights. Still there are many aspects that remain to be improved to make a real impact on issues like violence against women.

The sense of rights is directly related to the level of education, occupation and economic empowerment of the women. In general the sense of dignity improves when a person gets access to education and dependable income. It is now part of common sense that maltreatment, insult, neglect and other kinds of disrespectful behavior cannot be accepted by a person enjoying dignity in society. Education generates the sense of rights and status. Dignified occupation also widens ones social status while economic capacity gives the footing to resist the exploitative behavior of the men.

Patriarchy is a common term when we discuss the condition of women in rural Bangladesh. In its conventional meanings it implies that the women are directly subject to the control of men, being confined to the home, pursuing traditional occupations with a complete economic dependence on men. They hardly own any asset or other kind of linkages providing economic assurance. There is a common link between strong patriarchy and women's exploitation. Violence against women is a result of the discriminating and vulnerable condition of the women in our society as is true of other societies.

Relevant data show that the women of rural Bangladesh still lag behind in terms of the indicators like access to education, 'dignified' occupation and economic freedom despite the nationwide program of micro-credit, skill development and awareness-raising. In terms of 'dignified' occupation, if the examples are taken from bureaucracy or university teaching, women's representation would be slim compared to their gender counterpart. Back in 2002 there were 962 bureaucrats in the administrative cadre out of which only 166 were women (GOB 2002). There were no women in the position of additional secretary or secretary. In the university teaching jobs women's representation was only 17 percent as recent as in 1998-99 (Akmam: 2004).

Women's rights are the product of their social condition, as we mentioned above, the changes in which result from the improvement of certain indicators. It is argued that the weak establishment of rights of the women is a major factor for violence against women while the operation of macro indicators bring home a fact that the gross kind of violence against women (e.g., acid throwing, battering, or mortality during delivery out of negligence) could be reduced if there were improvement in such macro indicators.

### 5. Home Delivery Practices in Rural Bangladesh: Its Nature, Causes and Effect

According to a recent estimate for all over Bangladesh, 91 per cent delivery take place at home (NIPORT 2003: 51). In the metropolitan and town areas 32 per cent delivery take place in the hospitals or in places with clinical facilities. In the rural areas on the other hand only 7 percent deliveries take place in a clinical facility which may include *Upazilla* health complex, union health center or the *Upazilla* family welfare center. Hence the above information strongly indicates how widespread the home delivery practices are in rural Bangladesh.

In the review of the background of the people who conducted delivery practices the predominance of the 'traditional'/age long institution can be clearly captured. In quantitative terms three-fourth of all births in Bangladesh are carried out by *Dhai*, the traditional birth attendant. In order to explain the implication of the use of *Dhais* in the context of unsafe delivery we are presenting a case study from the *char* area of Bangladesh. In this story it is found that a very young girl whose name was Renubala met with a tragic end of her life when she failed to give a normal delivery of her child. She was a young girl in her sixteen. One day at the close of her pregnancy cycle she felt pain in her lower abdomen. Her kin called a *Dhai* of the village who said that it was not a very serious case. But the traditional healer could not actually diagnose the case because after a few days when Renu was in the toilet one of the legs of the baby suddenly came

#### Renubala's Death

Renubala was 16 years old at her first pregnancy. At the close of the term of the pregnancy she felt mild pain in her lower abdomen with a little discharge. The pain gradually increased and her kin called a *Dhai* of the village. After a little inspection she concluded that the delivery time was yet to commence. On the same day in the afternoon Renu went to the toilet when all on a sudden the baby came out of the passage. Renu's kin again rushed to the *Dhai* for the delivery. The *Dhai* came and applied force to bring out the baby with the total failure of efforts and leading to the death of the child and the mother.

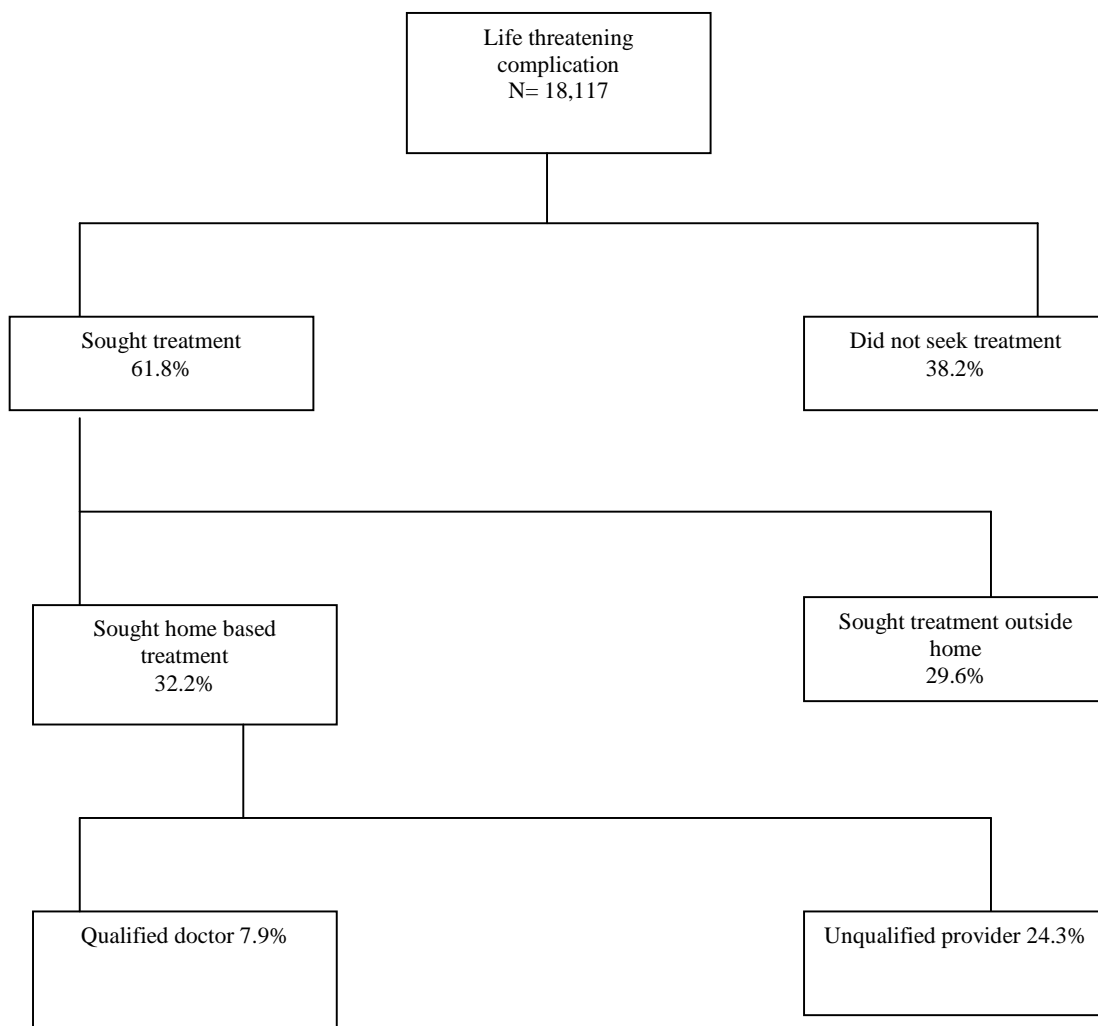
out obstructing the process of normal delivery. The story in the box shows that eventually the case went out of control for the *Dhai* and Renubala succumbed to death.

The extensive use of the *Dhai* in the home delivery in rural Bangladesh has significantly increased the vulnerability of the life of the pregnant women. According to a recent survey there were 382 reported deaths of pregnant women out of 100,000 live births; compared to the developed countries this figure is quite large in terms of its magnitude. The major

drawback of a *Dhai* is her low educational background, lack of medical knowledge and skill and the dependence on unsafe traditional instrument which put the life of the pregnant women at serious risk. The *Dhai* hardly ever refers the complicated pregnant cases to the qualified doctors. In order to preserve their occupational dominance they try to handle the complicated cases leading to the fatal outcome for the pregnant women.

Even in complicated cases the pregnant women are kept at home reinforcing the point that there is severe indifference to the condition of the women. According to a recent survey more than 60 percent pregnant women suffered from some kind of complication during their pregnancy

(NIPORT 2003: 67). The risk of home delivery has to be perceived against this background of large scale reporting of complication. The nature of the complication as mentioned below further shows that it is hardly possible to handle the problems at the home level or by untrained person. For example the complication like blurry vision, high blood pressure, prolonged labor, obstructed labor, eccamplsia, retained placenta, mal presentation cannot be dealt with by an untrained person (NIPORT 2003: 67).



**Diagram 1: Treatment Seeking Behavior by the Pregnant Women in Rural Bangladesh under Life-threatening Situation<sup>10</sup>**

<sup>10</sup> It is reproduced from NIPORT, *Bangladesh Maternal Health Services and Maternal Mortality Survey 2001*, Final Report, Dhaka, page 65.

Closer inspection shows that the after delivery negative effects can even impair the conjugal life of a married women if she is the victim of VVF, RVF or perineal tear. In medical terms the above diseases refer to the dilatation of the female genital with non responsiveness. Unsympathetic husbands instead of taking care of the problem of the wife venture into rupturing the marital relationship<sup>11</sup>.

The rigidity of the culture of indifference to the women is further manifested if we take into account the information presented in Diagram 1 on how the cases of complications were handled. As high as 38 percent pregnant women did not seek any treatment even in a life threatening condition. Among those who sought treatment, 32.2 percent opted for home based treatment. Within this category 24.3 percent received some kind of treatment from unqualified provider who would mostly be *Dhais*. In other words more than 60 per cent complicated pregnant cases were left to fate.

In broad terms there are two sets of factors that are responsible for large scale home delivery and not visiting the qualified doctor by the pregnant women. The patriarchal social structure results in producing indifference to the pregnant women, an underlying argument of this paper. According to the relevant statistics the husbands and the in laws are the main decision makers with regard to the seeking of treatment for the pregnant women (NIPORT 2003: 65). According to the precept of the 'traditional' wisdom pregnancy is a natural phenomenon hardly requiring any special attention. Economic and social empowerment of the women change the scenario, if we take into account the fact that increased education and wealth have motivated a woman to seek treatment from qualified personnel during pregnancy.

The second set of factors that discourage visiting a facility or qualified health personnel include the following. Sometimes difficult transportation discourages a pregnant woman to visit qualified medical personnel. Poor service facilities in the medical center are sometimes believed to be a deterring factor to visit the qualified medical personnel. .

## **6. Home Delivery as Passive Violence to Women**

Presence of a perpetrator is an integral part of the definition of violence. In other words violence is an act which is done by someone against another person. The phenomenon which is the focus of the paper gives us a different picture. The victim of the home delivery in terms of different physical injuries is the pregnant woman. If the injury is called a piece of violence one may ask who the perpetrator is. That there is no perpetrator in the visible sense does not weaken the claim of violence voiced in this paper. It is a 'passive' violence because of the rather apparent absence of a perpetrator. One may also call it self-inflicted violence if the emphasis is on the refusal of the pregnant women to visit a qualified doctor. However, the indifference of the pregnant women to

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<sup>11</sup> Personal communication with an expert of UNFPA.

visit a qualified doctor and instead depending on the folk attendants is an outcome of the social indifference which began during the childhood of a girl. Discrimination is the basis of indifference to women in our society. It is commonly seen with regard to the distribution of meal among the children in a family, sending the children to the school or treating the sick children by a health professional; the girl child is on the wrong side of the balance<sup>12</sup>. Such discriminations of the girl child gradually turn into the overall societal indifference (think of the notion in which a young girl is described as a burden because the parents need to pay dowry at her marriage). Women themselves have internalized the discriminating values in rural Bangladesh and as a result considered their condition as justified. Thus many rural Bangladeshi married women are found to approve the dominating behavior of their husbands even if it is demeaning in the eyes of others. Chronic indifference of the women towards themselves will be noticed sometimes in their being the last person in the family to take meal and at a late hour. Such neglect of the women may widen, shaping the attitude of the husbands and others as a natural occurrence. Leaving the pregnant women in the hands of the *Dhai* or other untrained personnel is an extension of the general neglect of the women.

The position of the rural Bangladeshi women in power structure is certainly an important issue in the discourse of gender led discrimination. Even the experts who think that the notion of 'separate working sphere' of men and women in rural Bangladesh is not a correct articulation since the women significantly contribute to the important processes of a household admits the behind-the-scene presence of the women in power structure (White 1992: 23 & 146). If the distress of the rural Bangladeshi women are identified in their incapacity to ensure a sustainable livelihood, literacy, skill or voicing their rights, certainly the relevant data portraying the educated pregnant women visiting the qualified medical personnel reinforce the issue of women's empowerment. When the in-laws are found to discourage the visit by a pregnant woman to the qualified medical personnel, lopsided power structure at the household level draws our attention to the causal analysis of the problem of this paper.

Calling home delivery a passive violence is primarily premised on the facts that the victims sometimes suffer severe physical consequences with a life long pernicious effect. Although the perpetrators are unknown in the literal sense, the role of the patriarchal husbands and the in-laws remind us of the presence of the perpetrator in some form. In a broad sense the discriminating gender relationship is the actual perpetrator in this context which is so powerful that the women themselves internalize the culture of indifference towards them.

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<sup>12</sup> There are several studies on the discriminating attitude to the girl children in rural Bangladesh; the introduction of female student stipend is more concrete example of governmental intervention to offset the balance against the girls with regard to the comparative enrolment.



## 7. Conclusion

The belief about the home delivery as a consequence of ignorance of the rural people and an effect of poverty has not been dealt with in this paper. Why does this paper strive to connect the link between home delivery and violence against women? It is largely because of the reason that the demand for home delivery to end could be more effectively made if we can identify the element of passive violence in it. The severe outcome of home delivery has been spelt out here. By the stretch of imagination one may even suggest that the individuals who carry out such tasks may be dubbed as a kind of perpetrator. However, the very point of perpetrator is not so much important in this paper, it rather points the finger at the social structure particularly the discriminating gender structure which explains its occurrence. Since violence against women is a social construction calling home delivery as violence depends on the condition of the level of empowerment of the women in society.

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## Book Review

### **End of Sociological Theory and Other Essays on Theory and Methodology.**

By Nazrul Islam. Dhaka: Anana, 2005.Pp230.

Many Western sociologists today feel that sociology 'risk annihilation' unless we rework the sociological theory in a creative way in the face of onslaught by postmodernism (Denzin, 1995, p405). But few sociologists from the South have seriously grappled with the issue of theory or theory construction or the relevance of Western sociological theory for the South. In this volume Nazrul Islam has just done that admirably. Although it is a book of essays that he has written over the last two decades, the pieces hang together around the central concern of sociology –the concern carved out by the great minds of sociology in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and that continues to inform the sociological cosmos today. The articles of this book can be neatly arranged in four sections-the state of sociological theory, methodological dilemma, reexamination of the classical heritage of sociology in terms of works of Max Weber and Marx, and empirical studies as examples of theory construction in the context of the South.

In the first essay appropriately entitled "Sociology in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Facing the Dead-end", the author develops a very fascinating hypothesis that sociology in the twentieth century was an American enterprise with a distinct biography of its own and which was quite different from its classical forms in Europe. The claim is quite novel and here it is worth quoting the author.

The focus of European sociology was on nations and civilizations and macro level generalizations. But this sociology came to an abrupt end in the 1920s because of the growth of Fascism and later the World War. Further developments in Europe took place from the 1950s onward but mostly as a reflection of the developments in America. So, when I refer to American sociology I refer to sociology quite different from the sociology the founding fathers in Europe intended to establish. All of such differences, however, turned out to be liabilities for American sociology and crippled the discipline from the start (P18-19).

From 1920s sociology in the US went through a process of unbridled or even cancerous growth without proper boundary or clear focus and was obsessed mainly with US society –a unique society without historical depth. There was no comprehensive paradigm or theoretical models to unite diverse fields of sociology. From the very beginning the US sociology was anti-theoretical. Although Parsons tried to synthesize the European masters in 1937 and focused on societal change in 1960s, it was soon discarded as a consequence of its serious shortcomings. Theory construction was never a 'hallmark' of American sociology. The other theoretical models that the US sociology developed were micro level theories like symbolic interaction theory and phenomenology, which had contributed very little to sociology. Sociology had become an anomic universe of scattered ideas. This was the reason why sociology had, in Turner and Turner's phrase become 'an impossible science.' The US sociology never in its history sought to study society. This is evident in any textbooks of sociology. Figures like Moore, Smelser, Bendix and Wallerstein have remained largely outside the mainstream American sociology.

Thus Islam finds that the best paradigm that US sociology developed – functionalism – never went beyond Comte and Spencer. For this reason sociology faces a dead-end. In this century sociology may be extinct because of its irrelevance or remain an umbrella term for a wide variety of sub-disciplines. Here the author has an original idea that he pushes to the extreme. Structural/Functionalism is not one single theory and it is a minor irony that sociology in the US followed Parsons rather than Merton who had developed a much more sophisticated form of functionalism.

Two other essays "End of sociological Theory", and "American Sociology: Crisis in Isolation" follow the same theme in greater depth. Theory, according to the author, means quantitative, formal and macro level theory. The absence of this type of theory is conspicuous in American sociology. Between 1927 and 1937 no article was published in the *American Journal of Sociology* having theory as its title. Although use of theory has figured more prominently since 1930s, it has been mainly used for hypothesis testing in empirical research. The author, following Turner and Turner, suggests that efforts at theory construction was modeled so strictly on natural sciences that it was impossible to meet its requirements and it led to the undoing of theory construction in sociology. The great emphasis on positivism led to widespread protest against it and the rise of qualitative techniques.

Theory construction in American sociology has, however, proceeded along two streams- through meta theories and in sub-disciplines. Meta theories are mainly pursued by 500-600 sociologists from the older generation who remain largely isolated from the discipline. The development of theory is fragmented in the subfields. This is due to the sprawling of sub-disciplines. The ASA recognizes about 50 sub-fields of sociology and there are many sub-specialties within each sub-field. The crisis in theory building has also been fueled by decline of fund for research and lack of job opportunities which force sociologists to move increasingly to the margins of sub-disciplines. Theory courses are losing ground and in future, the author apprehends, there will be few left to teach or construct theories.

The author thinks that it is still possible to revive the tradition of theory building in sociology with the greater data-base and larger resources available today. But it is not possible to do it from USA because it has failed to incorporate its other and embody different realities and different voices.

In "The Paradigmatic Status of Sociology" Islam narrates the discourse on paradigm in sociology and argues that Kuhnian definition of paradigm is faulty and a more acceptable definition of paradigm has been provided by Ritzer in terms of space of inquiry and the range of possible discovery. Islam rejects the idea that sociology, as indicated by Kuhn himself, is in a pre-scientific stage. Sociology was born with a paradigm as crafted by Comte and has ever remained in state of crisis.

This is a very well-written paper that elegantly encapsulates much of the debates about paradigm within sociology. I have, however, completely different ideas about paradigmatic status in sociology. Although the debate is more or less over, it is not much difficult, with hindsight, to see what Kuhn meant by paradigm. For Kuhn paradigm meant an important discovery in science that solves a strategic puzzle and around which a community of scientists builds consensus about theory, method and space of inquiry. What Ritzer and many other sociologists have done is to distort Kuhn and claim paradigmatic status for sociology as an act of impression management. In a sense the debate over the paradigmatic status of sociology has been useless.

Sociology is characterized by war of worlds simply because it is different from natural sciences in the sense that there is no strategic discovery or puzzle –solving activity in sociology that can herald a revolution and claim the loyalty of concerned scientists. But what is fascinating about Kuhn's theory is that any field of knowledge does show rise and fall of theoretical perspectives or schools-discourses change over time and space albeit often without dying. Sociology never had a revolution in Kuhnian sense and unlikely to have one in future.

In "Sociology, Phenomenology and Phenomenological Sociology" Islam provides an interesting critique of phenomenology focusing on Husserl and Schutz. He shows that phenomenological sociology did not remain true to Husserl and its programme to liberate itself from the vices of positivism had failed. It has achieved nothing except escalating the fragmentation of the discipline. In "On the Question of Validation in Qualitative Methodology" Islam carries his arguments further by examining the claims of qualitative methods. In this powerful analysis the

author meticulously exposes the weaknesses of the qualitative methods and finds that it has no scientific validity at all.

If qualitative sociologists accept that sociology is a science, they should also recognize that science has one and only one method that classifies such disciplines as Physics, Chemistry and Biology as sciences...If sociology claims to be a science it must be on the basis of the same method of inquiry. When we talk of a different methodology we are talking of a different class of disciplines...We are then no more in the domain of science. A different methodology means a different approach to knowledge and hence is necessarily a distinctly different class of disciplines (77).

In "Problems of Sociological Theory Building: Call for a Micro-Macro Divide or Old Wine in Two Old Bottles" Islam advocates that sociology be divided into macro sociology dealing with issues such as societies and civilizations and micro sociology focusing on the individual and interaction.

Islam explores Marx through an analysis of positivism in his thought, his concept of alienation, and the Asiatic mode of production and occasionally provides new insights on these enduring issues. Two essays on Max Weber—"From ideal Type to Pure type: Max Weber's Transition from History to Sociology" and "Protestant Ethic and Not-so- Sociology of World Religions" stand out as two of the most important essays of the collection which are provocative, original and fascinating to read. Islam does debunk the Protestant ethic thesis of Weber not in terms of historical evidence or Orientalism, but more on logical/methodological grounds.

Again another two of his essays deal with the issues of development and underdevelopment. In "Defining Intellectuals and Their Social Locations in a Peripheral Society", Islam builds upon Marx, Mannheim and Gramsci for identifying the role of intellectuals in peripheral society. Islam was one of the first sociologists to undertake an empirical test of development theories. A brief summary of this work is presented in the paper entitled "Sociology of Development: In need of a Fresh Paradigm" and thus his data-set covers two decades from 1960s to 1970s. The analysis shows that none of the existing theories explain the dynamics of development in terms of the interface between domestic growth factors and foreign economic influences and the results call for a fresh paradigm.

In this book Islam, as an apostle of Comtean positivism, renews the call for revival of grand theories of sociology for the comparative study of societies and civilizations. He hopes that such a revival can begin from the South. For many in the South who are looking for a way out from the postmodernist impasse or from a Western sociology that has little relevance for the South, Islam provides a pathway – a return from the South to puritanical positivism. Although I agree with some of Islam's ideas (Islam, 2003), I am not so cynical about the present or future state of sociology. I am rather skeptical about going back to the stranglehold of positivism. I agree with him that we, from the South, need to venture into new theoretical terrains to fill the blankness created by the fading 'rage' of postmodernism.

It is extremely difficult, if not impossible as Islam shows, to fruitfully engage with sociological theory from the South and Bangladesh in particular where we don't have good library facilities or any support for purely academic activities. It is really laudable that Islam has been able to keep his gaze fixed on theory for all these years. And it is always a pleasure to read him – always intellectually stimulating. The book has quite a few typing errors and then it is not easy to find a professional publisher in the country who would like to publish such an 'eschatological treatise'. In the hubris of Postmodern Age and in the 'End of History' who needs a theorist!

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