



## *Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology*

### **Volume 4. Number 1. January 2007**

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## *Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology*

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### **Editor**

Nazrul Islam

### **Associate Editor**

S Aminul Islam

### **Managing Editor**

M. Imdadul Haque

### **Book review Editor**

A.I.Mahbub Uddin Ahmed

Emails: [editor@bangladeshsociology.org](mailto:editor@bangladeshsociology.org)  
[mneditor@bangladeshsociology.org](mailto:mneditor@bangladeshsociology.org)  
[breditor@bangladeshsociology.org](mailto:breditor@bangladeshsociology.org)

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Room No. 1054, Arts Faculty Building, University of Dhaka, Dhaka – 1000, Bangladesh

Phone: 88-02-966-1921, Ext. 6578. Email: [bejs@bangladeshsociology.org](mailto:bejs@bangladeshsociology.org)

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### **Note from the Editor**

The political upheaval that swept over the country at the end of the last year took its toll on us as well. With much of the country's literary life closed down for weeks together academic pursuits suffered. Political turmoil and constant tension in the air forced everyone to pass days on an ad hoc basis. With a stalemate forced on the political situation by the declaration of emergency, things have settled down somewhat but with civil rights curtailed and uncertainties over the future course of politics everyone is still on the edge.

Yet, life must go on and so must our e-Journal. Although a little late we are coming out with a whole new group of authors, including fresh graduates. We are proud to promote these fresh minds and hope their contributions will enrich our stock of knowledge as they will build on the resource base of sociology, particularly of the sociology of Bangladesh.

Shahid M. Shahidullah opens up a whole new front for us introducing a "new science" that not only acknowledges the subjective but goes on to accommodate uncertainties. Focusing on the practices of modern medicine and psychiatry he shows how science merges with religious beliefs and not so scientific cures for the healing of the body and the mind.

Mahmuda Khatun delves deep into the learning process of the children. With a sophisticated set of statistical tools and a large data base she looks at the learning curves of the children of different racial and family types in the US. She concludes that race and family based policy is much needed to increase reading IRT score of children. While Bunmi Omolayo and A.B. Owolabi try to shed light on the age old controversy regarding the use of monetary rewards as predictor of employees' commitment. Using medium scale organizations in Nigeria, they argue that monetary reward affects the commitment level of employees irrespective of their gender, work tenure and educational level.

The other two studies are on Bangladesh. Farhana Zaman looks at the process of political empowerment of the women in Bangladesh. With a sample of female "ward commissioners" from Dhaka City Corporation and Narayanganj Municipality she argues that though women ward commissioners come to power through proper political participation and commitment, they cannot demonstrate their commitment to the public primarily because of the patriarchal nature of politics as well as the mind set of their male-counterparts. She also argues that constitutional assurance is unable to ensure the effective participation of women or their political equality. Zeenat Huda Wahid traces the circumstances that led to the opening up of the sky to satellite television in Bangladesh. She argues that the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) government had to allow satellite television to operate in the country due to demands from middle and upper classes within the country as well as forces from the outside like the CNN. The government, thus, in spite of an anti-Indianization stance, unwittingly, paved the way for cultural domination by India.

This issue is rounded off by reviews of two very important publications. The first book is on the *Political Economy of Land Litigation in Bangladesh* which introduces the reader to the staggering number of litigations that take place each year and the consequential losses to the land owners of thousands of millions of Taka, impoverishing many in the process. S. Aminul Islam while

reviewing the book notes a few flaws like the lack of a theoretical model and weak methodology but impresses upon the reader the tremendous importance of the data presented in the book.

The other book, *Election under a Caretaker Government*, is on the electoral participation process in Bangladesh focusing on the 2001 general election. The book seeks to explain the 2001 elections in terms of the factors that influenced losses and gains in the parliamentary seats for the two major political parties, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the Awami League. S. Aminul Islam brings in his own expertise and experience in dealing with the work and finds in the book a very rare and extremely necessary examination of the democratization process going on in the country.

We hope that with these provoking essays Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology will continue to maintain the standard it has set for itself and claim its rightful place in the academic world.

**Nazrul Islam**

## Science and Religion: The Quest for Knowledge and Certainty in the Postmodern Era [The Cases of Medicine and Psychiatry]

**Shahid M. Shahidullah\***

**Abstract:**

*For almost three hundred years since its birth in the seventeenth century, modern science did not have an epistemologically legitimate space for the study of religion. The study of religion did not fit into the positivist perspective of modern science based on the notions of truth and certitude. Social and human sciences, particularly medicine, psychology, and psychiatry, under the veil of positivism, did not regard religion as a serious topic for scientific investigation. However, there is a new conception of science today. In the new conception, Heisenburg's principle of uncertainty is basic to human knowledge. Human knowledge now is seen as inherently limited, uncertain, and probabilistic. This new notion of science has created a new era of relations between science and religion. In medicine and psychiatry, there is growing today a new movement for the scientific study of the relevance of religion and spirituality in health and healing. There is growing an epistemologically legitimate space within medicine and psychiatry for serious investigation of the role of human subjectivity. This new epistemological turn, however, is also socially constructed in the context of postmodern discourses on the limits of human rationality and the role of subjectivity in the construction of human knowledge.*

### Introduction

The rise of postmodern discourses has brought a series of new challenges in our thought and knowledge. One of the significant intellectual challenges is the concern to understand the role of human subjectivity – the role of the mind, the soul, spirituality, and sensibilities – in the shaping of human knowledge and actions. Whether human subjectivity can be a proper domain of scientific analysis is a problem as old as the birth of Greek philosophy. Socrates valued the notion of the soul, but it was he who laid the foundation of secular philosophy and human skepticism. And by laying the foundation of secular philosophy, Socrates also laid the foundation of modern science.

The birth of the Scientific Revolution in the seventeenth century, however, led to the demise of the notion of skepticism, particularly in the domain of science. Modern science, for the last three hundred years, was guided by the notion of certitude. Through the remarkable discoveries of Nicolas Copernicus [1473-1543], Francis Bacon [1561-1626], Galileo Galilei [1564-1642], Johannes Kepler [1571-1630], Rene Descartes [1596-1650], and Isaac Newton [1642-1727], modern science emerged as the dominant epistemology in the seventeenth century. Modern science left no epistemological space for religion and transcendental skepticism in the understanding of the nature and the universe. Modern science described the nature as a giant machine of unfathomable patterns of laws created some billion years ago out of the chaos of the Big Bang. (Parker, 1998) John Locke's naturalistic psychology, Auguste Comte's positivism, and

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\* Virginia State University, USA. Email: [sshahidu@vsu.edu](mailto:sshahidu@vsu.edu). Biographical note at the end of the article.

the neo-positivism of the Vienna Circle – all lend credence and legitimacy for the exclusion of human subjectivity from scientific knowledge even in the domain of human sciences. The dominance of the positivist and empiricist conception of science remained unchallenged until about the 1970s.

From the beginning of the 1970s, a new epistemological movement, however, began to grow among the philosophers of science in both sides of the Atlantic. The notion of scientific positivism began to be largely discarded. Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1971) was certainly an opening gun. Through a meticulous examination of the history of the development of scientific discoveries using the notion of paradigm, Kuhn argued that scientific knowledge is inseparable from human subjectivity. But more important for the new epistemological turn was the rise of new skepticism within the domain of science itself. The rise of Quantum Physics, Particle Physics, Molecular Biology, and many other branches of science from the beginning of the 1920s have been advancing a notion that scientific knowledge is inherently uncertain and limited by nature.

The purpose of this article is to examine how is this post-positivist epistemology of science reshaping the debates between science and religion? How are the debates between science and religion being recast in the context of the post-positivist concerns for the understanding of human subjectivity? The main argument of the paper is that through its own evolution, modern science itself has come to a stage of development where the traditional conflicts between science and religion are being reexamined. There is developing within science, particularly in medicine and human sciences, an epistemological space for the reevaluation of the role of religion and spirituality. The notion of spirituality is regaining an acceptance in the doing of postmodern science and scientific discourses. This new paradigmatic turn in the five thousand years history of relations between science and religion is both socially constructed in the context of postmodern conditions, and epistemologically justified in the context of the notion of post-modern science. The cases of medicine and psychiatry have been examined to substantiate the arguments.

### **Conflicts between Science and Religion: Some Historical Notes**

One of the oldest and earliest conflicts in human knowledge and thought is between science and religion. This conflict started almost half a millennium before the birth of Christ. One historian notes: "Since at least as early as 450 B.C., Western intellectuals have periodically shown intense concern over the degree of integration of scientific attitudes, techniques, and ideas into the broader culture from which they emerge" (Olson, 1982:1). In different stages of the growth of civilization starting from the Ancient Near East to the rise of modern urban industrial society in Europe, science and religion have deeply conflicted over the issue of the creation and

the constitution of valid knowledge. The search for validity has been the driving force behind the growth of human knowledge since the beginning of the evolution of human reason.

Over the last two thousand years, the positions of religion and science on the issue of knowledge validity have remained largely unchanged. For religion, particularly, the great organized religions, except Buddhism, God's revelation is the source of the certitude of human knowledge. For science, particularly modern science, knowledge validity is a matter of construction. The universe is a giant machine understandable by its own inexorable laws and principles, and it has evolved out of chaos in the domain of nature some billion years ago. Humans are constellations of atoms and molecules, and human life has evolved out of chaos in the chemical domain of life some million years ago.

Although modern science is less than five hundred years old, and modern science-based industrial civilization is less than two hundred years old, science as a human passion for understanding the mysteries of nature and life is as old as the civilizations of the Sumerians and the Babylonians; it existed in Ancient Near East about three-thousand years before the birth of Christ. The Sumerians and the Babylonians did not have organized religions, but had beliefs in deities, heavenly bodies, and the supernatural control of nature and life. Their religion sharply opposed the validity of mathematical astronomy discovered by their scholars. The conflict between religion and science began from that ancient time.

Ancient Athens made some remarkable progress in naturalistic philosophy and learning (Drees, 1996), but the Athenians "did not tolerate the natural philosophers and chatters about things in the sky, as they called them, dissolving divinity into irrational causes, blind forces, and necessary properties. Protagoras was banished, Anaxagoras put under restraint, and Socrates lost his life through his devotion to philosophy" (Olson, 1982: 80). The Athenians "blamed the decline of their political and military fortunes on the scientific intellectuals' undermining the traditional religion, law, and morality, and on the corrosive cynicism that they spawned" (Olson, 1982: 105). However, it was from that time that science began to grow as an autonomous sphere of intellectual activity, and a concept of scientific community as a separate group of believers began to take shape from ancient Athens. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle praised what later Merton called "disinterestedness" in the search of truth, and this "encouraged the isolation of scientific attitudes and activities from other cultural concerns almost until the Renaissance" (Olson, 1982: 143).

In the history of relations between science and religion, no event is more significant than the rise of Christianity in the West. In 352 A.D., Roman Emperor Constantine accepted Christianity, and made Christianity the legal religion of the entire Roman Empire. It was after the rise of Christianity to power that an epistemological war broke up between science and religion, a war, which shaped the history of relations between science and religion for almost fifteen hundred years.

The early Christianity and the Latin Fathers “were much less sympathetic to pagan science and philosophy than their Alexandrian counterparts” (Olson, 1982:161). The real problem was “that for Christians in the second and third centuries A.D., as for Greek polytheists in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C., attempt at scientific understanding too often seemed to lead to religious undermining” (Olson, 1982:161). However, the movement of conversion at that time also brought many classically trained intellectuals into the leadership of the new religion, like St. Augustine and St. Ambrose, who made some significant efforts to produce “critical linkages between Christian doctrines and Greco-Roman learning”(Olson, 1982:178). Augustine’s “authorization of some training in secular studies, especially in logic and mathematics, encouraged the development of an institutional format for Christian education that contained a substantial scientific component as a background to theological studies” (Olson, 1982:164).

Another intriguing turn in the history of relations between science and religion came when Europe entered the Dark Ages after the fall of the Roman Empire. Classical secular science and learning began to disintegrate in the face of the advancement of the early Christianity. The rise of Islam in power in the tenth century provided a fertile soil for the advancement of science. In about two hundred years, almost the whole of ancient and classical Greco-Roman works in science was translated into Arabic. There also emerged at that time, under the active patronage of the Islamic royalties, a critical mass of secular scientific community within the Islamic civilization. (Nasr, 1968)

The relations between science and religion, from the beginning of the rise of Christianity up to the twelfth century, can be described as one of mutual tolerance. There were theological oppositions to science, but they did not produce intense conflicts of political nature. “In its early formative years, Christianity came to have a vastly more favorable outlook on the physical universe than the other Eastern mystery cults with which it competed; and as a consequence, Christian religion and scientific systems became intertwined in such a way as to make natural theology, grounded in the theory that God could be understood through the study of the world, a central feature of early Christian thought” (Olson, 1982: 205). In the same way, Islamic scholars held the view that the understanding of nature by reason is a way of understanding God. The Quran, they said, stipulates that men should seek knowledge of their maker through the study of nature and its interpretation by reason.

From the beginning of high Middle Ages in the thirteenth century, the relations between science and religion began to be intensely antagonistic, and this period, which I call the period of the struggle for epistemological power, continued up to the advent of modernity in the nineteenth century. From the beginning of the high Middle Ages, when the Church was becoming a dominant political instrument in the advancing feudal society, science was also growing as a dominant intellectual specialty centering on the medieval universities. The social and political advancement of religion on the one hand, and the growth of a secular environment for science



and learning on the other, created the ground for the break up of an epistemological war. It began probably from 1277 when the Bishop of Paris, with the support of the Pope, condemned a set of 219 theses derived from the ideas of Aristotle and Avicenna – the great Islamic scholar. The reason for the condemnation was that those ideas contradicted the basic Christian doctrines and scriptures.

The war between science and religion further intensified in the late Middle Ages when “there came, one after the other, five of the greatest men our race has produced – Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Descartes, and Newton – and when their work was done, the old theological conception of the universe was gone” (White, 1928:15). The Copernican Theory challenged the validity of ancient spiritual cosmology, which was the ground for the rationalization of the Church’s fundamental claim as a mediator between man and God. The Catholic Church was, therefore, quick to reject the Copernican discovery. Since Galileo openly advocated that the Copernican system was true, he was immediately declared as a heretic. After the publication of Galileo’s “Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems,” he was tried as a heretic and given a life imprisonment in Rome. “In the middle ages, doubt was sin, because it questioned God. For Descartes and the modern age, doubt by unmasking and investigating conventional plausibility is now a virtue” (Thielicke, 1990: 57). Newton’s theory of gravitation “was fatal to the old theory of creation, for he had shown throughout the universe, in place of almighty caprice, all-pervading law”. (White, 1928:15).

Science and religion entered into a new phase of relations with the decline of the middle ages and the advent of modernity. The modern period has been a time of increasing isolation and separation between science and religion. The emergence of modern age signified the epistemological triumph of scientific worldview over that of religion. This began from the rise of Reformation, and progressed through the Renaissance, Scientific Revolution, American Revolution, French Revolution, and the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century. While the Reformation, Renaissance, and the Scientific Revolution brought a change in the religious worldview, the American Revolution, for the first time, laid the foundation of a secular polity. With the emergence of a secular polity, secular learning became the dominant intellectual ideology of modern society, first in America, and then in the whole world through the process of modernization (Hovenkamp, 1978). Religion was not abolished from the civil society and its authority on spiritual knowledge was not taken away. But the possibilities for epistemological conflicts have been removed by legally and politically keeping religion separated from the domain of secular learning and activities.

However, the conflicts and tensions between science and religion, and the sacred and secular, did not end with the rise of secular polities in the twentieth century. As science became more advanced, its epistemological territory began to widen. The widening boundary of modern science, particularly biology and genetics, are now invading in a far more aggressive way the

boundary of spirituality. This is opening a new era of tensions between science and religion in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The expanding growth of the movements of creationism and scientology, and the global rise of fundamentalism in politics in modern societies suggest that the schism between science and religion and their epistemological war is far from over.

### **Evolutions in the Nature of Modern Science and Scientific Epistemology**

Alfred North Whitehead once said, "It is no exaggeration to say that the future course of history depends on the decision of each generation as to relations between science and religion." Different ages of civilizations had also different perspectives on relations between science and religion. From the beginning of rudimentary science in the Ancient Near East around 450 B.C to roughly about 1200 A.D., the relations were of mutual tolerance. Neither science nor religion had social and political power to impose an epistemological dominance. During the reign of early Christianity and the Islamic civilizations, (Nasr, 1968) theological justifications were even made for the pursuit of naturalistic learning and philosophy.

From 1200 A.D. to the advent of modernity in the nineteenth century, for about eight hundred years, relations between science and religion were antagonistic and sometimes intensely conflicting. (White, 1928). The growth of political power in the hands of the medieval Church on the one hand, and the growth of science as an autonomous sphere of intellectual activity in the medieval universities on the other, created the grounds for intense ideological wars. The Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century, and the advent of modernity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, brought the triumph of science over religion. From then, there began a new stage of separation and isolation between science and religion to the twentieth century.

From the later part of the twentieth century, however, we can see the growth of a new paradigmatic turn in relations between science and religion, and this is happening particularly because of the changing nature of science and its epistemology. For the first time, in the history of relations between science and religion, there is now growing a scientific justification for the understanding and exploration of religion and spirituality. There is growing in postmodern science, in other words, an evaluative space to understand the epistemological relevance of religious and mystical knowledge.

The philosophical view of science that emerged after the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century, and the view which modern society has permeated to grow in almost all its institutional sectors, is that science is qualitatively different from other branches of knowledge and intellectual activities. "According to a familiar traditional view, science is a distinctive enterprise, demarcated sharply from all other human pursuits" (Shapere, 1985: 1). This distinctive ideology of science has been broadly described as positivism. The positivists and empiricists reject the knowledge of the scriptures because that knowledge, according to them, is surrounded with

spirituality and mysticism, and it is unseen, unobservable, and beyond the boundary of human experience. As Karl Popper described, "The positivists believe that they have to discover a difference, existing in the nature of things, as it were, between empirical science on the one hand and metaphysics on the other. They are continually trying to prove that metaphysics by its very nature is nothing but nonsensical twaddle -- 'sophistry and illusion', as Hume says, which we should 'commit to the flames'" (1968:35).

David Hume's "Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding" (1902) claimed that experience and observation are the key ingredients of scientific knowledge. For Hume, scientific knowledge must be based on observation and not contemplation and recollection. Scientific understanding must be grounded in experience and verification. As Karl Popper again remarked, "The positivist dislikes the idea that there should be meaningful problems outside the field of 'positive' empirical science -- problems to be dealt with by a genuine philosophical theory" (1968:5). The positivist ideology created a radical epistemological disjunction between science and religion.

For almost three hundred years, positivism has been the dominant ideology of modern science. However, from the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the essence of positivism began to be seriously questioned by philosophers of science. "That tradition, as is well known, is now rejected almost universally. The notion of "observational facts" as brute undeniable givens, wholly independent of our fragile and insecure interpretations of them was all but surrendered, and the idea that there was anything "given" in experience was thrown in jeopardy" (Shapere, 1985:1). Out of the revolt against positivism, there began to grow a new conception of science, and it is within this new conception that there is developing an evaluative space for the scientific exploration of religion and spirituality. "The twentieth century has witnessed that long process of cultural adjustment in the west that has sometimes been described as deconversion -- a learning to leave with an absence of God" (Brooks, 1996:323).

The new science is based on the notion that theories are radically underdetermined by observation. Observations and experience are theory-laden, and that there could be an infinite number of alternative explanations for any given problem (Stockman, 1983). The growth of science, according to the new conception, is a matter of the rise and decline of various interpretative frameworks or "paradigms" as Thomas Kuhn (1971) described it. It is these frameworks, which guide "the construction of evidence, observation, fact, explanation, and theory, and which even determine the methodological rules, and the goals of science itself" (Shapere, 1985:2). The interpretative frameworks, in turn, are based on presuppositions, and "differ in fundamental, perhaps incommensurable, ways from tradition to tradition or from group to group" (Shapere, 1985:2).

Science does not reveal the truth of a fact for once and for all, as the positivists claimed. Science grows through trial and error (Popper, 1969), and through a process of evolution in

thought and ideas ( Bhaskar, 1978; Campbell, 1974), a process, which is a human activity, and a matter of human knowledge construction (Mendelsohn, Weingart, & Whitley, 1977)

A series of new conceptual and epistemological ideas, which have been confirmed by many discoveries in modern astronomy, quantum physics, particle physics, molecular biology, neurobiology, genetics, and cognitive sciences that there is now growing a legitimate space for the evaluation of religious knowledge within the bounds of science. The first is the notion that science, like all other forms of knowledge, deals with illusive reality. “The recognition that physicists dealt with models of an elusive reality, and that no one model could give an exhaustive account of subatomic phenomena, allowed a little humility to enter the dialogues between scientists and theologians” (Brooks, 1996: 330).

The second is the notion of indeterminacy. The positivist model was based on the notion of certitude. The rise of quantum physics and the general acceptance of Hinesburg Uncertainty Principle [HUP] by the contemporary scientific community have permanently changed the notion of truth and certitude in modern science. The prevailing notion is that for any fact or an event at a given point of time, there may exist several probable explanations. In a Quantum Mechanical World, scientists cannot understand the behavior of particles with 100% certainty. They can understand only in terms of probabilities. Albert Einstein and Christian Bohr strongly argued that, “recent developments in quantum mechanics demanded a complete renunciation of the classical ideal of causality and radical revision of attitudes toward the problem of physical reality” (Brooks, 1996:327). Noble Laureate Physicist Richard Feynman found the same principle of indeterminacy to be true. “Philosophers have said that if the same circumstances don’t always produce the same results, predictions are impossible, and science will collapse. Here is a circumstance – identical photons are always coming down in the same direction to the same piece of glass – that produces different results. We can not predict whether a given photon will arrive at A or B” (Feynman, 1983: 19). British astronomer Arthur Eddington “even made the extraordinary remark that religion first became possible for a reasonable scientific man about the year 1927” (Brooks, 1996: 327).

Closely related to the notion of indeterminacy is the principle of complementarities between different levels and explanations. This means that scientific facts can be explained in multiple ways and means. The study of structures should not mean that cultural explanations are invalid. Emphasis on objectivism should not render subjectivist ideas irrelevant. “Denying that mechanistic explanation rendered teleological explanation superfluous, Christian Bohr had argued for their complementarities. For an exhaustive account of animal behavior, both were required” (Brooks, 1996:332).

Another important conception is the idea of holistic knowledge. The positivist ideology was based on the assumption that the behavior of a complex system is deducible and understandable from the behavior of its component parts. The new science claims that the

understanding of the emergent behavior of complex systems needs a holistic perspective. The Newtonian physics, the special theory of relativity, and the general theory of relativity have explained different aspects of the nature, but what is still missing is a holistic understanding of the nature as a totality. (Davis, 2002)

Today, one of the theoretical issues in physics is the formulation of a “theory of everything,” which will unify all the above into a single theory. Three physicists, - David J. Gross, H. David Politzer and Frank Wilczek – received Noble Prize in 2004 for making this fundamental discovery of the theory of everything – the Wave Theory. Quantum mechanics requires a holistic approach. As Bohr explained, “The future of wholeness typical of proper quantum phenomena finds its logical expression in the circumstance that any well defined subdivision would demand a change in the experimental arrangement incompatible with the definition of the phenomena under investigation” (Brooks, 1996:330). It is this postmodern trend of thought that begins to produce a space for the evaluation of religious knowledge and spirituality in science, particularly in human sciences. (Roberts, 2002).

In the twentieth century, there was an unprecedented degree of progress in science. Significant theoretical developments have been achieved in physics, astronomy, biology, physiology, medicine, artificial intelligence, psychology, sociology, economics, political science and many other branches of knowledge. These achievements, however, have brought human knowledge to a new threshold from where more questions are being raised than answered. What is happening is that science has not only improved our knowledge, it has also enlarged the boundary of our ignorance. As one astronomer says: “It is somewhat paradoxical that the more we know about the universe, the more we seem not to know. We know the amounts that go into the cosmic recipe, but not most of the ingredients (Gleiser, 2001:233). Recent astronomical discovers suggest that there are thousands of galaxies, and they are still evolving and receding from each other in the boundless time and space of the universe. (Ivars, 1993)

Modern biology has discovered that the DNA is the smallest unit of life. The scientists working with the Human Genome Project found that probably about 100,000 genes are the ultimate deciders of the beauty and the variety of human life, and the mystery of human death and longevity. These epoch-making discoveries suggest that there is a need and scope for complementary analysis and holistic interpretations to further expand our understanding of the illusive realities of life and nature.

I am not arguing in this paper that religion is becoming a dominant perspective in modern science. Majority of the working scientists are not fully aware of the changing nature of science and scientific epistemology. The positivist ideology is still the dominant perspective in scientific research. What I am suggesting is that within the epistemological boundary of postmodern science, there is growing a serious discourse for the evaluation of religion and spiritual knowledge for complementary and holistic interpretations, particularly in medicine, psychology, and

psychiatry. In modern medicine and psychology, we have enormous understanding of different empirical aspects of the mind, body, and consciousness, but we still need a holistic understanding of the principles that govern those realms to make the “everything” of a human being.

### **Religion and the Quest for Knowledge in Postmodern Medicine**

Medicine is one of the earliest branches of knowledge and specialization, and religion is one of the oldest sources of medicine. In almost all great religions, there are texts and writings on medicine. (Ashley, 1985) The prophets and the sacred texts of all religions --Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam -- deliberated on issues of health, disease, and well being (Desai, 1989; Rahman, 1987; Pellegrini, Langan, & Harvey, 1989; Vaux, 1984). As the Bible said: “ My son, if you have an illness, do not neglect it, but pray it to the Lord, and He will heal you. Renounce your faults, amend your way, and cleanse your heart from all sin” (Vaux, 1984:120). In the Judeo-Christian tradition, there is a theological concern for sickness “which was highlighted by the biblical history of Jesus’ caring for the sick” (Pellegrino, Langan, & Harvey, 1989: 131). Religion has been a source of knowledge in medicine, not only because of its rites and rituals for cure and healing, but also because of its central concerns with the sacredness of the body and the sanctity of life and death (Pellegrino & Thomasma, 1981; Steen & Thung, 1980).

For almost five thousand years, medicine and religion were epistemologically and institutionally linked. The advent of scientific medicine, however, started a process of delinking between medicine and religion. Scientific developments in physiology, anatomy, biology, and biochemistry in the nineteenth century laid the foundation of modern medicine. With further developments in molecular biology, genetics, and laser in the twentieth century, modern medicine has become scientifically one of the most advanced professional cultures.

The philosophy and the characteristics of modern medicine are based on the ideology of scientific positivism. Modern medicine, like physics, believes in demarcations, empiricism, quantification, observation, and experience. It believes in the need for rejecting the unseen and the unobservable. The subjective aspects of illness -- a patient’s desire, thinking, behavior, fear, feeling, emotion, and love -- are deliberately avoided in scientific medicine.

The dominant medical model of disease “is biomedical with molecular biology as its basic scientific discipline. It assumes disease to be fully accounted for by deviations for the norm of measurable biological (somatic) variables. It leaves no room within its framework for the social, psychological, and behavioral dimensions of illness. The biomedical model not only requires that disease be dealt with as an entity independent of social behavior, it also demands that behavioral aberrations be explained on the basis of disordered somatic (biochemical or neuropsychological) process” (Engel, 1977:130). In view of the medical model, the human body is an autonomous functioning machine, apart from the mind and soul, with its own atomic, chemical, electrical, and

structural properties. A physician's knowledge and training is complete when he or she has learned about the body. Conventional medicine creates a sharp dualism between the mind and the body, and the body and the soul. For the last three hundred years, these remained the dominant themes in medical education, which are surprisingly similar not only in the West but also in all post-colonial countries and cultures.

In the context of our central problematic, the question is whether and to what extent is modern scientific medicine creating a legitimate epistemological space for the evaluation and understanding of religious knowledge about disease, health, and the human body? Is modern medicine becoming open for complementary and holistic analysis? The nature of modern medicine today is paradoxical. (Cassell & Seigler, 1979) On the one hand, it is increasingly becoming scientific, rational, and technocratic. On the other, there is a growing recognition in the role of subjectivism. My argument here is that these two processes in medicine are becoming mutually complementary. The increasing growth of science and technology is creating medicine's increasing interests in subjectivism – interests in the relevance of the unseen and unobservable facts of the mind and behavior, particularly the role of religion and spirituality. Religion is the realm of human subjectivity – the realm of the unobservable that create a relatively fixed trajectory of beliefs and a sense of the divine in the minds of an individual. It is this trajectory of spirituality that for many is the guiding frame of reference for the soul and salvation, and the organization of the mind and materiality. In modern medicine today, there is a growing trend of research to understand the scientific basis and the clinical values of this trajectory of human spirituality. This trend is not a new epistemological turn to move away from scientific medicine, but a new epistemological space within its domain to examine the scientific basis of spirituality for a more holistic analysis of health and healing.

From the beginning of the 1970s, many popular writings began to grow reflecting on the limitations of scientific medicine. These writings grew in the context of the New Age Movement, Transcendental Meditation, Alternative Medicine, Alternative life-styles, psychic healing, Eastern Medicine, and many other disparate sets of revolts against modern medicine in particular, and modernity in general. Around the 1990s, this trend of thought began to move from popular writings to professional medicine, when medical doctors began to empirically examine the relations between health, healing, and spirituality. The institution of professional medicine then gradually began to be more open for research and education in this area.

Major medical journals, both in the United States and Europe, such as the *New England Journal of Medicine*, *Annals of Internal Medicine*, *Archives of Internal Medicine*, *American Journal of Medicine*, *American Journal of Public Health*, *Social Science and Medicine*, *British Medical Journal*, and the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* published hundreds of empirical and experimental studies in recent years on the problem of religion and spirituality. [Table 1] (Astin, Harkness, & Ernst, 2000; Daaleman, 2004; Dossey, 2000; Jonas and Crawford, 2003; Rosner

2001; Yawar, 2001). Most of those studies, using methods of clinical trials, controlled clinical trials, randomized controlled trials, and double-blind experiment, found strong correlations between spirituality and longevity, lower cancer rate, lower blood pressure, increased survival after cardiac surgery, overall health, and life satisfaction. (Astin, Harkness, & Ernst, 2000; Dossey 2000; Mueller, Pelvak, & Rummans, 2001; Testerman, 1997). In a major study of 232 open heart surgery patients, one group of medical researchers, for example, have found that “Those reporting no strength or comfort from faith had more than 3 times the risk of death as those with faith. Those reporting neither faith nor social support system had 10 times the risk of dying” (Testerman, 1997: 3; Oxman, Freeman, & Manheimer, 1995).

There is now growing a consensus within the scientific medicine that more serious studies and education are needed for a holistic understanding of the impact of prayer and spirituality on the nature and dynamics of human physiology, neurology, endocrinology, immune system, and the vortex of human Consciousness. As Dr. Redford Williams of the Duke University Medical Center says, “The mainstream cardiologists need to recognize what more and more studies are proving -- that a patient’s social situation and mental mindset can make or break modern medical care. Given these findings, and with more than 500,000 people suffering heart attacks a year, it would be unethical, he says, not to start aggressively screening patients and treating those at risk with some sort of therapy.” He believes that the existing “culture of cardiology” should be changed. (Benson, 1996)

A new paradigm, described as “distant healing”, is now creating a widening community of researchers. (Austin, Harkness, & Ernest, 2000; Dossey, 1982; Dossey, 1989; Olshansky & Dossey, 2003) As one empirical study concludes: “Remote, retroactive intercessory prayer said for a group is associated with shorter duration of fever in patients with a bloodstream infection and should be considered for use in clinical practice” (Leibovici, 2001: 1). Distant healing is the reincarnation of the ancient notion of “pranic healing”. “Prana” is a Sanskrit word that means a vital force of energy. The Hebrew and Islamic scriptures call this as “Ruah”. The Japanese describe it as “Kid”; the Chinese word for “Prana” is “Chi”, and the Greeks call it “Pneuma”. (Jonas & Crawford, 2003).

## **Table 1: Selected Empirical Studies on Medicine and Spirituality**



Author /Year	Research/Subject	Journal/ Publication	Findings
H. Benson (1977)	Hypertension and Relaxation Response	New England Journal Medicine 296:1152-1156	Meditation is positively correlated with lower hypertension
E.T. Creagan (1997)	Attitudes and Cancer Survival Rates	Mayo Clinic Proceedings 72: 160-164	Long-term survivors have strong faith and social connectedness
H.G. Koenig, et al. (1988)	Religion and Well-Being	The Gerontologist 28:18-28	Positively Correlated, effects are greatest among women
H.G. Koenig, et al. (1997)	Religion and Immune Function	Intl. Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine 27:233-250	Religion is positively correlated with stable immune system
H.G. Koenig, et al. (1998)	Religion and Smoking	Journal of Gerontology 53 A: M426-M434	Smoking is lower in people with religiosity
H. G. Koenig, et al. (2000)	Religious Attendance and Survival Subjects: 3,968	Journal of Gerontology 54 A: M370-M376	Positively Correlated
H. G. Koenig (2002)	Religion and Congestive Heart Failure Subject: 196 Patients	Journal of Religion and Health 41: 263-278	Positively Correlated
K. L. Lapane, et al. (1997)	Religion and Cardiovascular Disease: A study of 5241 adults	Journal of Religion and Health 36:155-163	Religiosity is positively associated with lower risk of cardiovascular disease
D.B. Larson, et al. (1989)	Religion and Men's Blood Pressure	Journal of Religion and Health 28:265-278	Religiosity is positively correlated with low LBP
S. Levy, et al. (1987)	Stress and Natural Killer Cell Activity in Cancer Patients	Journal of Clinical Oncology 5:348-353	Stress reduces natural killer cell activities
W. Linden, et al. (1996)	Psychosocial Interventions and Coronary Artery Disease	Archives of Internal Medicine 156:745-752	Mortality is significantly lower with psychosocial interventions
T. E. Oxman, et al. (1995)	Religiosity and Recovery From Heart Surgery: A Study of 232 Patients	Psychosomatic Medicine 57:5-15	37 patients who were deeply religious did not die during the 6-month time
M.A Parsinger, et al (1984)	Neurological Basis of Beliefs	Perceptual and Motor Skills 58:963-975	Religiosity is positively associated with high temporal lobe activity

The National Institutes of Health [NIH], which is the nucleus for the production of scientific knowledge in health and medicine in America, has established, under a Congressional mandate, a National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine in the mid 1990s. The Center's Mind-Body Program is the core institutional locus for research on the science of transcendental meditation, imagery, spirituality and distant healing. The NIH's Complementary and Alternative Medicine Program [CAM] provides funds for the development religion and spirituality teaching and training within the medical curriculum.

One of the studies done at the Center for Spirituality and the Healing at the University of Minnesota in 2001, funded by the NIH's CAM Program, found that about 91 percent of their Medical School faculty and 88 percent of 4<sup>th</sup> year medical students believe that clinical care should integrate the best of conventional and CAM practices. About 92 percent of medical faculty and 94 percent of medical students believe that conventional medicine could benefit from ideas and methods of alternative and complementary medicine. About 86 percent of medical faculty and 81 percent of medical students recognized the need to include alternative and complementary medicine in their school's curriculum. (Kreitzer, 2001)

More than 50 university medical schools in the United States in recent years have integrated religion and spiritual teaching and training in their curriculum. The John Templeton Foundation is one of the major pioneers in this movement. In recent years, it has provided grants to more than thirty major medical schools including Johns Hopkins, Harvard, University of Pennsylvania, Brown University, University of Minnesota, Case Western Reserve University, and the University of California at Los Angeles.

Along with the growth of research and curriculum innovations, there is also growing a critical mass of highly qualified medical doctors who not only research, but also work as scholar-advocates for the increased presence of religion and spirituality in clinical medicine. The Duke Center for Spirituality, Theology, and Health in the United States is one of the leading world centers for the scientific study of religion in health and medicine. There is a group of medical doctors and health professionals in this Center who are at the forefront of this movement.

Medical doctors in clinical practice today are also being increasingly demanded by their Board of Examinations, and medical education and training accreditation agencies to make medical judgments in the context of "patient-centered" rather than "illness-centered" approach in medical practice. In the patient-centered approach, the understanding the patient's subjective trajectory of faith and beliefs and their relations with the conditions of patient's physiological trajectory is a basic task for the clinician. Thus the relations between religion and scientific medicine are entering into a new age of tolerance and understanding. (Koenig, 2001)

### **Religion and the Quest for Knowledge in Postmodern Psychiatry**

Modern psychiatry is the hybrid creation of phrenology, physiology and psychology. Until the advent of modern science and its positivistic ideology, psychology was deeply interconnected with religion and spirituality. Socrates gave birth to secular philosophy, but he valued the understanding of the soul as a way of understanding humanity. The humanistic orientation of classical Greek philosophy “developed the notion of the spiritual soul that possess the unique capabilities of the intellect and the will. The soul was elaborated as the central element in the interpretation of life offered by Plato and Aristotle” ( Brennan, 1994:26). The great medieval Christian scholar Thomas Aquinas said, “the human person is not simply a physical machine propelled by external stimuli or environmental pressures. Rather, the person is a dynamic entity, motivated internally by the soul” (Brennan, 1994:58).

Modern psychology and psychiatry emerged through the dethronement of the soul from the mind and human personality. The positivistic ideology in modern psychiatry has advanced the notion that the mind as an autonomous region with its inner working rules and principles, and they are observable and empirically understandable. The central point of theorizing in psychology during the last one hundred years of its growth has been the understanding of the structure and organization of the mind, and the internal processes, which govern its functions and activities. In this quest for understanding the mind, reference to religion and spirituality, except in the Jungian psychology, has been deliberately avoided.

German psychologist Wilhelm Wundt [1832-1920], who was trained primarily in physiology, is commonly described as the father of contemporary scientific and positivist psychology. Wundt’s structural positivism was based on the assumption that “psychology must be kept free of the forces of metaphysics, common sense, and utilitarian or applied interests, which would destroy its integrity” (Brennan, 1994:169). He theorized that there are certain identifiable structures of the mind, and their functions and expressions are mediated by the brain and neurochemistry. Wundt’s positivist psychology was a marriage between psychology and biology. It “was the outgrowth of studies of sensory physiology and psychophysics” (Brennan, 1994: 182).

In United States, the positivist psychology was imported from Germany in the late nineteenth century through the writings of William James [1842-1910]. William James, who studied medicine at Harvard, published his *The Principles of Psychology* in 1890. James’s psychology combined American pragmatism and German positivism. He enlarged the scope of Wundt’s positivist psychology and developed the notion of physiological psychology “that stressed brain in accounting for mental experience, or consciousness”. For James, the task of psychology was to observe, measure, and conceptualize the streams of human consciousness rooted in biochemistry.

Modern psychology and psychiatry came to a new turning point with the arrival of Freud’s psychoanalysis in the early part of the twentieth century. Freud [1856-1939] theorized that the

mind is governed primarily by the unconscious. The unconscious is a region, governed in turn, by the blind forces of Eros. Neurosis is the result of sexual repressions dictated by culture. Religion is an illusion created by the sublimation of repressed instinctual desires. And the organized monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are the symbols of collective neurosis. In his last work, *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), Freud wrote that religion is not a cure but a disease of the mind created by the development of culture and civilization. Freud, who claimed himself a “godless Jew” (Gay, 1989: 685), said in his *The Future of An Illusion* that religion is the product of our inability to cope with the control of civilization on the one hand, and the control of the passions for instinctual gratifications on the other. “In the same way, a man makes the forces of nature not simply into persons with whom he can associate as he would as his equals – but he gives them the character of a father. He turns them into gods “ (Gay, 1989:695). But Freud did not see the scientific basis of religion as a phenomenological reality – the role of that constructed reality of god as a father. The science of psychiatry based on psychoanalysis draws a sharp boundary between science and religion. (Fromm, 1950) Traditionally, psychoanalysis does not pay much attention to the role of distant human illusions about heaven and hell, and the anxiety of the soul for salvation – the illusions that might play a critical role in dealing with the storms and turbulent of the human mind.

From the 1920s to the 1970s, for almost half a century, American psychology was dominated, along with psychoanalysis, by the paradigm of behaviorism. Behaviorism, developed by John Watson [1878-1959] on the basis of the theories of classical conditioning, left no scope for studying human subjectivity. For the behaviorists, the task of psychology is not contemplation for the unseen and unobservable forces of human behavior. The mind and the soul are not real because they are not empirically observable. The task of psychology is the discovery of the laws that govern the observable and overt human behavior. B.F. Skinner, who emerged as a dominant figure in behavioral psychology in the 1960s and 1970s, described human organism as a behaving system that follows some observable “uniformities or lawful relations” (Skinner, 1953:15). Human behavior can be understood, regulated, and predicted. The task of psychology, for Skinner, is to observe and measure the impact of positive and negative reinforcements on behavior. Everything else that cannot be seen and measured is not real. “Many people interested in human behavior do not feel the need for the standards of proof characteristics of exact science; the uniformities in behavior are “obvious” without them. But these idiosyncrasies are a costly luxury” (Skinner, 1953:16).

While behaviorism was dominating psychology in the 1970s, psychiatry became deeply entrenched into medicine and physiology. From the 1970s, medicalization emerged as a dominant paradigm in psychiatry and mental health. New discoveries in physiology, molecular biology, neurology, endocrinology, genetics, and pharmacology made medicalization a major perspective in the study of mind and mental health. There emerged a pervasive belief in

psychiatry and mental health practitioners that mental health is largely a biological problem, and therapies should be based on medical and pharmacological interventions. (National Advisory Mental Health Council, 1995) The recent directions in the psycho-biological theories of addiction, violence, and aggression, and recent explosion in the use of various antipsychotic drugs clearly shows this trend of the growth of medicalization in modern psychiatry (Goodwin 1994; Franklin, 1994). One of the studies done from the Office of Research, American Psychiatric Association (Pincas, Henderson, and Blackwood, & Dial, 1993) reviewed the trends of research in 1,236 articles published in two major psychiatric journals in 1969-1990 - American Journal of Psychiatry and Archives of General Psychiatry. The authors found that most of the research was dominated by biology and psychobiology. (Freedheim, 1992)

However, from around the same time of the dominance of medicalization, we can also detect and discover the growth of a postmodern concern for subjectivism in contemporary psychology and psychiatry (Jones, 1994; Kimble, 1994; McWhirter, 1989; Nicholas, 1994; Worthington, 1989). In the 1990s, the perspective of medicalization and positivist psychiatry came under serious attacks. As Dan Blazer, a psychiatrist at the Duke University Medical Hospital said, "I believe there is a real vacuum in academic psychiatry. Mainstream psychiatry is missing something. Religious longing, craving is missing. We are a people of the spirit. Psychiatry has become mechanistic. There is no longer a philosophy in psychiatry" (Boyd, 1994:45-46). In the same tune, David Larson, who was once a psychiatrist at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), claimed that the spiritual dimension is almost totally ignored by the mental health field. "Therapists often have unresolved feelings about religion or religious issues. When I present research data about religion to a mental health audience, I point out that the data are asymmetrical. About 75% to 80% of the time religion is beneficial to health. Mental health audiences react with surprise. They are stunned" (Boyd, 1994:69-79).

The last two decades have seen the growth of enormous amount empirical studies in psychiatry on the role of religion and spirituality in mental health both in the United States and Europe (Blass, 2001; Breakey, 2001; Koenig, 2001; Plante & Sherman, 2001). One study analyzed 1200 studies and 400 research reviews on relations between psychiatry and religion, and found that most studies discovered positive correlations between spirituality and the status of mental health. (Koenig & Larson, 2001). Major scientific journals of psychiatry and psychology, such as the American Journal of Psychiatry, Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, Canadian Psychology, British Journal of Psychiatry, British Journal Of Psychology, International Review of Psychiatry, Advances in Psychiatric Treatment, Psychological Medicine, Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica, American Psychologist, American Journal of Psychotherapy, Journal of Humanistic Psychology, Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, and the International Journal for the Psychology of Religion, now publish scientific research on relations between religion and psychiatry. [Table 2] The Committee on Psychiatry and Religion of

the American Psychiatric Association, the Division of Psychology of Religion of the American Psychological Association, Association of Transpersonal Psychology and many other groups and organizations today conduct serious scientific discourses on the role of religion in mental health.

Religion has been recently described by the American Psychological Association as a scientifically legitimate problem for discussion by the counseling psychologists. Research on recent developments in counseling psychology shows that there has been a major growth in the interest on religion and spiritual questions in counseling (Bloch & Chodoff, 1991; Janov, 1991). One recent study finds that the majority of psychologists sampled perceived spirituality (but not necessarily institutionalized religion) to be relevant both personally and professionally. They also believe that the therapist's personal stance toward spirituality influence the outcome of therapy, particularly with those patients who are more religious and spiritual in their behavior and worldview (Hendlin, 1989).

The American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders [DSM-IV, 1994], which represents a barometer of cultural change in the profession of psychiatry, included a new entry on religious or spiritual problems for first time the time in its existence for half a century. The clinicians are now asked to investigate the client's cultural and religious frames of reference – their subjective trajectories of life. "A clinician who is unfamiliar with the nuances of an individual's cultural frame of reference may incorrectly judge psychopathology, those normal variations in behavior, belief, or experience that are particular to the individual's culture. For example, certain religious practices or beliefs" (DSM-IV, 1974:XXIV). The Manual describes, "This category [V62-89] can be used when the focus of clinical attention is a religious or spiritual problem. Examples include distressing experiences that involve loss or questioning of faith, problems associated with conversion to a new faith, or questioning of other spiritual values which may not necessarily be related to an organized church or religious institution" (DSM-IV, 1994: 685).

One of the other examples of this trend of growing scientific interest in human subjectivity is the revival of the Jungian approach to psychotherapy (Aziz, 1990). For a long time, Jungian psychology was not taught at major universities and training programs. Jung's work was intentionally and deliberately ignored because he broke away from Freudian psychoanalysis, and his theorizing of psychology in terms of religion and spirituality did not fit into the positivistic mode of psychotherapy. In his "Psychology and Religion" published in 1937, Jung developed a theory of the relevance of religion in psychology.

**Table2: Selected Empirical Studies on Relations Between Psychology and Spirituality**

Author/Year	Subject and Research	Publication	Findings
D. Bienenfeld, et al. (1997).	Psychosocial Predictors of Mental Health in Elderly Women	Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry 5: 43-53	Religious commitment is strongly correlated with mastery on mental health
J.K. Cochran, et al. (1999)	Religion and Non-Marital Sexuality	Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion 30: 45-62	Religiosity is inversely related to attitudes toward sex
K.S. Kendler, et al. (1997)	Religion and the Psychopathology of Substance Abuse	American Journal of Psychiatry 154: 322-329	Personal devotion and religion reduces substance abuse
H.G. Koenig, et al. (1992)	Religious Coping and Depression	American Journal of Psychiatry 149:1693-1700	Religious coping is inversely related to Geriatric Depression Scale
H.G. Koenig, et al. (1993)	Religion and Anxiety	Journal of Anxiety Disorders 7:321-342	Religious people are less likely to have anxiety disorders
H.G. Koenig, et al. (1994)	Religion and Alcoholism	Hospital and Community Psychiatry 45:225-231	Religious people are less likely to have alcoholism
H.G. Koenig, et al. (1998)	Religion and Recovery From Depression	American Journal of Psychiatry 155: 536-542	Patients with high religiosity scores experienced faster recovery
H.G. Koenig, et al. (1998)	Religious Coping in Elderly Patients	International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine 27: 365-376	Religion is related to greater cognitive functioning
J. Neeleman, et al. (1993)	Religion and the Psychiatrists	Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavia 88: 420-424	92% believe that religion and mental illness are connected
G.B. Parker, et al (1982)	Religion and Coping Behavior	Archives of General Psychiatry 39: 1386-1391	56% indicated that prayer was effective; 41% would increase prayer
S. Pfeifer, et al. (1995).	Psychopathology and Religious Commitment	Psychopathology 28: 70-77	Religion provides comfort, meaning and hope to patients with mental disorders
M.R.Trimble, et al. (1997)	Neuropsychiatric Symptoms from the Temporal Limbic Lobes	Journal of Neuropsychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences, 9: 429-438	Religiosity and temporal lobe activities are connected

Jung came to his theory of religion through his theory of truth. Truth, Jung claimed, is a fact and not a judgment. If a woman believes that there are angels, it is a psychological truth to that woman. It does not matter whether there are angels or not.

Jung was skeptical about the Freudian notion that our unconscious region is a region of unmet sexual cravings. For Jung, who was deeply curious about human mythology, the unconscious region of the mind is the store of human beliefs and mythology. For Freud, religion

was an illusion, and for Jung, it was a genuine psychological phenomenon worthy of serious scientific investigation. Jungian psychology is that it is not just “aggression and sex but the need for meaning (spirit) that propels us as individuals.” Jung’s cravings for the scientific understanding of human subjectivity cost his friendship with Freud (Donn, 1988), but now, after almost a century, he is recognized as one of the classical founders of postmodern psychology.

### **Conclusions: Science, Religion, and Postmodernism**

The advent of modernity has brought a radical break from the past five thousand years of human knowledge and experience. One of the most radical disjunctions was between the sacred and the secular, and this was achieved by the triumph of modern science. Modern science did not abolish religion, but made it epistemologically irrelevant. The modern liberal secular society did not abandon religion, but made it politically irrelevant. For the last two hundred years, science was dominated by the ideology of positivism. Within the philosophical and methodological framework of positivism, there was no epistemologically legitimate scope for the study of human spirituality and subjectivism.

But today’s new science challenges the basic assumptions of positivism. No serious philosopher of science today believes that positivism depicts the true nature of science. The theoretical progress in science, particularly in quantum physics, particle physics, new astronomy, and new biology created a new meaning of science, and that turned the old dichotomy between object and subject up side down. In the post-positivist conception, the study of human subjectivity is a legitimate scientific inquiry.

The post-positivist turn in science, however, came in the wake of the rise of postmodern discourses in general. (Smart, 1992; Touraine, 1995). Postmodern discourses are discourses essentially of the relevance of human subjectivity in the production of human knowledge and actions. (Gilbert, 1997) Postmodern discourses are also a discourse of chaos, uncertainty, fragmental reality, deconstruction, power and domination, and the essentiality of holistic analysis. The postmodern human conditions are characterized by remarkable economic growth, and the expansion of consumerism and advanced technology for most of western societies. But postmodern conditions are also characterized by crisis in human relations, mind, and mentality. In no stage of human progress, so many millions of people remained continuously depressed and medicated with anti-depressants of different kinds as they are in modern societies. In no stage of human progress, so many millions of families were devoid of the depth of love and connections as they are in postmodern societies. Medical experts believe that 60 to 90 percent of all doctors visits involve stress related complaints” (Benson, Corliss, & Cowley, 2004:46). One government survey shows that “nearly half of all Americans used mind-body interventions in 2002” (Benson, Corliss, & Cowley, 2004: 46; Dubovsky, 1997). These interventions include meditation, deep relaxation techniques, and deep breathing techniques, hypnosis, and guided imagery. “Close to



half of them also said they prayed – perhaps the oldest and most basic form of mind-body medicine” (Benson, Corliss, & Cowley, 2004: 46).

The growing problems of depression, suicide, violence, aggression, and loneliness in modern societies created a vast crisis of analysis for science, particularly for human sciences. (Gilbert, 1997). It is this crisis of analysis that led to the growth of an epistemological space in modern science for the study of human subjectivity. (Wallis, 1996) But it is also related to the growth of postmodern social discourses and postmodern culture. The rise of post-positivist science made the study of human subjectivity epistemologically relevant. The rise of postmodern culture made it a part of postmodern discourses.

The classical sociological predictions about modernity, particularly those of Durkheim and Weber, who theorized about the role of human subjectivity and the need for its scientific understanding, remained surprisingly close to postmodern discourses. (Turner, 1991) Modern science in fact is struggling with the Durkheimian paradox. Durkheim theorized that God did not create humans. Humans created God for their own needs to reason chaos, crisis, and uncertainty. Postmodern science and discourses are trying to make a sense of one of the greatest discoveries of humanity - the discovery of God. The English poet Thomas Hardy once imagined himself attending “God’s funeral” (Wilson, 1999) in the context of modernity and the Enlightenment. But God has reincarnated in discourses on postmodern science and culture. In contemporary postmodern discourses, we see growing relations between science and religion for a more complementary and holistic analysis of the mysteries of the human body, mind, soul, and subjectivity.

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**Biographical Note:** Shahid M. Shahidullah is an Associate Professor, Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice, Virginia State University. His major areas of research include sociology of science, crime policy, globalization, and governance in Developing Countries. Westview Press published his first book "*Capacity-Building in Science and Technology Development*" in 1991. E.J. Brill published his second book "Globalization and the Evolving World Society" in 1998 [Co-edited with P.K. Nandi]. The American University Press will publish his book "*The Changing Paradigms of Crime Policy in America*" in 2007. He is also currently working on a book "Postmodern Science and Postmodern Criminal Justice".

**Address:** Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice, Virginia State University, Petersburg, Virginia, 23806, USA. [Email: [sshahidu@vsu.edu](mailto:sshahidu@vsu.edu)] and [drshahid@cox.net]

# Unmasking Children's Reading Ability: Context US Society

Mahmuda Khatun\*

## Abstract:

*The present study attempts to examine the relationship between children's reading ability with race and types of family. Previous studies which have been done so far did not perform multi-level regression model and growth trajectories to see the variation of children's reading ability based on race and family types. The data for this study comes from ECLS-K study. This is a nationally representative sample of US. The number of sample of this study is 30599 and the total student is 10248. Using multi-level regression model and growth trajectories, this study established the link between race and family types with reading IRT score. Race and family based policy is much needed to increase reading IRT score of children.*

## Introduction

For centuries, racial deprivation of children is a major concern in the USA. Minority racial groups in the United States call into question the different structural policies of the government. The main argument was that due to anti-racial policies which exist in the society, racial deprivation becomes wider than usual in terms of well-being. The popular argument was that because of these policies, minority racial groups have been experiencing more poverty and more unemployment, low quality housing, low access to transportation, less health coverage, and poor nutrition compared to the dominant groups. All these indicate low socio-economic status of minority racial groups. Black (30%) children are more vulnerable to poverty compared to white (9%) children (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). Black children, three out of four, grow up in a household with no financial assets or zero assets. An evaluation of Panel Study of Income Dynamics data demonstrates that income from assets positively affects children's educational attainment. Children of homeowners are less likely to dropout of school or to have children before 18 than children of renters (Rector and Hederman, 2003). This perpetuating deprivation could potentially affect children's reading ability and children could be left behind compared to their non-minority counter groups.

Nearly 15% of the Gross Domestic Product has been spent on children but still some children's academic attainment is lower than usual. In most cases, family has been seen as one of the key determinants of children's achievement. From the economic perspective, family is considered as a production unit, which tries to generate utility for its members. Adults in the family make

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\* Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Dhaka. Email: [editor@bangladeshsociology.org](mailto:editor@bangladeshsociology.org)

decisions regarding the generation of activities in the family. In most cases, parents make a variety of choices such as level of fertility and family stability that could influence the well-being of the members of the family, especially children (Haveman and Wolfe, 1995). However, some racial groups experience less family stability than others. Rates of separation and divorce are higher, the length of separation prior to divorce often longer and the likelihood of remarriage even lower among minority racial groups (Cherlin, 1992). By the age of the 16, 40% of White children and 75% of Black children in the United States experience parental separation or divorce. Some children experience divorce or live with a single parent from their early childhood. Most of these children spend an average of 5 years in a single parent household (Bray and Depner, 1993). Some believed that family types also influence reading ability of children. Children belong to step or single family may have difficulty in reading or difficulty in math skill compared to children of biological parents. This means being part of minority racial groups or being part of different family types could lessen reading IRT score. However, a few researches have been done on this area and none of them plot children's growth trajectory. The present study will focus on three specific objectives –

1. to examine whether children's reading IRT score varies based on their race,
2. to examine whether children's reading IRT score varies based on family types,
3. to plot children's growth trajectories overtime

## Data and Method

The data for this study has been collected from ECLS-K study. This is a nationally representative sample of US. The number of sample of this study is 30599 and the total number of students is 10248. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of this study. Out of 10248 students, 6669 children are white, 1342 children are black, 1218 students are Hispanic, 417 are Asians and 547 are children belong to other races. Almost half of the black children live with single parents and 33.8% live with biological parents. A majority of white children (78.5%) live with their biological family and 12.4% live with single parents. Sixty-eight percent Hispanic children live with biological family, 21.4% live with single parents and 7.5% live with stepparent. Asian children mostly live with their biological parents (84.2%).

Out of 53 racial categories of ECLS-K study, five racial groups have been used in this study - White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, and other race for present purpose. Since this is a nationally representative sample, only Black, Hispanic, Asian, and other race were kept in the model and use white as an omitted category. These groups are dummy-coded, for example, being white is coded as '1' and other is coded as '0'. Four family types have been chosen for this study –

biological, step, single parent family, and other family. Biological family is the omitted category in the model. Control variable for this study is - socio-economic status.

This study attempts to see the individual variation in reading score overtime. This study will be representative of growth model for several reasons. The data collection schedule (wave 1, 2, and 4) is different. Since growth models are designed for continuous outcome whose value changes systematically overtime, reading score is the best outcome for present study. However, reading score could be associated with particular age. For this study, age of assessment is considered as 'time varying covariate' for growth model because age of assessment could fundamentally be representative of the predictor of change in reading score. Age of assessment delineates the specific occasion of measurement that data describes.

As children start their kindergarten at age 66 months (five and half-years), age of assessment has been recoded by subtracting 66 months from age of assessment that way it would be easy for measuring initial status and subsequent development. After recoding, this has been labeled as age66. Besides, for growth model a zero-point of time needs to be specified which is interpretable and substantively meaningful. However, age squared has not been created because only 3 waves of data are available and there will not be enough degrees of freedom for estimating variance. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of this study.

**Table 1: Sample characteristics (reading sample)**

Variables	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Other Race
	6669	1342	1218	417	547
Mean	.6543	.1317	.1195	.0409	.0537
S.D.	.4756	.3381	.3244	.1981	.2254
(In Percent)					
Biological	78.5	33.8	68.1	84.2	61.6
Step	7.4	7.2	7.5	4.1	8.6
Single	12.4	49.9	21.4	8.2	23.8
Other family	1.7	9.2	3.0	4.1	6.0

## Hypotheses

Guided by literatures, two sets of hypotheses have been drawn which are as follows:

1(a) A child's average reading IRT score does differ if child is Black or Hispanic or Asian or belongs to other race compare to white child (white is reference category).

1(b) A child's true rate of change in reading IRT score does differ if child is Black or Hispanic or Asian or belongs to other race compare to white child (white is reference category).

The main assumption here is that if a child is white, more likely that a child will be born with some advantages which children of other races may not get and these advantages will be reflected when they will be assessed for their reading ability. Since children are the largest groups that receive welfare and other facilities from both state and local governments, some may expect that children reading score will not vary based on their racial memberships.

2(a) A child's average reading IRT score does differ if a child lives with stepfamily or single parent family or other forms of family compared to a child who lives with biological family (biological family is reference category).

2(b) A child's true rate of change in reading IRT score does differ if a child lives with step family or single parent family or other forms of family compare to a child who lives with biological family (biological family is reference category).

Two of the fastest growing families in the United States have been stepfamily and single parent family (Popenoe, 1994). Child who lives with stepfamily or single parent family might have different experience than who lives with biological family. This could affect their reading score.



## Major Findings

First, a null model has been fitted for present study with a random intercept and slope. Since no predictors have been added at the second level, it would be easy to see the differences in results if we include any second-level predictors in the model (Raudenbush and Bryk, 2002). Table 2 presents the result of fitting the unconditional growth model of children's reading score. The equation for this model is:

$$\text{Level 1: Reading Score} = \pi_0 + \pi_1(\text{Age66}) + e$$

$$\text{Level 2: } \pi_0 = \beta_{00} + r_0$$

$$\pi_1 = \beta_{10} + r_1$$

The estimated average of a child's reading score is 18.89 (s.e. = 0.108) when the child is 66 months old (Table 2). On average monthly true rate of change in reading score of a child is 1.81 points (as age of assessment clocked in months) and this is statistically significant (s.e. = .005,  $p < .001$ ). To assess whether there is a statistically significant variation in initial status or rate of change that level-2 predictors could explain- we need to examine the variance component. The between children variability in monthly rate of change is 0.18 which is statistically significant at the .001 level. Since, we have non-zero intercept and non-zero slope, it would be beneficial for us if we introduce substantive predictors into the level 2. Because of that another model has been fitted, which includes racial composition, controlling for socio-economic status. The equation for the model 2 is:

$$\text{Level 1: Reading Score} = \pi_0 + \pi_1(\text{Age66}) + e$$

$$\text{Level 2: } \pi_0 = \beta_{00} + \beta_{01}^* (\text{SES}) + \beta_{02}^* (\text{Black}) + \beta_{03}^* (\text{Hispanic}) \\ + \beta_{04}^* (\text{Asian}) + \beta_{05}^* (\text{Other Race}) + r_0$$

$$\pi_1 = \beta_{10} + \beta_{11}^* (\text{SES}) + \beta_{12}^* (\text{Black}) + \beta_{13}^* (\text{Hispanic}) + \beta_{14}^* \\ (\text{Asian}) + \beta_{15}^* (\text{Other Race}) + r_1$$

Table 2 presents the results of Model 2. On average, the estimated reading score of a child is 18.51 points (s.e. = 0.129,  $p < .001$ ) when child is 66 months old. On average the monthly true

rate of change in reading score of a child is 1.83 (s.e. =0.007,  $p < .001$ ). A black child, who is 66 months old, gets on average 0.87 more points in reading IRT score than a white child (s.e.=0.327,  $p < .01$ ), while controlling for socio-economic status (SES). Initially, after controlling for SES, a Hispanic child receives on average 0.36 more points in reading IRT score than a white child but this is not statistically significant. Controlling for SES, an Asian child gets 5.05 more points in reading IRT score than a white child and this is statistically significant at the .001 level. A child from other races gets .93 more points than a white child initially, controlling for SES (s.e.=0.459,  $p < .05$ ). However, another model has been taken into account without SES (not reported in Table 2), the average estimated reading score of Black and Hispanic children (except Asian) became lower than white children and this is statistically significant at the .001 level. The result is not significant for children of other races.

On average Black child's monthly true rate of change in reading IRT score is 0.16 points less than a white child after controlling for SES (s.e.= 0.017,  $p < .001$ ) and this is statistically significant. After controlling for SES, on average Hispanic child's monthly true rate of change in reading IRT score is .02 points less than a white child but the finding is not statistically significant. However, an Asian child's monthly true rate of change in reading IRT score is higher than a white child, after controlling for SES and this is statistically significant at the .05 level ( $\beta_{14}=0.060$ , s.e.=0.027, and  $p < .05$ ). A child who belongs to other races, his/her monthly true rate of change in reading IRT score is .06 less than a white child and this is significant at the .05 level. The between children variability in monthly rate of change is 0.17 and this is statistically significant (s.e. =0.415,  $p < .001$ ).

To examine which model fits better, the study performed deviance test and used full-maximum likelihood, which not only provides the effect of fixed parts of the model, but also the random part of the model. The deviance statistics is reduced and statistically significant. The chi-square is 1570.02,  $df = 12$ , and  $p = .000$ . This model fits better than the null model (Table 3). Finally, types of family have been added in the analysis and fitted another model to see if there has been any difference based on family types in reading IRT score. The equation for this model is:

Level 1: Reading Score =  $\pi_0 + \pi_1(\text{Age66}) + e$

Level 2: 
$$\pi_0 = \beta_{00} + \beta_{01}^* (\text{SES}) + \beta_{02}^* (\text{Black}) + \beta_{03}^* (\text{Hispanic}) + \beta_{04}^* (\text{Asian}) + \beta_{05}^* (\text{Other Race}) + \beta_{06}^* (\text{Step}) + \beta_{07}^* (\text{Single}) + \beta_{08}^* (\text{Other Family}) + r_0$$

$$\begin{aligned} \pi_1 = & \beta_{10} + \beta_{11}^* (\text{SES}) + \beta_{12}^* (\text{Black}) + \beta_{13}^* (\text{Hispanic}) \\ & + \beta_{14}^* (\text{Asian}) + \beta_{15}^* (\text{Other Race}) + \beta_{16}^* (\text{Step}) \\ & + \beta_{17}^* (\text{Single}) + \beta_{18}^* (\text{Other Family}) + r_1 \end{aligned}$$

Table 2 presents the results of model 3. On average, the estimated reading IRT score of a child is 18.71 points (s.e. =0.142,  $p < .001$ ) when child is 66 months old. A black child, who is 66 months old, gets on average 1.12 more points in reading IRT score than a white child (s.e.=0.337,  $p < .01$ ), controlling for SES and family type. Initially, after controlling for SES and family types, a Hispanic child receives on average 0.39 more points in reading IRT score than a white child but this is not statistically significant. Controlling for SES and family type, an Asian child gets 5.02 more points in reading IRT score than a white child and this is statistically significant at the .001 level. A child from other races gets 1.03 more points than a white child initially, controlling for SES and family type (s.e.=0.459,  $p < .05$ ). On average the monthly true rate of change in reading IRT score of a child is 1.85 (s.e. =0.007,  $p < .001$ ).

A child who lives with step parents and who is 66 months old, gets on average 1.22 less points in reading IRT score than child lives with biological parents (s.e.=0.407,  $p < .01$ ), controlling for SES and race. Initially, after controlling for SES and race, a child lives with single parent receives on average 0.64 less points in reading IRT score than a child who lives with biological family and the relationship is statistically significant at the .05 level. Controlling for SES and race, a child who lives with other type of family gets 1.13 less points in reading IRT score than a child who lives with biological family and this is not statistically significant.

On average Black child's monthly true rate of change in reading IRT score is 0.13 points less than a white child after controlling for SES and family type and this is statistically significant (s.e.= 0.017,  $p < .001$ ). After controlling for SES and family type, on average Hispanic child's monthly true rate of change in reading IRT score is .02 points less than a white child but the finding is not statistically significant. However, an Asian child's monthly true rate of change in reading IRT score is higher than a white child, after controlling for SES and family type and this is statistically significant at .05 level ( $\beta_{14}=0.062$ , s.e.=0.027, and  $p < .05$ ). A child who belongs to other races, his/her monthly true rate of change in reading IRT score is .05 less than a white child and this is significant at the .05 level controlling for SES and family type.

On average a child who lives with step parent, that child's monthly true rate of change in reading IRT score is .05 points less than a child who lives with biological parent controlling for SES and race and this is statistically significant (s.e.= 0.021,  $p < .05$ ). After controlling

**Table 2: Parameters Estimates for Reading IRT Score Growth Models**

	Parameter	Null Model	Model 2	Model 3 (Final Model)
<b>Fixed effects,</b>				
<b>Initial Status <math>\pi_{0i}</math></b>				
Intercept	$\beta_{00}$	18.89*** (0.108)	18.51*** (0.129)	18.71*** (0.142)
SES	$\beta_{01}$		3.23*** (0.108)	3.14*** (0.112)
Black	$\beta_{02}$		0.875** (0.321)	1.12** (0.337)
Hispanic	$\beta_{03}$		0.36 <sup>+</sup> (0.327)	0.39 <sup>+</sup> (0.327)
Asian	$\beta_{04}$		5.05*** (0.519)	5.02*** (0.519)
Other Race	$\beta_{05}$		0.93* (0.459)	1.03* (0.461)
Step	$\beta_{06}$			-1.22** (0.407)
Single	$\beta_{07}$			-0.64* (0.291)
Other Family	$\beta_{08}$			- 1.13 <sup>+</sup> (0.601)

<b>Rate of Change, <math>\pi_{1i}</math></b>				
Intercept	$\beta_{10}$	1.81*** (0.005)	1.83*** (0.007)	1.85*** (0.007)
SES	$\beta_{11}$		0.07*** (0.006)	0.06*** (0.006)
Black	$\beta_{12}$		- 0.16*** (0.017)	-0.13*** (0.017)
Hispanic	$\beta_{13}$		- 0.02 <sup>+</sup> (0.017)	-0.020 <sup>+</sup> (0.0170)
Asian	$\beta_{14}$		0.06* (0.027)	0.06* (0.027)
Other Race	$\beta_{15}$		- 0.06* (0.024)	-0.05* (0.024)
Step	$\beta_{16}$			-0.05* (0.021)
Single	$\beta_{17}$			-0.06*** (0.015)
Other Family	$\beta_{18}$			-0.13*** (0.031)
<b>Variance component</b>				
Within- person	$\sigma^e$	20.40 (4.516)	20.44 (4.521)	20.44 (4.522)
In Initial Status	$\sigma^2_0$	98.10***	96.55***	96.12***

Status		98.10*** (9.904)	86.55*** (9.303)	86.43*** (9.297)
In Rate of Change	$\sigma^2_1$	0.18*** (0.427)	0.17*** (0.415)	0.171*** (0.414)

<sup>+</sup>p<.10, \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001 (two-tailed tests)

for SES and race, on average a child who comes from single parent family, that child's monthly true rate of change in reading IRT score is 0.06 points less than a child come from biological family but the finding is statistically significant at the .001 level. A child who belongs to other family, that child's monthly true rate of change in reading IRT score is .13 points less than if a child comes from biological family and this is significant at the .001 level. The between children variability in monthly rate of change is .17 and this is statistically significant at the .001 level. The model 3 also fits better than the model 2 because deviance has been reduced and the result is statistically significant (chi-square=99.47513, df= 18, p<.001).

**Table 3: Deviance test of null model, model 2 and model 3**

	Model 2 vs. null model	Model 3 vs. model 2
Deviance	216219.42	216166.72
Chi-square	1570.02	99.48
Df	12.00	18.00
P	0.000	0.000

For present study, an omnibus test has been performed to see the difference in intercept and slope of a child's reading score based on model 3. Restricted maximum likelihood is used as an iteration setting. The null hypotheses are: 1. a.  $\beta_{02} = \beta_{03} = \beta_{04} = \beta_{05} = 0$  and 1.b.  $\beta_{12} = \beta_{13} = \beta_{14} = \beta_{15} = 0$ . For hypothesis 1(a), the chi-square is 101.615822, df=4 and p<.001. The null hypothesis is rejected. This means that initially there is a significant difference in the average reading IRT score based on their race. Hypothesis 1(a) is supported. After testing hypothesis 1(b), we found that the chi-square is 66.71, df=4 and p=.000. The null hypothesis is rejected. This means that child's monthly true rate of change in reading IRT score also varies based on their racial composition. Hypothesis 1(b) is also supported. The results of hypotheses suggest that race matters while explaining child' reading IRT score.

The second set of hypotheses, which have been tested (used model 3) in congruence with the research objectives, are: 2(a)  $\beta_{06} = \beta_{07} = \beta_{08} = 0$  and 2(b)  $\beta_{16} = \beta_{17} = \beta_{18} = 0$ . The finding from hypothesis test did support hypothesis 2(a) (chi-square=13.89, df = 3(3), p<.01). This implies that initially there is a significant difference in the average reading IRT score of child based on family

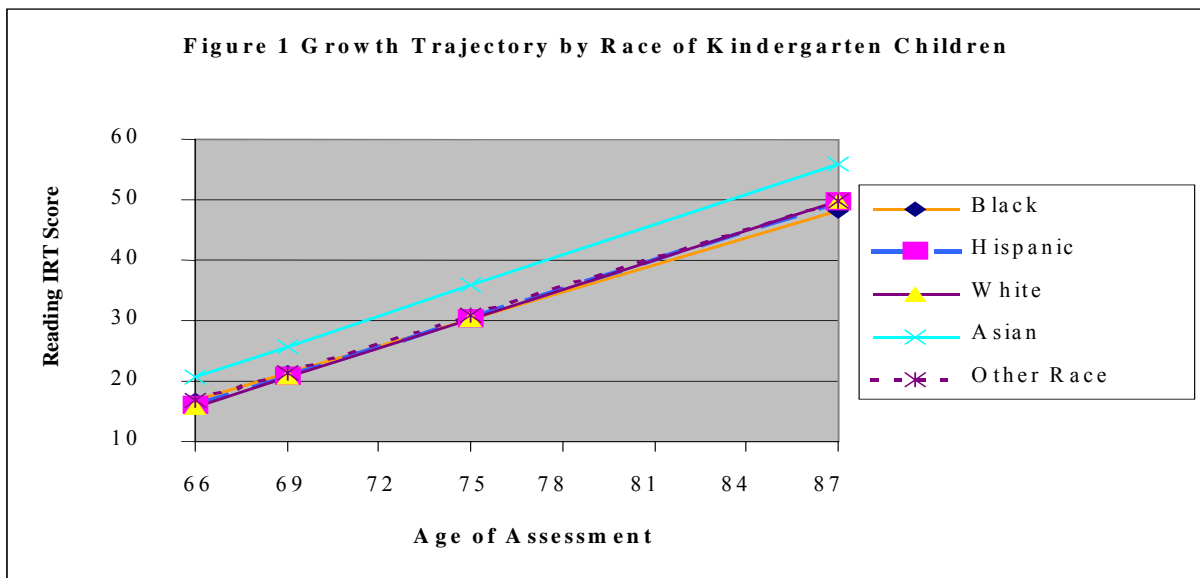
types. Hypothesis 2(b) is also supported. After testing hypothesis 2(b), we found that the chi-square is 36.23,  $df = 4$  and  $p < .001$ . The null hypothesis is rejected. This means that child's monthly true rate of change in reading IRT score also varies based on their family composition. The results of hypotheses suggest that family matters while explaining child's reading IRT score.

After that, a prototypical graph has been plotted for a child who has an average SES, after holding constant for family characteristics for plotting growth trajectory (Singer and Willet, 2003). However, SES has been grand mean centered (described in Bold and *Italic*) for plotting this graph. We derived connecting data plots from different waves and started with age of assessment 66 months and the last age of assessment is 87 months (87 month was the average age of assessment at wave 4). The equation for the graph is:

Level 1: Reading Score =  $\pi_0 + \pi_1(\text{Age66}) + e$

Level 2: 
$$\pi_0 = \beta_{00} + \beta_{01}^* (\text{SES}) + \beta_{02}^* (\text{Black}) + \beta_{03}^* (\text{Hispanic}) + \beta_{04}^* (\text{Asian}) + \beta_{05}^* (\text{Other Race}) + \beta_{06}^* (\text{Step}) + \beta_{07}^* (\text{Single}) + \beta_{08}^* (\text{Other Family}) + r_0$$

$$\pi_1 = \beta_{10} + \beta_{11}^* (\text{SES}) + \beta_{12}^* (\text{Black}) + \beta_{13}^* (\text{Hispanic}) + \beta_{14}^* (\text{Asian}) + \beta_{15}^* (\text{Other Race}) + \beta_{16}^* (\text{Step}) + \beta_{17}^* (\text{Single}) + \beta_{18}^* (\text{Other Family}) + r_1$$



**Figure 1. Growth Trajectory by Race of Kindergarten Children**

## Conclusion

The finding of this study established the links between race and family types with reading IRT score. The primary finding of this study is that racial background matters for children's average reading IRT score (Hypothesis 1a). A child's monthly true rate of change in reading IRT score also varies based on their racial composition (Hypothesis 1b). However, initial status shows that being a racial minority does not appear to have a negative effect on children's reading IRT score controlling for SES. Results from model 2 presents that a black, Asian, children of other races get on average more points than white children (Black,  $\beta_{02} = 0.87$ , Asian,  $\beta_{04} = 5.05$ , and other race,  $\beta_{05} = 0.93$ ) controlling for SES. Initially, after controlling for SES, a Hispanic child receives on average 0.36 more points in reading IRT score than a white child but this is not statistically significant. After including family types in the model, the magnitude of average reading IRT score did not significantly varied based on racial composition. The strength and the direction remain same. Although, initially Black and children of other races were advantageous in terms of the reading IRT score, but in both models (model 2 and model3), it appears that monthly true rate of change in reading score is lower for black, and children of other races. This suggests that there could be other factors also affect the reading IRT score, and this needs further research in future.

The results also suggest that family types matter for children's reading IRT score (Hypothesis 2a). A child's monthly true rate of change in reading IRT score also varies based on family types (Hypothesis 2b). On average, children who live with step and single parents received lower points in reading IRT score compare to children who belongs to biological family controlling for SES and race (Step,  $\beta_{06} = -1.22$ , and single,  $\beta_{07} = -0.64$ ). Even the monthly rate of change in reading score also varies based on all family types. Growing up in a single parent and stepparent family has a negative effect on reading IRT score. Children may receive less parental time and attention in both single parent families and stepfamilies. "Single parents appear to exert weaker control and make fewer demands on their children than married parents. Stepparents, on the other hand, generally provide lower level of warmth and support to children, in comparison to original parents and may therefore not fully substitute for the original parent" (Thomson et al., 1994:223). Race and family based policy is much needed to increase reading IRT score of children.



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## Monetary Reward: A Predictor of Employees' Commitment to Medium Scale Organizations in Nigeria

Bunmi Omolayo\* and A.B. Owolabi\*\*

### Abstract

*This study investigates monetary reward as a predictor of the commitment of employees in medium-scale organizations in Nigeria. A total of 160 employees comprising of 85 male and 75 female participated in this study. The participants were randomly selected from four medium-scale organizations in Ekiti and Ondo states of Nigeria. Their age ranges between 26 years and 50 years with a mean age of 38 years. Questionnaire was used to collect data from the participants, while t-test for independent groups was used to test the three hypotheses for this study. Result however revealed that no significant difference exist in the commitment level of more tenured and less tenured employees in monetary reward. Equally, no significant difference was found in the commitment level of male and female employees in term of monetary reward. Result also revealed that high educated employees have no significant difference in their commitment level with that of low educated employees.*

### Introduction

Encouraging employees to work and be committed to organization toward achieving organizational goals and objectives is one of the most significant challenges for any management team (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1994:49; Guth & Macmillan, 1986:303). The continuous survival of any work organization requires the cooperation of labour with the other factors of production such as land and capital.

Organization commitment refers to the relative strength of an individual's identification with, and involvement in an organization (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982:145). It is characterized by a strong belief in, and acceptance of the organization's goals and values, a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization, and a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization (Porter, 1968:52). It involves active relationship with the organization in which individuals are willing to give something of them in order to help the organization succeed and prosper (Meyer & Allen, 1997:60). According to March and Simeon (1958:52), real commitment often evolves into an exchange relationship in which individuals attach themselves to the organization in return for certain rewards or outcomes.

Employees' commitment reduces turnover but increases performance (Angle & Perry, 1981:12), and employee can only be committed when their needs are met and fulfilled by their organizations (Maslow, 1954:122). Maslow (1954) human needs are arranged in a hierarchical order, and once a need is satisfied, the individual move to the next unsatisfied need which now

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\* Department of Psychology, University of Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria. Email: [droluomolayo@yahoo.com](mailto:droluomolayo@yahoo.com)

\*\* Department of Psychology, University of Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria.

forms the basic for his/her behaviour. These needs are the physiological needs (which include food, clothing, shelter, water, and sex), security needs (such as job security, protection of life and property), social needs (such as need for affection, friendship, and sense of belonging), esteem needs (which include need for recognition, accomplishment, achievement, and self respect), and self-actualization needs (which is the need for an employee to reach his/her highest potential at workplace in conquering his/her environment). However, one of the basic conditions of employment to satisfy and fulfill these human needs at work organizations is monetary reward (that is, wages and salaries) which is pay. Monetary rewards are something given or obtained in return for work done or service rendered. Vroom (1964:134) asserts that the expectation (reward) of employees on task performed motivates and encourages them to be committed. Thus, the higher the expectation of workers, the greater the commitment. On the other hand, the lesser the expectation of workers, the lower the commitment (Martin & Shawn, 1984:273). In their study of antecedents of employees' commitment, Mowday, Porter & Steers (1982:153) found that more tenured employees are more committed than less tenured employees. They also found that women tend to be more committed as a group than men (1982:155), and that highly educated employees tend to be less committed than less educated employees (1982:157). Studies have shown that position; job tenure and organization tenure have a significant relation with employees' development activity and commitment, and that tenure on the job and in the organization has positive relationship with employees' commitment (Kozlowski & Farr, 1988:361; Luthan, McCaul & Dodd, 1985:240). Oloko (1972:40) found that Nigerian workers are committed and motivated to work in organizations managed by fellow Nigerians in which they foresee their opportunity for promotion and advancement as limitless more than organizations that are managed by foreigners where advancement is difficult to achieve.

### **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were tested:

- 1        There will be a significant difference in the level of commitment of more tenured and less tenured employees in term of monetary reward.
- 2        There will be a significant difference in the commitment level of male and female employees in monetary reward.
- 3        There will be a significant difference in the commitment level of highly educated and low educated employees in monetary reward.

## **Research Methods**

### **Research Design**

Descriptive research design was adopted. Survey method was equally used through the use of questionnaire to generate data. Monetary reward serves as independent variable while employees' commitment to organization is the dependent variable.

### **Participants**

160 employees participated in this study, comprising of 85 male and 75 female. Their age ranges between 26 years and 50 years with a mean age of 38 years. The participants were randomly selected from four medium-scale organizations in Ekiti and Ondo states of Nigeria. The selected organizations are, Odua Textile Industries and Omolayo Industries in Ado-Ekiti, all in Ekiti state; Coop Cocoa Products Industries in Akure and Stanmark Cocoa Processing Industries in Ondo, all in Ondo state.

### **Instrument**

A 36-item questionnaire in Likert form of Strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD) was used to generate data for this study. The pilot study of the instrument conducted by the researchers shows a split-half reliability coefficient of 0.57 and a construct validity coefficient of 0.60. Amongst the items of the questionnaire are:

- i) This organization treats its employees better in terms of monetary reward.
- ii) Increase in employee's wages and salary brings dedication and commitment.
- iii) I am satisfied with my present pay.
- iv) I prefer monetary reward to free accommodation.

The items were scored as follows:

Strongly Agree – 5 points

Agree – 4 points

Disagree – 2 points

Strongly Disagree – 1 point

### **Procedure**

Personal visit was paid to the four organizations where the instrument (questionnaire) was administered personally and directly to the randomly selected employees used for this study. The participants were in the middle cadre of the organizational chart. They include the personnel officer, administrative officer, laboratory officer, technical officer, senior clerical officer, senior typist, secretary among others.

### **Data Analysis**

To test the three hypotheses for this study "t-test" for independent groups was used.

## Results

The results of data analysis are presented in table form below.

**Hypothesis 1:** There will be a significant difference in the level of commitment of more tenured and less tenured employees in term of monetary reward.

**Table 1: “t-test” Summary Table Showing the Commitment Level of More Tenured and Less Tenured Employees in Monetary Reward.**

Sex	N	X	df	t-ob	t-cr	p
More tenured employees	58	53.0	158	0.104	1.960	<.05
Less tenured employees	102	53.1				

t (158) = 0.104, p<.05  
Source: Authors' Survey

Result in Table 1 shows that no significant difference exists in the level of commitment of more tenured and less tenured employees in monetary reward. Therefore, the first hypothesis is not accepted.

**Hypothesis 2:** There will be a significant difference in the commitment level of male and female employees in monetary reward.

**Table 2: “ t-test” Summary Table Showing the Commitment Level of Male and Female Employees in Monetary Reward.**

Sex	N	X	df	t-ob	t-cr	p
Male	85	52.5	158	1.406	1.960	<.05
Female	75	53.8				

t (158) = 1.406, p<.05  
Source: Authors' Survey

From Table 2 above, result indicates no significant difference in the commitment level of male and female employees in monetary reward. As a result of this, the second hypothesis is rejected.

**Hypothesis 3:** There will be a significant difference in the commitment level of highly educated and low educated employees in monetary reward.

**Table3: “t-test” Summary Table Showing the Commitment Level of Highly Educated and Low Educated Employees in Monetary Reward.**

Education	N	X	df	t-ob	t-cr	p
Highly educated	58	80.0	158	1.062	1.960	<.05
Low educated	102	81.6				

$t(158) = 1.062, p < .05$

Source: Authors' Survey

Result in Table 3 above revealed that there is no significant difference in the commitment level of highly educated and low educated employees in monetary reward. Hypothesis three is therefore not accepted.

## Discussion

From the result, it is evident that in any organization, monetary reward is a yardstick in determining the level of employees' commitment. Therefore, it can be said that this variable (monetary reward) has a major influence on employees as long as they remain in the organization.

Hypothesis 1 predicted a significant difference in the level of commitment of more tenured and less tenured employees in monetary reward. This was found to be non-significant as shown in Table 1. This suggests that employees irrespective of their years of tenure in the organization need monetary reward to be committed. This monetary reward which is pay (wages and salaries) could determine the commitment level of an employee to the organization, and it is needed as means of fulfilling and meeting the needs of employees. This is because without pay, employees will not be able to feed themselves, take care of their nuclear and extended families, belong to associations of their choice, and gain recognition and respect from others. The result of this finding corroborates with Maslow (1954) who asserts in his hierarchy of needs theory that human being are motivated to work when their needs are fulfilled. These needs are the physiological needs, social needs, safety needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. The fulfillment of employee's personal needs brings about greater commitment, but this fulfillment of needs cannot be accomplished without giving the employees monetary reward which would be used to meet and fulfill these needs. This suggests that both the more tenured and less tenured employees have needs to accomplish, and this is the reason for engaging in work activities in their organizations. This finding, however does not support the previous findings of Mowday,

Porter and Steers (1982:153) who found that more tenured employees has a high level of commitment than less tenured employees.

Equally, there was no significant difference in the commitment level of male and female employees in monetary reward as indicated in Table 2. This suggests that both male and female employees are committed to the organization if giving high pay in terms of wages and salaries in order to satisfy their needs. This finding supports the assertion of Vroom (1964:134) that the expectation (reward) of employees on tasks performed motivates and encourages them to be committed. This shows that both male and female employees expects that their effort will lead to desired result or outcome (reward), hence, their commitment to the organization. The result of this finding also supports the assertion of Martins and Shawn (1984:273) that the higher the expectation of employees in term of reward, the greater the commitment, while the lower the expectation of employees in terms of reward, the lesser the commitment. However, the finding of Mowday, Porter and Steers (1982: 155) that women tend to be more committed than men does not support the result of the present study.

Moreover, there was no significant difference in the commitment level of highly educated and low educated employees in monetary reward as revealed in Table 3. This suggests that both the highly and low educated employees are committed in terms of monetary reward. This is because they need money to meet their needs in order to be on the equilibrium state. Some of the highly and low educated employees are married and they are saddled with the responsibility of taking care and maintaining the members of their families including the extended family. These employees must satisfy and fulfill their needs as categorized by Maslow (1954:122) and the fulfillment of these needs is dependent on monetary reward (pay). The result of the present finding, however, does not support Mowday, Porter and Steers (1982:157) who found that highly educated employees tend to be less committed than less educated employees.

From the result of this study, it is evident that the level of employees' commitment increases if it is back up with monetary reward, and this in turn brings greater performance and productivity to the organization.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The finding of this study shows that given monetary reward to employees in medium-scale organizations is very important especially if the organization want to realize and achieve its goals and objectives. This is because monetary reward affects the commitment level of employees irrespective of their gender, work tenure and educational level. Therefore, inadequate monetary reward system is seen as a major setback of employees' commitment and this can bring about increase in absenteeism, lateness, low performance, feeling of grievances, and employees turnover.

Based on the result of this study, it is recommended that management of medium-scale organizations should always be alive to monetary reward system in their organizations. This could be done through periodic increase in the employees pay (wages and salaries). This system should favour the employees who are the engine and the oil that keeps the wheels of the organization working.

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# The Nature of Political Empowerment and Gender in Local Governance: A Comparative Study of Dhaka City Corporation and Narayangonj Municipality

Farhana Zaman\*

## Abstract

*The study focuses on the fact that the role of women's participation in local bodies is undervalued. Women ward commissioners claim that responsibilities are not specified clearly for them in the working circular by the local government Gazette. As a result, though women ward commissioners come to power through proper political participation and commitment, they cannot demonstrate their commitment to the public. Their working environment is constrained by the patriarchal nature of politics as well as by the psychological state of their male-counterparts. They also recognize that constitutional assurance is unable to ensure their effective participation as well as political equality.*

## 1.1 Introduction

Empowering women is good (for) governance. Equality between men and women is now a leading global political principle. However, gender differences, based on the social construction of biological sex distinctions, is one of the great fetters of all societies. Though the constitution provides women the right to be elected in political and public representative institutions, such as parliament and local government bodies (Husain, S. A. 2000), gender inequality, as a collection of interlinked problems, is manifested in the political arena too.

Politics is male dominant and andocentric. There is usually slim possibility for the integration and reflection of women's perceptions and needs in state politics that are determined, directed and controlled by men. As women are not adequately represented in political decision-making, issues of public policy relating to women's equality and empowerment remain under the competence of men, who may not be interested in these issues. In spite of the recognition of the principle of gender equality in the constitution, state policies could be seen as reinforcing women's subordination or as not prescribing bold steps for removal of gender disparity. Thus, there is a tendency to move beyond the traditional typology as determined by political science on the basis of political system and ideology, and identified the state as patriarchal. (Chowdhury, N., 1994)

One UN study maintains, in support of women's representation and partnership in politics and power, that the issue of women's political participation first is a question of democracy, equality and citizenship rights. On the basis of population women's claim to representation is undeniable.

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\* Lecturer, United International University, Dhaka, Bangladesh. Email: [faranaz\\_soc@yahoo.com](mailto:faranaz_soc@yahoo.com)

Secondly, the feeble presence of women in politics raises questions about the decisions taken in the political arena and the legitimacy of democratic system. There occurs a vast disjunction between women and the democratic state due to the insufficient presence and limited participation of women in political structures and processes. (Chowdhury, N., 1994)

The third argument rests on the differences of interests of men and women. Women are directly aware of their basic problems and needs. But women are denied the opportunity to articulate and safeguard their interests, if they are not adequately represented in politics. (Chowdhury, N., 1994)

Fourth, women's large-scale entry in politics will bring about a desirable shift in the existing focus of politics. Those issues that are now viewed as personal because they relate to women's lives and concerns and are thus considered as being outside the jurisdiction of real politics would come to be regarded as political issues. (Chowdhury, N., 1994)

Finally, the study notes that women's strong presence in politics is justified for the effective use of human resource. However, women do not constitute an un-differentiated social entity. From the vantage point of Contemporary Marxian Feminism, the quality of each individual's life experiences is a reflection first of his or her class position and only second of his or her gender. Women of markedly different class backgrounds have fewer life experiences in common than women of any particular class have with the men of their class. For this reason, they are not able to constitute one homogeneous interest group. (Chowdhury, N., 1994)

Again, there are differences among women, which are rooted in many existing social divides. There exist differences among women on the basis of class structure; geographical or situational differences; some differences are constructed on binary relations. There are differences among women determined by their class and status in society. Again, there are differences among women on the basis of society and culture. This wide applicability of this theory of difference nevertheless hints at a basic feature, which is that within the class or situational context, women's status is unequal and subordinate to that of men. This overriding difference based on gender, which is pervasive as a fundamental determinant in structuring genders relations, binds women together in one universal bond of a community. Women's subordination manifests in many ways. There are gender differences in ownership, authority and decision-making, which are reflected in the discrimination, oppression and repression of women. Therefore, the question of women's political participation is closely linked to the realization and awareness of many dimensions of unequal status of women. Thus, the social consciousness about this unequal status of women can be able to change the whole situation. (Chowdhury, N., 1994)

Throughout the world, women continue to face inequality and as a result are deprived of social rewards such as money, power and prestige. Unless women are involved in the decision and policy making processes at all levels of the state, changes in women's political and to some extent social and economic status will continue to remain marginal. The present study has been organized to examine the nature of women's participation in politics and to identify the factors, which work as obstacles in their satisfactory performance as compared to those of men of Dhaka Municipal Corporation and Narayanganj Municipality.

### **1.2 Objectives of the Study**

The study is broadly an attempt to analyze the emerging scenario of women leadership at urban local level politics by focusing on the women representatives compared to their male counterparts of the Dhaka Municipal Corporation and Narayanganj Municipality. It is also an attempt to make a comparative analysis of the nature of political empowerment of Dhaka Municipal Corporation and Narayanganj Municipality.

More specifically, the study intends

- To assess the nature of political involvement and empowerment of women and men elected as commissioners of Dhaka Municipal Corporation and Narayanganj Municipality.
- To identify the functions of the ward commissioners of the two areas.
- To examine the role of gender in the functioning of urban local political institutions and focus on a comparative perspective on the experience of two areas.
- To identify the constraints and problems faced by women and men commissioners as representatives in the urban local bodies.

Along with these objectives, the research is looking at a fundamental question, i.e.

To what extent women's participation make a difference from their male counterparts?

### **1.3 Methodology**

The study has been conducted in two neighboring districts of Bangladesh: Dhaka and Narayanganj. Both Dhaka Municipal Corporation and Narayanganj Municipality are the municipalities of class-1 category. To satisfy the purpose it was needed to include a representative number of women and men Ward Commissioners of Dhaka City Corporation and Narayanganj Municipality. A total of 60 respondents were selected to collect information about the research. Among them, 48 are from Dhaka Municipal Corporation and the rest of them are from Narayanganj Municipality. Among 48 respondents 24 are women and the rest of 24 are men commissioners. In case of Narayanganj, as it is a very small number to compare with that of Dhaka, all the 12 commissioners were interviewed. They were selected following purposive sampling procedure. The method of interview survey is adopted here because it is the most

appropriate one to collect data from the commissioners. In present research a combination of both structured and unstructured questionnaire is used for getting the advantages of the two and for the best outcome.

#### **1.4 Participation and Representation of Women in Politics in Bangladesh**

Historically women's voting right was established long ago but women's participation in the political and national movement has been negligible. At present both the prime minister and the leader of the opposition in Parliament are women. One of them (Begum Khaleda Zia) was a housewife and had no political involvement before she made a lateral entry into the party to assume the top leadership role. The other one (Sheikh Hasina) was also a housewife, but had some experience as a student leader during her university days. Begum Khaleda Zia is the widow of a former president of Bangladesh who was killed in an abortive coup and the other (Sheikh Hasina) is the daughter of another former president and first Prime Minister of Bangladesh.

The present chairman of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (Begum Khaleda Zia) was brought in to keep her husband's political party in tact as well as to rejuvenate it. She was ushered into the leadership role from a non-political status as the symbol of her husband to keep the battling groups in the party from falling apart.

As in the case of Bangladesh Nationalist Party, the Awami League also brought the daughter of a former president to assume the top leadership role as a symbol of her father to save the party from falling into pieces. These two women, on whom leadership roles were suddenly thrust upon, seem to have risen to the occasion. They have not only been successful in 'crisis management', but also have led their parties in such a way that these two political parties have become the main opposition parties of Bangladesh.

Political inheritance in Bangladesh is somewhat new in Bangladesh politics. Although such instances are not rare in Indian Politics, this is the first time such and their ship' has worked so successfully in the politics of Bangladesh.

Not only have these two top women leaders served as 'rallying points' of their very large party following (composed of diverse political elements in the case of Bangladesh Nationalist Party), these two political parties have to depend on them, to a very great extent, for the mobilization of public opinion in favour of the party programs. However, these two top women political leaders have been created by special circumstances.

However their high position in politics does not reflect the whole scenario of women's position in politics. Observation and study findings reveal that women generally cannot go up the party

hierarchical ladder in a 'reutilized' manner as a man generally can. Women are still subordinated to men in many cases but they are coming out. Gradually women's participation is increasing. The increasing political involvement has inspired women to contest for the Rural Union Council and Urban Municipal Election (there are one third reserved for women) more than before. In the last union council election (1997) nearly 48000 women contested for the member post. Directly elected women councilors/members are demanding for their defined responsibilities and Jobs.

**Table 1: Gender based voters in National Parliamentary Election**

Numbers of votes National Parliament			Number of votes State/Provincial Parliaments		Votes caste for Urban Local Government councils	
Year	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
1996	28,759,994	28,956,941	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a
2000	36,239,491	38,463,258	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a

Source: Election Commission Office.

**Table 2: Representation in national parliament by Gender**

Year	National Parliament			Urban Local Govt. Council	
	F	M	%		
1960					
1970	15	300	4.8		
1980	32	298	9.2		
1990	35	295	10.6		
2000	37	293	11.2	887	2661

Source: 1. Journal of Public Administration by PATC vol. 15, June 2000, Dhaka

1. List collected from Ministry of Local Govt (four City Corporations are not included here). Ratio of four City Corporation M:F=190:63 (Source: BBS, 1998)

**Table 3: Women participation in Federal Cabinet/Executive branch and Urban Local government**

Year	Number and Percentage of women in Federal Cabinet/executive Branch		Number and percentage of women Mayors	
	Number	%	Number	%
1960			Nil	
1970	02	4		
1980	06	6		

1990	04	3	
1992	03	5	
2000	04	16	

The Country was under military regime from 1975 to 1990. There was no democratic practice at all during the martial law government. After the fall of the martial law government in 1990, democracy was established in 1991. (Source: Islam, F., 2002).

### **1.5 Women's Participation in Urban Local Government**

Before the Gazette notification (the Pourashava Ordinance 1977, Ordinance No. XXVI of 1977, which was amended on 1998, July, and Gazette additional copy 22/3/1999) for municipalities and city corporations respectively, female ward commissioners were appointed by selection. For the first time Dhaka City Corporation elected 19 female ward commissioners (elected by male commissioners) for reserve seats in 1994. With a view to promote women's participation in Urban Local Govt. the Pourashava Ordinance and City Corporation Ordinance have been introduced which were monetary for every Pourashava and city corporation. These ordinances stipulate that whatever the number of ward commissioner, depending on the area of Pourashava and City Corporation; there should be reserved seats, exclusively for women equivalent to one third of the number of commissioners fixed by the Govt. The women ward commissioners will be elected directly.

The span of responsibilities for ward commissioners has been well-defined in the govt. gazette. But there is no definite responsibility narrated in such a gazette for women ward commissioners. The Govt. Gazette Notification has described the nature of meetings; panel Chairman etc. so the status of women ward commissioners has been undermined still there is some confusion and misunderstanding between commissioners and women ward commissioners.

Every political party has a women wing to encourage women to join politics either at National or local level. Women's participation in politics has no doubt increased tremendously. All NGO's Women Organizations and Civil Society Organizations are very active in this regard. Recently there has been a phenomenal change. During the last 1998 local govt. election (Union Parishad) more than 12000 women members were elected directly for reserved seats. In the near future, after completion of municipal election, another 887 women ward commissioner will be directly elected. Contesting for reserved seats, women's participation in election will have a positive impact on women's political consciousness. Beside this, the media are playing a vital role educating women. The total number of women voters' enrolment has increased compared to the previous enrolment.

**Table 4: Number of voters by sex in the voting year 1991 and 1996**

Year of voting enrolment	Total number of voters	Number of voters by sex		The ratio of M/F voters	% of vote casting
		M	F		
1991	62181743	33040757	29140986	53.14:46.86	55.44%
1996	56887588	28614475	2827313	50.30:49.70	74.80%

Source: FEMA, Election Report (1996).

From the above table it is seen that the ratio of female voters has increased from 49.7% by the year of 1991-1996.

Local Govt. has initiated different programs to encourage women's participation in governance. Women ward commissioners mainly deal with women's issues, particularly for poor women, such as micro credit programs, handicrafts and professional training programs attracting women to join such programs. There are some positive impacts of such programs initiated by local government. Women are becoming very concerned about their rights and unnecessary cases. Local Govt. are compelled to facilitate their rights. Very recently the govt. has introduced transport facilities for women, childcare facilities, violence against man. All these are the results of the women's movement. (Source: Islam, F., 2002).

### 1.6 Major Obstacles to Women's Political Participation in Bangladesh

Although women in Bangladesh enjoy political and legal rights comparable to many other developed nations, very few Bangladeshi women have entered the political arena and still fewer have made serious efforts to gain political power through their involvement in the country's politics. Even after the war of liberation of 1971, the experiences of which played a significant role in raising the political consciousness of the women of Bangladesh, politics remains for them a very unusual career (Salauddin, K., 1994).

Traditionally women in our country are deprived of the right of decision-making and of effective political participation. Their roles have been identified as secondary. Their potentiality remains largely unrecognized and contributions are mostly unpaid. An adequate explanation of this phenomenon necessitates the identification of the constraints more precisely. Main obstacles to women's political participation include the following:

- (a) **Women's primary responsibility:** Traditionally women's domestic activities are considered as their primary responsibilities which keep women isolated from the labor market. This also limits their interests and serious involvements in politics. In general

women spend their times with family members such as children and very old people who hardly have knowledge or interests about politics. As a result, women lack scope to discuss political affairs with people either outside or inside the home and also the freedom to gain politically relevant experience. Studies in the United States (Anderson, 1975, Welch, 1977) find that employment particularly outside home, is associated with dramatic increase in women's political participation. These factors are more intense in a developing country like Bangladesh, where the average number of children per couple is much higher than that of the developed countries.

**(b) Women's Inferior Economic Status:** Economic dependence is the key factor that works against the political participation of women in Bangladesh. Gender is a significant factor in poverty in Bangladesh. Poverty is over represented among women. Empirical evidence from different studies suggests that incidence of extreme poverty is generally higher for the female headed, female managed and female supported households. Both labor force survey and micro level household surveys indicate that, female workers earn considerably less than the male workers. The vast majority of the populations (about 80%) live in the rural areas, where the women experience a disproportionately large share of the country's poverty (UNDP 1994). In Bangladesh, women's inferior economic status keeps women economically dependent on men. This dependence is also an important factor that limits her freedom to participate seriously in politics.

**c) Lack of fixed working hours:** Politics is an occupation, which does not have any fixed working hours. Ward commissioners may need to go outside anytime on an urgent basis. As women are primarily assigned to domestic activities, they might not make themselves available in a place where they are required on an urgent basis.

**d) Women's Educational Status:** Women are lagging behind men in all stages of education. Though worldwide literacy rate is improving, in all regions illiteracy remains higher for women than for men. Of the world's nearly one billion illiterate adults, two-thirds are women. Approximately, 100 million children, including 60 million girls remain without access to primary education and over two-thirds of the world's 960 million illiterate adults are women (United Nations 1995:70). This unequal educational status is contributing negatively on the way to women's involvement in politics. Women always have a fear of not being able to perform all the activities necessary for politics due to their inferior educational status.

**e) Social Norms and Values:** In fact, the cultural factors do not support women's involvement in politics. 'Women in politics' is a matter of toleration, not a matter of acceptance. Cultural values and norms are playing a crucial role in socializing a girl and a boy. The occupations, which are especially assigned to a girl from her childhood, are -



elementary school teacher, nurse, receptionist, personal secretary etc. On the contrary, the field of politics is highly considered as male-dominated.

However, in order to improve the situation of women, governments of almost all countries and different national and international NGOs are taking different steps. The Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees certain rights and privileges to women fundamental rights. Moreover, to safeguard the various constitutional rights, the government has enacted various women-specific and women-related legislation. As a result, gender gap is closing day by day, though much is left to achieve.

In recent years, participation of women in politics has been increased significantly. They all are contributing significantly to the country's democratic exercise and some of them are very much successful in performing their responsibilities. However, as for many years male politicians are involved in 'politics' as well as 'local government, these have become male dominated institutions. Women representatives face number of problems, which stand as barriers in their satisfactory performance. Under this purview, the later part of this article will focus on some of the problems those the local level women representatives are facing most.

### **2.1 Participation of women in politics**

Political participation is one of the major ways to ensure women's empowerment, to increase decision-making power and enhance ability to influence matters that affect their lives in the community and in the larger society. In broader sense, participation in politics goes far beyond electoral politics, such as voting and election to public office. Women's empowerment begins with her consciousness- perceptions about herself and her rights, her capabilities and potential, awareness of her gender and socio-cultural, economic and political forces that affect her. Women's political empowerment and equal representation in all decision-making institutions are critical inputs in the struggle for freedom from patriarchal subjugation (Shamim and Nasreen, 2002). This section of the article focuses on the participation of women in two urban local bodies- namely Dhaka Municipal Corporation and Narayanganj Municipality.

#### **Meetings Called Per Month by the City Corporation/ Municipality**

Respondents were asked about the number of meetings called per month in City Corporation/ Municipality. Great variation in their opinions is found from the study. In case of DCC, 54 per cent respondents told that at least one meeting is called per month, whereas 38 percent respondents told that they meet twice/thrice a year. Such a situation indicates about huge communication gap

between the City Corporation schedules and those who are obliged to follow these schedules for their successful performance.

In case of Narayanganj, their opinions are more or less same. All but one responded that one meeting is called per month in their Municipality.

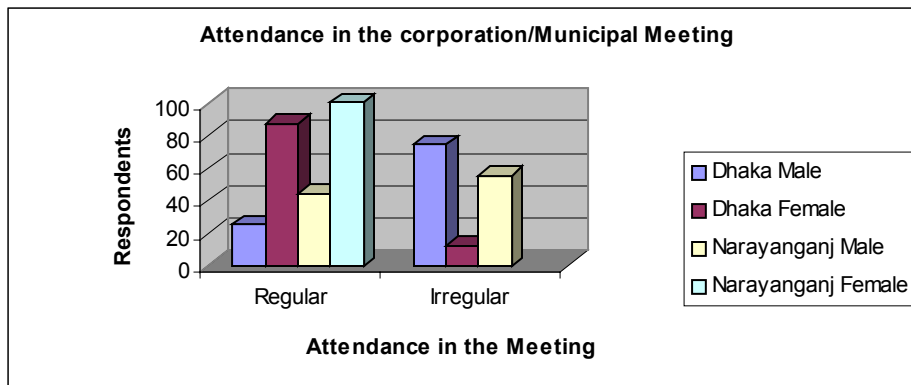
**Attendance in the Meetings by the Respondents:** The sample areas under study have large indicators to analyze two urban local bodies, their activities and respondents' role on it. Attendance at the meetings is not only an important indicator for active participation, but also a forum to discuss development activities and decision-making. This study shows that 88 percent women ward commissioners regularly attend the corporation meetings as compared to only 25 per cent men ward commissioners. A large number of men commissioners (75%) do not attend at meetings regularly. This clearly indicates that women ward commissioners are more serious about corporation activities than that of men.

**Table 5: Attendance in the Meetings by the Respondents**

Attendance in the meetings	Dhaka			Narayanganj		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Regular	6 (25%)	21 (87.5%)	27 (56.3%)	4 (44.4%)	3 (100%)	7 (58.3%)
Irregular	18 (75%)	3 (12.5%)	21 (43.8%)	5 (55.6%)	-	5 (41.7%)
Total	24 (100.0%)	24 (100.0%)	48 (100.0%)	9 (100.0%)	3 (100.0%)	12 (100.0%)

Source: Fieldwork, 2004.

In case of Narayanganj, the same scenario is apparent. All women respondents join regularly in the Municipal meetings as compared to 45 per cent of the men respondents.



**Figure – 1: Attendance in the Corporation/Municipal Meetings**

### **If Irregular, Reasons for Non Attendance:**

Regularly participation in meeting is very important for the commissioners for becoming up-dated about the corporation/ municipal activities. But the 'Table no. 1' shows that a large number of men ward commissioners do not attend at meetings regularly. About 67 percent of them told that they did not get notice in time. As a result, they failed to attend due to some other pre-scheduled tasks. (It should be noted here that women ward commissioners also do not get notice in time. But as they do not miss meetings as they always enquires about corporation activities). About 61 percent could not attend due to illness and 56 percent did not attend meeting as because they were in abroad. It is surprising that 22 percent respondents failed to attend because they forgot the schedule of the meetings.

Among the irregular women respondents 67 percent could not attend meetings due to illness. One responded that she does not attend for not getting the opportunity to participate in the discussion of the meeting. She complained that men commissioners do not give floor to women commissioners to talk. It is the general scenario, which is applicable to all women ward commissioners more or less. Despite most of the women commissioners attend the meeting only to establish their rights.

In case of Narayanganj, all the women ward commissioners are very serious regarding the participation in the Municipal meetings. But some men ward commissioners (56%) were irregular. They did boycott meetings for not being given with important responsibilities and due importance of their opinions. Only 20 percent could not join due to illness.

### **Extent of Participation by the Respondents in Meetings Discussion**

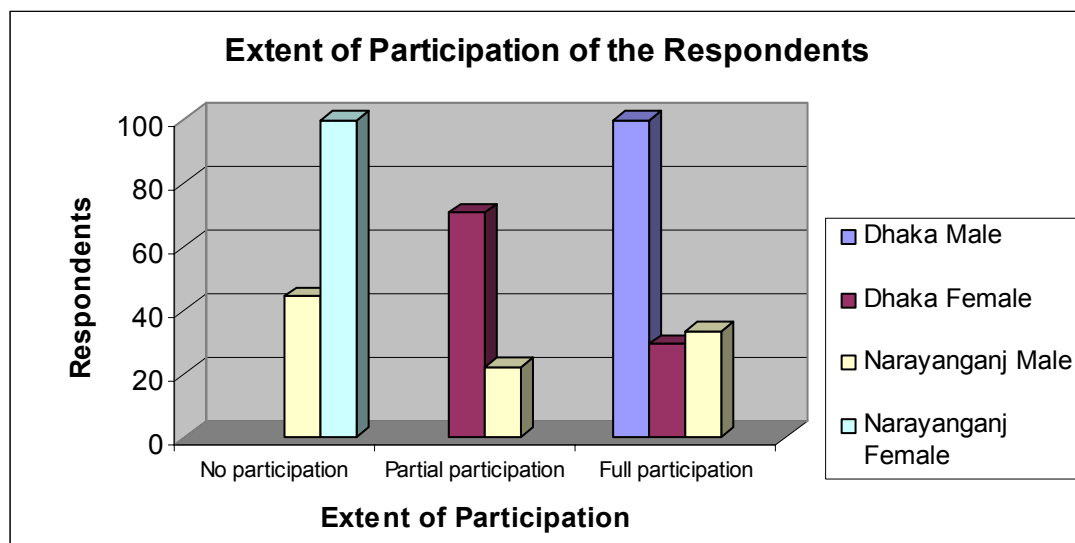
The first hand report (field report) shows that all respondents participate in the meeting discussion more or less in Dhaka, whereas nearly 60 percent respondents have no participation in case of Narayanganj. In Dhaka, all men commissioners can participate fully as compared to only 29 percent women ward commissioners. More than 70 percent women ward commissioners participate partially. Here partial participation means only to join in the meeting and not getting the opportunity to express their own views. Women ward commissioners complained that men commissioners do not give them floor to speak, rather they laugh at the women ward commissioners. They opined that they were unable to raise their voices properly because of their lower representation in the corporation. Some of them opined that chairman ignores women's views. They said that their opinions are accepted only when majority support the same. But in case of men's opinions it is just vice versa.

**Table 6: Extent of Participation by the Respondents in Meetings Discussion**

Extent of participation	Dhaka			Narayanganj		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
No participation	-	-	-	4 (44.4%)	3 (100%)	7 (58.3%)
Partial participation	-	17 (70.8%)	17 (35.4%)	2 (22.2%)	-	2 (16.7%)
Full participation	24 (100%)	7 (29.2%)	31 (64.6%)	3 (33.3%)	-	3 (25%)
Total	24 (100.0%)	24 (100.0%)	48 (100.0%)	9 (100.0%)	3 (100.0%)	12 (100.0%)

Source: Fieldwork, 2004

In case of Narayanganj, data show that only 42 percent respondents do participate in the meeting discussion of which 25 percent respondents are full participants and 17 percent are partial participants. A larger portion of the respondents has no participation which includes all the women ward commissioners. They felt themselves nothing but a living statue in the meeting as they are only the signatory of the decisions made by the male participants. Their chairman takes all the decision herself, prepares required papers on that and finally just ask for signature from them.



**Figure – 2: The Extent of participation of the Respondent**

### **Standing Committees Headed by Women Ward Commissioners:**

When the respondents were asked about the number of standing committees formed by the City Corporation/ Municipality, most respondents of both Dhaka and Narayanganj became confused. A larger portion of men (33%) and women (67%) respondents didn't know the actual number of the standing committees.

In fact, no standing committees have yet been formed formally by the City Corporation. But there are some informal standing committees such as - Market, Technical and Mosquito Killing Committees (which are waiting to be approved), all of which are headed by men ward commissioners. But there are some development projects such as revenue committee, slum development projects which are being headed by the women ward commissioners. Again each ward has an urban development center (UDC), which is directed by the women ward commissioners of the respective wards.

In case of Narayanganj, the exact number of the standing committees remained undisclosed. The Chairman of Narayanganj Municipality informed that no standing committee was headed by the women ward commissioners. She told that reserve seated commissioners do not have the right of heading any committees.

### **2.2 The Nature of Functions of the Ward Commissioners:**

Due to rapid urbanization, the role and functions of urban local government institutions in Bangladesh have been gaining in significance in the recent year. Gender empowerment is determined by the degree to which women and men participate actively in all these activities and take part in decision-making. But there are no clearly specified responsibilities given to women ward commissioners by the local government Gazette. As a result, women ward commissioners are unable to show their commitment to public or to the office. This section focuses on the different types of functions of the two urban local bodies performed by women and men ward commissioners.

#### **Responsibilities Given by the City Corporation/ Municipality to the Respondents**

The data reveal significant differences between responsibilities of men and women ward commissioners. In Dhaka City Corporation, almost all the men ward commissioners are given with the responsibilities of corruption and smuggling protection, provision of birth, succession, nationality and character certificates, provision of street light and keeping pollution free environment followed by infrastructure development (96%), maintaining proper drainage and

sewerage system (92%), encouraging people to pay tax (79%), provision of public toilet and water supply system (75%) and to participate in the tree plantation programme (70%).

But in case of women the scenario is totally different. Almost all the women are involved in judging the women and child issues, welfare of the local people, motivating people during natural calamities, provision of birth, nationality and character certificates followed by encouraging people in income generating activities (95.83%), motivating people in family planning and health care (95.83%), involving poor women in development activities (91.66%) and motivating people about literacy (91.66%). The participation of men in all those sectors mentioned above is very less. Again the sectors where the involvement of men is very high, participation of women in those sectors is really insignificant except infrastructural development (87.5%). Some ward commissioners perform some other activities such as numbering of houses, control over traffic and public vehicles etc. Many women ward commissioners work for keeping the environment free from pollution even not being given with this task by the Corporation.

**Table 7: Responsibilities Given by the City Corporation/ Municipality to the Respondents**

Responsibilities given	Dhaka			Narayanganj		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Ensuring infrastructural development & maintenance	23 (95.83%)	21 (87.5%)	44 (91.66%)	9 (100%)	3 (100%)	12 (100%)
Corruption & smuggling protection & maintenance of discipline	24 (100%)	10 (41.66%)	34 (72.91%)	8 (88.88%)	-	8 (66.66%)
Encouraging people in income increasing projects	1 (4.16%)	23 (95.83%)	24 (50.0%)	-	3 (100%)	3 (25.0%)
Motivating people for family planning	-	23 (95.83%)	23 (47.91%)	-	3 (100%)	3 (25.0%)

Encouraging people about literacy	6 (25.0%)	22 (91.66%)	28 (58.33%)	5 (55.55%)	3 (100%)	8 (66.66%)
Motivate people about health care	-	23 (95.83%)	23 (47.91%)	-	3 (100%)	3 (25.0%)
Provide birth, succession, nationality & character certificate	24 (100.0%)	24 (100%)	48 (100%)	9 (100%)	3 (100%)	12 (100%)
Provide public toilet & water supply system for local people	18 (75.0%)	11 (45.83%)	29 (60.41%)	8 (88.88%)	1 (33.33%)	9 (75%)
Co-operate in enumeration	7 (29.16%)	-	7 (14.58%)	2 (22.22%)	-	2 (16.66%)
Provide public library, amusement facilities & its maintenance	9 (37.5%)	8 (33.33%)	17 (35.41%)	2 (88.88%)	-	2 (16.66%)
Encouraging people in cultural activities	13 (54.16%)	9 (37.5%)	22 (45.83%)	4 (44.44%)	-	4 (33.33%)
Awareness about natural calamities & relief distribution	5 (20.83%)	24 (100%)	29 (60.41%)	2 (22.22%)	2 (66.66)	4 (33.33%)
Maintaining proper drainage & sewerage system	22 (91.66%)	14 (58.33%)	36 (75.0%)	9 (100%)	-	9 (75.0%)

Keep environment pollution free	24 (100%)	13 (54.16%)	37 (77.08%)	9 (100%)	1 (33.33%)	10 (83.33%)
Welfare of local people (protect dowry, early marriage, acid throwing)	2 (8.33%)	24 (100%)	26 (54.16%)	-	3 (100%)	3 (25.0%)
Register birth, death & marriage	-	8 (33.33%)	8 (16.66%)	-	2 (66.66%)	2 (16.66%)
Encourage people to pay tax, fee etc	19 (79.16%)	3 (12.5%)	22 (45.83%)	8 (88.88%)	1 (33.33%)	9 (75.0%)
Provision & maintenance of street light	24 (100%)	9 (37.5%)	33 (68.75%)	7 (77.77%)	-	7 (58.33%)
Provision & maintenance of slaughter houses	-	-	-	3 (33.33%)	-	3 (25.0%)
Distribute VGD & VGF card	-	-	-	9 (100%)	3 (100%)	12 (100%)
Participate in tree plantation program	17 (70.83%)	6 (25.0%)	23 (47.91%)	1 (11.11%)	-	1 (8.33%)
Judge the child & women violence cases	15 (62.5%)	24 (100%)	39 (81.25%)	2 (22.22%)	3 (100%)	5 (41.66%)



Involve poor women in development activities	2 (8.33%)	22 (91.66%)	24 (50.0%)	-	3 (100%)	3 (25.0%)
Others	-	1 (4.16%)	1 (2.08%)	9 (100%)	3 (100%)	12 (100%)

Source: Fieldwork, 2004

Note: i) This is a multiple response table

ii) Parentheses present percentage on the basis of the respondents

In case of Narayanganj it is found that all the respondents irrespective of men and women are given with the task of ensuring infrastructural development, distribution of VGD and VGF card and provision of birth, character and nationality certificates. All the men are specially involved in maintaining proper drainage and sewerage system and keeping the environment free from pollution followed by corruption and smuggling protection (89%), provision of public toilet and water supply system (89%), encouraging people to pay tax (89%) and provision and maintenance of street light (78%). Like DCC, the nature of the women functions is much different than that of the men. All the women are involved in encouraging people in income generating projects, motivating people for family planning, encouraging people about literacy, motivating people about health care, welfare activities for the local people, to judge the child and women's violence cases, followed by creating awareness about natural calamities. The participation of men in such activities is very less. All the respondents of Narayanganj Municipality perform some other activities such as - naming of roads, numbering of houses, controlling the super markets, eradication of mosquitoes, reception of distinguished visitors etc.

The nature of functions given to the commissioners by the local bodies is very much similar. But the function of distributing VGD and VGF card is practiced only in Narayanganj. Another significant difference is that commissioners of DCC are enjoying full freedom in selecting the development activities. They give plan and take approval by the chairman and distribute the work among the contractors and supervise it personally. But in case of Narayanganj, commissioners only look after the development activities and their chairman performs all other formalities.

#### **Activities those specially address women**

All women respondents of DCC and Municipality mentioned almost the similar type of responsibilities. The activities which specially address women are generally - to encourage people in various income generating activities, motivate people about family planning, demonstrate people about literacy, motivate people about health care, provide birth, succession, nationality and character certificate, provide public toilet and water supply system for the local people, make people aware about natural calamity and relief distribution, keep environment free from pollution, look after the welfare of the local people specially women and child, protect dowry, early marriage, acid throwing etc, judge the child and women violence and to take effective steps to involve poor women in development activities.

But there are also some differences in the responsibilities performed by the women ward commissioners of two local bodies. The women ward commissioners of Narayanganj are also involved in taking possession of governmental lands. These activities are difficult even for a man to perform properly. But women are performing these activities quite successfully. Again responsibility to distribute VGD and VGF card is practiced only in Narayanganj, not in Dhaka.

It is found in DCC that women are heading some committees like 'Revenue committee' and 'Slum development committee' etc and they are really proving their capabilities in performing these activities. This type of involvement as well as performance is in deed remarkable in Narayanganj.

### **2.3 Hindrances Faced by the Respondents While Undertaking the City Corporation / Municipal Activities**

Numerous reasons have prompted the less participation of women representatives in local bodies activities. All of the women ward commissioners of both Dhaka and Narayanganj mentioned that they have been encountering many problems. Some problems are mentioned in the Table 6. Almost all the women respondents complained that they are given with fewer responsibilities. They are also facing financial constraint (92%) and immorality of chairman in distribution of corporation activities (92%). The problem of financial crisis is more acute for those women who all are not from rich family background. About 96 percent women reported that they are always vested with unimportant tasks. They (96%) also complained that male commissioners laugh at them while participating in meeting discussion. Women ward commissioners are also facing some other problems such as - ignoring women in financial affairs (71%) followed by getting less information about Corporation activities (58%), indirect threat by the male colleagues (46%), restrictions to get involved in work (42%), lack of security (38%), social obligation (33%), very poor honorarium (29%), lack of peoples interests in paying tax (29%), and high rate of corruption (21%) etc.

On the contrary, 79 percent men ward commissioners do not face any problem in performing their duties. It has been proved by the co-efficient of correlation as the figure -0.19 indicates that men

and women are negatively correlated with the hindrances. A very non-significant portion of men faces some problems due to partiality of the chairman (25%), followed by lack of security (8%), social obligation (4%) and less allocation of work (4%). A male commissioner mentioned that he does not feel secured even having 10 security guards. However, he believes that for political representatives this situation is a typical one.

**Table 8: Hindrances Faced by the Respondents**

Hindrances	Dhaka			Narayanganj		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
No problem	19 (79.16%)	-	19 (39.58%)	1 (11.11%)	-	1 (8.33%)
Social obligation	1 (4.16%)	8 (33.33%)	9 (18.75%)	-	-	-
Financial constraints	3 (12.5%)	22 (91.66%)	25 (52.08%)	8 (88.88%)	3 (100.0%)	11 (91.66%)
Immorality of chairman in work distribution	6 (25.0%)	22 (91.66%)	28 (58.33%)	5 (55.55%)	3 (100.0%)	8 (66.66%)
Partiality of chairman	6 (25.0%)	22 (91.66%)	28 (58.33%)	5 (55.55%)	3 (100.0%)	8 (66.66%)
Lack of security	2 (8.33%)	9 (37.5%)	11 (22.91%)	-	-	-
Restrictions in involving work	-	10 (41.66%)	10 (20.83%)	-	-	-
High rate of corruption	-	5 (20.83%)	5 (10.41%)	-	-	-
Very poor honorarium	-	7 (29.16%)	7 (14.58%)	2 (22.22%)	-	2 (16.66%)
Lack of people's interest in tax paying	-	7 (29.16%)	7 (14.58%)	7 (77.77%)	-	7 (58.33%)
Less allocation of work	1 (4.16%)	24 (100.0%)	25 (52.08%)	5 (55.55%)	3 (100.0%)	8 (66.66%)
Less responsibilities given to women ward commissioners	-	24 (100.0%)	24 (50.0%)	-	3 (100.0%)	3 (25.0%)
Women ward commissioners less informed about responsibilities	-	14 (58.33%)	14 (29.16%)	-	-	-

Less interest shown on women program by local elites	-	17 (70.83%)	17 (35.41%)	-	-	-
Male commissioners laugh at women ward commissioners	-	23 (95.83%)	23 (47.91%)	-	2 (66.66%)	2 (16.66%)
Indirectly threatened by male colleagues	-	11 (45.83%)	11 (22.91%)	-	-	-
Ignoring women ward commissioners in financial affairs	-	17 (70.83%)	17 (35.41%)	-	2 (66.66%)	2 (16.66%)
Women vested with unimportant works	-	23 (8.70%) (95.83%)	23 (7.59%) (47.91%)	-	2 (9.10%) (66.66%)	2 (16.66%)
Others	-	-	-	-	1 (33.33%)	1 (8.33%)

Source: Fieldwork, 2004.

Note: i) This is a multiple response table

ii) Parentheses present percentage on the basis of respondents

$r = -0.19$  [Dhaka (male-female)]       $R_{xy} = 0.93$  [Narayanganj (male-female)]

$r = 0.87$  [DCC & Narayanganj Municipality (Total)]

In case of Narayanganj, 67 per cent respondents irrespective of men and women face problems due to the immorality of the chairman and due to her partial attitude. The result of co-efficient of correlation is .93 which means that men and women of Narayanganj Municipality are strongly correlated with the hindrances. They also face problems due to lack of funds. It should be mentioned here that Narayanganj remained as an abandoned Pourashava for a period of 18 years. As a result, there was no political representative during that period. This town is now facing a large number of problems. The Commissioners believed that these problems cannot be solved within next few years with their limited funds. In order to solve all those problems - mainly very poor condition of roads, another 18 years may take. But the commissioners are hoping for the best.

From the above analysis, it is clearly understood that most of the commissioners of DCC and almost all the respondents of Narayanganj Municipality are facing numerous problems. Figure .87 indicates that the commissioners of both of these two local bodies are strongly correlated with the hindrances. However, unlike the respondents of Dhaka City Corporation, they do not face the problems of lack of security, high rate of corruption and social obligation.

**Concluding Remarks:**

Politics relates to decision making through formal structures and informal processes on the basis of the public opinion. The mobilization and distribution of resources at micro and macro levels, the creation and application of value, the organization of public opinion – all these are integral parts to political processes. The community action at local level is as much a part of politics as is public policy activism. This present study is conducted with a view to examining the political participation of women at the urban local level and to identify various problems that are faced by women.

The study reveals that the government could merely recognize the potentials and dynamism of women ward commissioners. On the contrary, they were given with work responsibilities by the local government Gazette. As a result, gradually they are grown up with lack of confidence in to performing any Corporation work when it is given occasionally. Initially they were not involved with any development activities. Women ward commissioners of DCC and Narayanganj Municipality had been working only through Urban Development Center and UGIIP respectively to improve the socio-economic condition of the poor people of their communities. Familial disputes, dowry issues, domestic violence, mother-child health care, women's and adult education, women's co-operative, income earnings and credit programs and arranging emergency fund and relief in a period of disaster have received special attention by the women ward commissioners. But when women ward commissioners of DCC logically demanded to the Mayor for providing them with development work. Such an instance prompted the Mayor to give the responsibility of tax committees and slum development projects to them. Since then the women ward commissioners are monitoring these projects and committees only.

Ironically women cannot show their commitment to the public, or to the office, as they are supposed to listen or convince three different ward commissioners for any project to be realized. Women ward commissioners cannot take any development initiatives and actions without the permission or support from the relevant men ward commissioners. Men commissioners were not at all cordial to see the women to come to the limelight. Men ward commissioners were also not keen to share the chance of handling a big "financial benefit" with those who did not have any specific duty (according to the Gazette) to perform.

The fund allocation of women ward commissioners for their development work is comparatively much lower than that of the male. Due to very less allocation, utilizing the fund properly becomes more critical than that of getting the allocation.

In DCC, no standing committee has yet been formed completely. Few standing committees are in pipe line and few are already being started working, but being headed by some men ward

commissioners. According to a new circular of DCC, the women ward commissioners of reserve seats are to act as head of one-third standing committees. Thus it is expected that the more standing committees will be formed, with women being the president of the. But in case of Narayanganj Municipality, the reserve seated are prohibited by rule to act as head of any department of the Pourashava.

All the women ward commissioners strongly opined that the government must take adequate steps so that their potentials and dynamism are being utilized to the fullest. Recently some new rules and regulations have been introduced in order to improve the overall situation of the women ward commissioners regarding their meaningful political empowerment. According to the circular, issued on 6<sup>th</sup> January, 2005:

- All the commissioners of DCC will be given 2000 Tk. per month by the City Corporation for their presence in the meeting.
- All the commissioners of the City Corporation not having any govt owned office, will be given 6000Tk. monthly as office rent.
- All the commissioners of DCC will be given 2000Tk. monthly for the maintenance of their offices.
- One ward secretary, one MLSS and one guard will be appointed for each ward commissioner's office.
- Chairmen of the Tax Committee of different zones will be given 300 Tk. as honorarium.
- The City Corporation will provide all furnitures of the ward offices of the commissioners.
- The above policy level changes of the City Corporations may become a milestone in the context of improving the prevailing vious status of women in urban local governance. Side by side, women ward commissioners are also trying their best to minimize their shortcomings. It must be noted here that all the women ward commissioners of both DCC and Narayanganj Municipality are not less trained than those of men. As a result, the presence of the women ward commissioners has already changed the environment of politics/governance in various aspects. The changes are vivid, especially in relation to the poor and females, the field in which women work independently. Thus it is noticeable that if women are allowed to work independently in other spheres of City Corporation, they are likely to bring even more positive changes.

In order to involve women in local bodies and for their active participation in local and national decisions, they have to be mobilized and organized at various levels. It is expected that the steps stated above will be able to enhance the mobilization and organization of women. In fact, the local government system of the country can be effective only through the equal representation of

gender in all parts of it. For this women must also learn how to make the local government more responsive and accountable to them. To transform the local government system of Bangladesh into more responsive and accountable one, the government must be committed to ensure the establishment of truly representative local bodies backed up by the administrative and financial powers with a view to expediting decentralized development process.

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## **Emergence of Satellite Television and Enigmatic Geo-Political Strategy of Bangladesh government**

**Zeenat Huda Wahid\***

### **Abstract**

This article manifests the socio-political and cultural background of the emergence of satellite television in Bangladesh. Although the Bangladesh Government highlights the religio-territorial identity of the people of Bangladesh, it adopts the enigmatic geo-political strategy in challenging the penetration of Indian culture through satellite television in the country. Although the government is very loud in designing its own Bangladeshi culture by denying the past link with West Bengal and disowning a huge chunk of cultural heritage, its role remains paradoxical in resisting the cultural hegemony of India through the penetration of satellite television in Bangladesh.

### **Introduction**

This research article demonstrates the socio-political background of the emergence of the satellite television (STV) in Bangladesh by investigating the interactive association among the media policy, nationalist philosophy and the geo-political strategy of the Bangladesh government. Although the state regulated Bangladesh Television (BTV) was the dominant medium of entertainment for prolonged twenty-eight years (1964-1992), its monopoly ended with the penetration of STV in 1992. It was in fact the Bangladesh government which located the middle class viewers of Bangladesh in the global media environment in 1992 by becoming the client of the entertainment bazaar (Huda, 2005). The Bangladesh government and its allied forces although they justify their political policy and the nationalist philosophy on the ground that they are the real safeguard of Islam and the only armour against the Indian aggression, this paper manifests a different reality. In the context of the era of globalisation and the geo-political strategy of the Bangladesh government this research article brings into focus those debates and the paradoxes which have been generated in the academic and the political fields due to the penetration of Indian culture through STV in Bangladesh.

### **Rise of the Global Media: Theoretical Paradigms**

To comprehend the influence of the free flow of the Indian programmes, which has raised several possibilities and concern in Bangladesh, the researcher has analysed both the modernisation and the dependency paradigms in the context of current era of globalisation. Although cultural

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\* Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Dhaka. E-mail: [zhudabd@yahoo.com](mailto:zhudabd@yahoo.com)

globalisation is a contested concept, the modernisation thinkers consider the transnational horizontal integration of media structures and media interaction as the key features of this globalisation process. According to such a theoretical formulation, the world is becoming a single world society through a satellite based communication network, which contributes in changing the viewer's notion of belongingness and their sense of common experiences by producing the diverse as well as pluralistic images and languages (Brown, 2003; Pieterse, 1995: 45). While STV, as a global media, suggest the possibility of continued change by increasing the diversity and offsetting the centralising tendencies (Herman and Mc Chesney, 1997), the modernisation thinkers lighten it's de-regulating attribute to bring about freedom of cultural choice and practice (Thompson, 1997). Its competitive pressure on, and threat to, state controlled broadcasting system, in their view, is noteworthy while some of these are complacent and perform poorly.

The dependency thinkers negate the thesis of cultural globalisation by considering STV as an essential component of global capitalism. By regarding globalisation as a procedure of cultural dominance and regulation, they adopt the term "cultural imperialism" to reveal the systematic penetration and domination of the cultural life of the West, which aims to rebuild the values, and identity of the oppressed people to conform to the interests of the imperial classes (Schiller, 1976; McPhail, 1989; Tomilson, 1991). Media from such theoretical perspective is used to create a state of dependence in the periphery and contributes in establishing the hegemonic authority of the developed countries by shaping the popular consciousness.

While identity is constructed through the cultural representation, Meyrowitz (1986) demonstrates how television undermines the national identity and overrides the local traditions through the various transnational communications and media networks. Hall's narrative is more explicit about the three possible consequences of globalisation on cultural identities, which are marked as follows: erosion, reinforcing and the construction of new identities. As the social life becomes more mediated by marketing of styles, the identities in his account become more detached and disembodied from times and place in the era of late modernity (Hall, 1992: 310).

For Appadurai, the tension between cultural homogenisation and cultural heterogenisation is the central problem of today's global interaction. Although the homogenisation argument is based on the idea of Americanisation or commoditization, in his understanding these explanations fail to consider that when the new cultural form including the music or styles are brought from the various metropolises to the new societies or how they tend to become indigenised in one or another way. Instead of Americanisation, Indonesianization may be more worrisome for the people of Iranian Jaya or Indianization for Srilanka. One man's imagined community in his conceptualisation is another man's political prison (1990: 5-6). Appaduari is influential for this

research article as he demonstrates how the global media is breaking down the old concept of the national identity in association with commerce and consumer fantasies and offering a new sphere for the construction of the imagined selves and the imagined world. Instead of homogenisation, as he emphasised on indigenisation and fear of cultural absorption by the larger politics and culture, it is relevant to understand the impact of regional channels of STV, particularly the Indian channels on the cultural sphere of Bangladesh.

To comprehend the penetration of Bollywood (Mumbai based film industry) culture in Bangladesh the author has also considered the argument of Page and Crawley (2001: 24) who documented the impact of satellite revolution in five countries of South Asian region (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Srilanka and Nepal). Television in their analytical study is presented as an effective instrument in creating a new South Asian popular culture, which is a still one way-from India outward. In their study it is in fact explicit that India has created an endogenous form of cultural dominance in the region,

### **Concept of Satellite Television in Bangladesh**

The sophistication of telecommunication in a given region depends on the economy of that area. The 'have' nations involve the well-developed communication systems while the 'have-not' nations are barely able to sustain the system. Whereas the rapid growth of cable TV was regarded as a distinctive feature in the Western World in the 1960s (Hillard and Keith, 1996: 88) the residents of an information poor country, the middle class viewers, of Bangladesh did not possess any clear insight about STV for prolonged years. They were familiar only with the name of Sputnik, which was a satellite of former Soviet Union (Faisal, 1992: 83).

### **Beginning of the Change in Bangladesh**

STV appeared as the 'Talk of the Town' in Dhaka city for the first time in 1991 when the local daily 'Bangladesh Times' reported that 'CNN likely to be on air soon' (*Holiday*, 17-01-1992). But, its appearance was not that soon and until 1992 the Dhaka middle class viewers remained in dilemma about the future of STV in Bangladesh. STV re-appeared as an issue in the capital city, when the middle class viewers got acquainted with the name of STAR in the form of advertisement in the different daily newspapers of Bangladesh. But as the Wireless and Telegraphy Act of 1933 (which did not include any rule about the dish antenna) was still active in Bangladesh, without the amendment of which it was not possible for the government to welcome STV in the country during that time (Sanaullah, 1993: 69-71).

### **Trans-border Flow of Television Programmes in Bangladesh**

The trans-border flow of Television programmes could not be regarded as a new phenomenon in Bangladesh. There was always transmission of some foreign programmes on the state channel of BTV. According to a report of *Niriksha*, BTV imported 32% programmes from abroad (*Niriksha*, 1980: 31). The contribution of the medium like a video cassette recorder (VCR) at the private level is worth mentioning in case of bringing the foreign programmes for the viewers of the country.

### **VCR Boom in Bangladesh**

Although the middle class viewers of Bangladesh were passionate in viewing the foreign programmes, particularly the Hindi as well as Indian Bengali movies, for many those were totally banned in the country (Faisal, 1993:86). Indeed, in the late 70s the craze for viewing the Hindi and Bengali films rose to such an extent that in an attempt to ensure better TV reception from neighbouring country, various kinds of aids (such as booster antenna) were being used (Narunnabi, 1994:202). Neither the state television nor any cinema hall then was allowed to telecast or show any Indian movies in the country. VCR, for the first time, brought a great breakthrough in that stagnant condition by opening the door for an easy access of the Hindi films in Bangladesh

Thus, despite government's regulation, because of the invasion of VCR, the humble drawing room of the Bangali middle class was flooded with Indian movies. Although VCR was initially regarded as a symbol of prestige and power, within a short period of time the penetration of VCR moved from the capital town to the districts and even villages. The VCR, started to diffuse rapidly in the decade of 1980s, when BTV's black and white broadcasting went coloured and the government of General Ziaur Rahman liberalised the import duties on TV sets (*Anonna*, 01 July 1992).

### **Development of Satellite Television (STV) in Bangladesh**

Although BTV struggled to find its place in the media preferences of urban viewers due to video operations, the real competitive threat was posed to it from the Direct Satellite to Broadcasting (DBS) after its advent in 1992. Thus for a couple of decades the middle class viewers, while they were eager to get a variety of entertainment programmes, had to see what the government wanted them to see. Finally, their goal was fulfilled with the legalisation of Television Receive Only Dish (TVRO) in 1992 by the government of Khaleda Zia (*Dainik Bangla* 24 July 1992).

### **Emergence of TVRO as a Novel Status Symbol in Bangladesh**

After having the explicit declaration from the government level, the trend of installing TVRO for receiving alternative TV programmes from abroad was initiated in Bangladesh. TVRO initially were owned basically by the luxurious hotels with the objectives of attracting the international travellers and foreign tourists. Along with the American Information Centre, some diplomatic offices and two newspaper's head offices started using TVRO in Dhaka city, when its price was almost about one *Lakh* (one hundred thousand) *Taka* (*Dainik Bangla* 24 July 1992). Although the price of the TVRO was too high for the average middle class in Bangladesh, within a short period of time, it appeared as a 'beauty of the roof' in many of the posh residential areas (including Dhanmondi, Banani, Gulshan, and Baridhara) in Dhaka city. The upper middle stratum then appeared as the principal media consumers by purchasing this new type of receiver, despite its price variation from 50 thousands to one *Lakh Taka* (Faisal, 1993).

Sociologically speaking, no appropriate terminology is available in Bangladesh to designate this group of media consumer of the country. The social scientists of the country offer a contrasting narrative in identifying the rank of these people in the society. While the group has been marked as the thriving middle class in the context of the capitalist transformation and consumer revolution in the framework of one scholarship, the others tend to see them as a parasitic and comprador class resulting from the boom of 'black money' in the society (*Ekota*, 13th April, 1984) estimated at Taka 60,000 Crore (1 Crore = 10 million) (*Janakantha* 12 April 2002).

Bangladesh is a country that still remains in a dual world of the peasant culture and modernity, primary products and industrial goods. Because of the co-existence of these two modes of production, the capitalist transformation has not yet been completed in Bangladesh and the indigenous bourgeoisie could not emerge as an independent class (Islam, 1991: 73). Indeed, with a GNP per capita of \$252, Bangladesh has been ranked as one of the poorest countries in the contemporary world (*Observer Magazine*, 2000: 4). Yet, and in spite of the persistence of mass poverty and food insecurity, a small affluent group has formed in the country with a greater purchasing capacity and the availability of consumption goods. Consumption is associated with the discourse of luxury and class identity. Hence, after the declaration from the government this moneyed group installed TVRO at the rooftops of their skyscrapers to demonstrate their novel symbolic status (*Daily Azadi* 30 May 1992).

### **Cable Connection in Dhaka City**

Although TVRO remained as a 'golden dream' for the middle class dwellers in Dhaka City, it was out of their purchasing capacity due to its 'too high' a price. The entire condition changed in 1993 when the cable operators made possible the 'victory of satellite' for the middle class viewers in

Dhaka City by the wiring up homes in different parts of the city. Due to a far lower cost of the cable connection it succeeded in reaching the widest audiences in the Dhaka City (Jahangir, 1997: 79-95).

### **TV without Border: CNN entry in Bangladesh**

With the emergence of the American news network CNN (Cable News Network), which launched the direct satellite based broadcasting of the Gulf War in 1991, television news and information appeared as an international cultural artefact. It was Ted Turner, an Atlanta based cable entrepreneur, who revolutionised the news business by launching the twenty four hour news services in 1980. Through such a procedure he contributed in shaping McLuhan's prediction on global village which would be constructed through the televisual experiences (Fournay and Stewart, 1997).

After the end of the Gulf War, CNN appeared as a global medium and endeavoured to increase its viewers as well as designed to set up the new regional bureaux in Asia. With the objective to reach these targets, CNN intended to expand its markets in Bangladesh and successfully developed a good rapport with the then government of Khaleda Zia of Bangladesh. A couple of commercial executives of CNN visited Bangladesh and met Khaleda Zia and her administration to exchange their views about the future plan of CNN. Finally, Turner himself met Khaleda Zia (when as a Prime Minister of Bangladesh, she visited USA) and made a fruitful discussion about the advent of CNN in Bangladesh. Soon Turner's vision turned realistic as his CNN received the permission from the government of Khaleda Zia to open its channel in the country. In return, Turner did not forget to broadcast the interview of Khaleda Zia on the big screen of CNN (Faisal, 1993: 87).

At the initial phase, CNN was experimentally relayed only for a few hours. In accordance with the government strategy, the authority of BTV decided to broadcast the programmes of CNN from 7am to 2pm by considering it as a part of its six-month programmes (Jahangir, 1993: 97). The motive behind that slow footing strategy of the government was to evaluate CNN's acceptance and popularity among the viewers of Bangladesh. A survey conducted by 'News Scan 90', collecting the views from among 548 respondents, living in Dhaka city found that a majority of the viewers watched CNN. However, by identifying language as a barrier many did not watch while as many as 35% viewers expressed their "least interest" in watching its programmes (*Bhorer Kagoj* 30 October 1992). Although the modernisation thinkers consider the spread of English as an international language through the global communication media (Cohen and Kennedy, 2000:57), the above statistics demonstrates its inability in capturing the local language audiences and transmitting international material in this language.

### **Satellite Television Asian Region (STAR) in Bangladesh**

Although CNN pioneered the direct transnational broadcasting, without the real entertainment programmes, it appealed to only a few middle class viewers in Dhaka City. The real boost to direct transnational broadcasting was received with the launching of Hong Kong based Satellite Television Asian Region (STAR) network (Leonard, 1993: 124). The distinctive feature of the STAR lies in the fact that, it was inaugurated with the objective to offer the programmes in the cultural context of Asian countries with their local vernaculars.

STAR won the viewers of Bangladesh when it began beaming its five channels to the region. The middle class viewers got the real flavour of the foreign programmes when the STAR TV began beaming down its 'round-the-clock news' and the sports programmes. STAR gained huge popularity particularly among the middle class viewers when BTV transmitted 23 live matches, out of 139 matches of '1992 World Cup Cricket', from STAR sport channel network (Dainik Bangla 24 July 1992). As STAR is devoted to Indian languages, it contributes to making the programmes more popular and acceptable in Bangladesh.

### **Zee TV and other Hindi Language Channels in Bangladesh**

In spite of the intricate bi-lateral relationship existing between India and Bangladesh since the political transformation of 1975, the Dhaka middle class viewers, because of cultural affiliation, are found enthusiastic in watching Indian movies and dramas. Indeed, in the nationalist project of post-75 government India was conceived as a large country with hegemonic aspirations due to some delicate subjects including rampant cross border smuggling, gas export issue, transit facilities etc (Franda, 1982; Kabir, 2002). Despite the manifestation of such sensitive issues in the Bangladeshi nationalist project, the middle class viewers of Bangladesh in the decade of eighty eagerly viewed the programmes of Doordorshan by using the booster antenna. Those attempts of the middle class viewers ended with the advent of Indian channels like Zee TV, Zee Cinema Sony, etc (Goonesekera, 1998: 7).

Although STV was launched by CNN in Bangladesh, Zee TV contributed to making it incredibly popular among the middle class viewers in Dhaka City. Just when the Dhaka middle class viewers were eager to have more attractive and quality programmes, Zee TV and other Indian channels arrived with the huge entertainment shows. A Survey, conducted by 'Centre For Communication and Research' in 1994, explicitly demonstrates the popularity as well as the strong footing of the Zee TV in Bangladesh. Whereas 41% city viewers revealed their passion for Zee TV, 21% were identified as the viewers of Channel V, 11% adored STAR Plus and 7% watched Prime Sports regularly in Dhaka city (Rahman 1994: 11). The statistics is indicative in

gaining an insight about the penetration of the Indian language channels in Bangladesh, which, as the new socio-cultural resources, contributes in fracturing the traditional cultural domain of Bangladesh.

### **Emergence of Bengali Language Satellite Channel**

Due to the popularity of the Hindi language channels, while most of the viewers of Dhaka and Calcutta had already been captured by its multi channels, Alpha was launched with the aim to fuse the rich past of Bangali culture with the present (*Television Asia*, 1999). Accordingly, it intended to cover a wide spectrum of the Bangali culture and tradition in its programmes. Besides Alpha, some more Bengali language channels including ATN Bangla, Channels I, DD Bangla, ETV Bangla and Tara etc were also launched in the region (Huda, 2005).

### **External Factors for the Emergence of Satellite Television in Bangladesh**

This section intends to trace the emergence of STV as a global media at the end of the twentieth century and the relevant political, economic and technological factors that have led to its ascension in Bangladesh.

Globalisation was one of the buzzwords of 1990, which designates a phenomenon that resulted in part from the end of the Cold War in Europe. The dismantling of the Soviet Union, the end of the East-West conflict and the collapse of the bipolar world order dramatically reorganised the entire structure of the prevailing 'World System'. Rather than being the end of history, a new phase of history has opened up in 1990 after the break down of the USSR. A wave of global liberalisation gathered momentum during the period in which the state enterprises were privatised; private businesses were de-regulated resulting in the triumphant era of Globalisation and liberal democracy (Herman and McChesney, 1997).

The history of satellite based broadcasting is interwoven within these economic and political changes of the 'World System'. While globalisation has been made possible due to the advent of improved information (*Observer Magazine*, 19 May 2000: 3), the new information technologies are being seen as heralds of the new history where the relevance of the nation-state itself is being questioned. As the greater part of the social life is determined by the process of globalisation, the image of 'national border' has become less significant (*Asia Week*, 1993: 36).

To demonstrate the association between globalisation and the decisive change in media network, this section throws light particularly on GATT. GATT (General Agreement on Trade and Tariff) is a unique phenomenon, which contributes to an understanding of the new era of globalisation by opening up the new commercial opportunities for the cultural production. For an extensive period



the cultural products including the movies, television programmes were exempted from trade liberalisation (Goonasekera, 1998: 215). But in Uruguay Round of Talks in 1986 when 111 participant countries adopted the free trade policy in audio-visual services, the market became open for international trade in TV programmes (French and Richards, 1996: 343).

Bangladesh being one of the participant countries, as she signed on GATT, was integrated with the global market economy, and the media enterprise. It is worth noting that the nationalisation trajectory of Bangladesh for the first time was replaced by the privatisation policy within the military discourse of Ziaur Rahman. Due to his patronisation of a kind of Laissez-Faire economic policy, the collaboration between the private sector and foreign corporation was accepted in principle (Sen, 1986: 307). By adopting the homogeneous socio-economic strategy of Zia administration, the government of Ershad announced a New Industrial Policy (NIP) with the objective of capitalist transformation and industrial growth through the private sectors. The NIP was further liberalised in 1986, which aimed at expanding the industrial development under the Revised Industrial Policy (RIP) which ultimately helped in strengthening the export promotion measures (*Observer Magazine* 19 May 2000: 4).

Because of Bangladesh's involvement in the world economy, another industrial policy was announced in July 1991 when BNP returned to power under the leadership of Khaleda Zia. The policy which was then developed by the then government aspired to go global and encouraged the productivity in the industrial sector by means of deregulation, privatisation and establishment of export oriented industries. As Bangladesh was integrated with the world economy through such industrial approaches, the policy makers of the then Bangladesh government viewed the new economic and ideological environment as the essential prerequisites for the stabilisation of the democratic policy and the removal of isolation of the peoples of Bangladesh. Through such a procedure they expected that a common cultural environment would develop in which the people will see themselves and the world through their own lenses. They also lightened the concepts of 'transborder flow', 'freedom of choice' to bring about modernisation and a democratic atmosphere in the country (Lipon, 1997: 9).

A group of media analysts, including Lipon (1996), Abad (1993) expressed their disagreement with such approach of the government regarding the impact of the globalisation upon Bangladesh economy and culture. Such a view, they argued, was used to camouflage the capitalist economy as those strategies would carry the message of consumerism and promote acquisitive behaviour by encouraging the displacement of critical issues connected to a divided society like Bangladesh (Lipon, 1996: 3-9). Such environment would foster not only the dichotomization of 'economically

rich' and 'economically poor', but would widen the gap between the 'information rich' and 'information poor' of the country (Lipon, 1996).

Because of the end of East West conflict and dissolution of the socialist block, a politically strong trend was apparent towards de-regulation, privatisation and commercialisation of media. At the same time the people of Bangladesh also brought to an end the 'Era of Martial Law' by overthrowing the Ershadian autocracy and military dictatorship. For an extensive period (1975-1990) the succession of power through the military coup remained as a significant feature in the political culture of Bangladesh. Although military is supposed to be an a-political institution (Webster, 1990: 144) which is taught to accept professionalism and civilian supremacy (Masoom, 2000: 2), in Bangladesh it's frequent seizure of the state power attests to its emergence as a formidable political force which violates the constitutional law in the name of political reform and modernisation of the country. But this trend in politics was halted during the last decade of the twentieth century, when with the objective to restore democracy and people's voting right, a new movement for the Caretaker Government was launched by the two major political parties of Bangladesh (Hakim, 1993:103).

The movement ultimately resulted in the mass uprising in 1990 and subsequently, for the first time, a general election was held under the neutral Caretaker Government in Bangladesh in February 1991 (Hakim, 1993:103). The concept of Caretaker Government was imbued with novelty and originality. The idea of the Caretaker Government was initiated in order to conduct free and fair parliamentary elections and set off the democratic process in the country, with the added objective that the next three general elections of Bangladesh will be held under its aegis (Hasina, 1997: 43).

The movement of 1990 paved the way for both the process of democratisation and freedom of the media in Bangladesh. Although no significant changes took place in the field of mass media in Bangladesh after independence, a massive expansion in their growth was witnessed after the fall of Ershad government in 1990. The freedom of media is associated with the democratic rights of the citizens, as media has been seen as a way to keep the political elites accountable to the people and to provide a device for competing interests and conflicting perspectives to be heard (Morgan, 1989:240). Since a democratic society depends on an informed populace making the political choice, people expected a well-developed mass media policy from the newly elected democratic government of Khaleda Zia, which returned to power after the fall of Ershad. With the objective of accomplishing the dreams of the people, the government of Khaleda Zia launched a new media policy declaring that her government would air differing views over the media. Consequently, in May 1992, the government lifted the restrictions on the private use of satellite

antennas because of which Arabsat (CNN) and Asiasat (STAR TV) programmes became available to the private viewers in Bangladesh (Moslem, 1993: 8).

In addition, the media revolution in Asia influenced the government of Khaleda Zia to embrace the new strategy in the domain of mass communication in Bangladesh. Indeed, when the Indian and the Pakistani viewers were enjoying the global programmes in their private channels even without having the dish antenna, then the middle class viewers in Bangladesh remained completely isolated from the arena of the global entertainment. Despite Bangladesh's conversion to colour TV before India and Pakistan, those neighbouring countries initiated the watching of STV before the middle class viewers of Bangladesh (Robbar 19 February 1992). Initially, the middle class viewers were found indifferent towards the programmes of STV in Bangladesh. But the demand was stimulated by the '1992 World Cup Cricket', which was held in Australia.

### **Internal Factors Responsible for the Advent of Satellite Television in Bangladesh**

The enthusiasm, which was generated among the middle class viewers of Dhaka City for STV, gradually gathered momentum. In order to comprehend the significance of such a demand, the endogenous socio-political environment of Bangladesh is analysed in this section.

The crucial phenomenon that inspired the democratisation in Bangladesh was people's mass uprising, which toppled the dictatorship of Ershed in 1990. The event led to the general election and Khaleda Zia returned to power with the ambition to construct a new image of the government. As one of the important elements of her political campaign was the democratisation of the mass communication, she gave her consent to CNN entry when the offer came from Ted Turner to open its bazaar in Bangladesh sky. Both the parties had self-interest in this regard. While Turner looked for commercial objective and profit making, Khaleda intended to gain 'international' reputation by using television as an 'image building medium' (Faisal, 1993: 87).

Despite such initiative of the government, the democratic voters cum viewers soon got shocked when they discovered the concentration and monopolisation of BTV by the BNP government following the same path of the JP (Jaitya Party of General Ershad) government. Indeed, under the both governments, BTV got its alliance with the ruling party and lend continued support to them by promoting and protecting their partisan politics. Although the government of Khaleda Zia assigned full autonomy to the print media with the explanation that, there was a need for broader access to the media; the electronic media remained exclusively captive in the hands of her government (Janakontha 31 December 1993). Despite the public demand for the autonomy and independence of BTV, the then Information Minister Nazmul Huda explicitly rationalised the government's control and censorship on BTV by arguing, 'We have got the people's mandate for

five years, BTV will be conducted in accordance with our own direction' (*Janakontha*, 17 July 1995).

While partisan politics and state regulation played the dominant role in determining the BTV culture, its programmes remained stereotyped and non-attractive in nature and the middle class viewers got disappointed by watching its low quality programmes during the regime of Khaleda Zia.. Despite Khaleda's claims of economic liberalisation, privatisation and commercialisation, the decision to liberalise BTV from the government intervention remained illusive (Huda, 2005). While the middle class viewers did not find any change in its cultural production, a big question was raised by the critiques about the government's intention on 'Whether or not Khaleda and her administration want viewers for BTV' (*Janakontha* 17 July 1995)?

Because of government's indifferent trajectory as the administration of BTV failed to improve the quality of the programmes, the middle class viewers got annoyed with the state channel. Due to their dissatisfaction, they initiated their search for a more diverse and richer media environment. Most audiences in Dhaka City are primarily middle class people who do not mind paying for quality shows (Hiuda, 2005).

As a result of the internationalisation of the mass communication on the one hand and the discontentment of the middle class viewers on the other, the government of Khaleda Zia adopted the 'double standard' principle in the media policy. The advent of STV in Bangladesh was the resultant feature of that political strategy. The media policy then had been re-evaluated with the intention to remove the dissatisfaction of the middle class viewers of Dhaka city who play a determining role in the formation of the government in Bangladesh (it is worth mentioning that, BNP won 12 seats of Dhaka city in the election of 1991) and to keep BTV under absolute control as a mouthpiece of the government. Because of the universal push towards the globalisation, Khaleda's administration understood that for a developing country like Bangladesh, it would not be possible to resist the globalisation process, which is penetrating from the centre to the every corner of the periphery. As the defining medium of the age, STV accordingly was welcomed in Bangladesh for the fulfilment of the aspiration of the middle class viewers and the political objectives of the Bangladeshi middle class government (Lipon, 1997: 10).

The advent of STV could be interpreted as a kind of 'compensation' for the middle class viewers in Dhaka city, who for long years have been deprived from viewing quality programs on state television. Indeed, by adopting the double standard media strategy, Khaleda was both appreciated and condemned by the academicians and political elites of Bangladesh. Although ends justify the means, it can not be denied that, she contradicted herself by opening the

trajectory for the free flow of uncontrolled Western values in a country like Bangladesh that was exposed to Islamicist values. It is such a country where Bismillah-ar-Rahman-or-Rahim (In the name of Allah, the Beneficent) has been inserted in the Constitution and sexuality, hedonism is strictly regulated by religion and social custom. Although BNP is found to be very loud against the socio-cultural aggression of India, it was Khaleda's administration, which opened the door for the penetration of Indian culture in Bangladesh through the free flow of satellite communication (Huda, 2005).

### **Geo-political Strategy of Bangladeshi Nationalism and its contradiction with STV**

Bangladesh, this author feels, has been caught into the nationalist dilemma since the post-1975 era because of the invention of the Bangladeshi nationalism. Although Bangladesh emerged as a modern nation state on the basis of Bangali Nationalism, that linguistic-cultural identity has been replaced by Bangladeshi nationalism with the open commitment to an Islamic way of life. While the term Bangladeshi nationalism involves several confusing connotations and ambiguities, Huda in her recent works has considered it as an invented nationalism. The Bangladeshi nationalism, according to her analysis was politically invented by General Ziaur Rahman with the objective to destroy the indigenous Bangali culture including folk literature and songs, *Yatra*, as well as Tagore's and Nazrul's philosophy of humanism and secularism to differentiate the people of Bangladesh from the people of West Bengal of India who possess the identical Bengali vernacular and cultural traditions (Huda, 2005). The cultural interaction between the Bengali speaking worlds of India and Bangladesh in fact is high, perhaps the highest of any people living in separate countries in South Asia. There is a large migrant population in both areas and both share the cultural luminaries and a common literary heritage (Chowdhury, 2003: 100).

In view of such existing reality, Bangladeshi nationalism, the author finds, has been articulated within this geo-political environment of the South Asia. As geographically Bangladesh is not only a small country, but almost encircled by India from all three sides, the Bangladeshi nationalists suffered from xenophobia (Huda, 2005). The fear of Indianisation and the hegemonic character of India was manifested in the Bangladeshi nationalist project in view of her supremacy within the bi-lateral relation between the two countries on the issue of sharing of water from the Farraka Barrage, India's failure to hand over Tin Bigha Corridor to Bangladesh, to get access to the Bangladeshi enclaves of Dohargram and Angorpota and frequent migration of the refugees from Bangladesh in the states of West Bengal, Asam, Tripura etc. Not only that, Gen. Zia himself was suspicious about the motives of India which in his view could overturn his regime and render Bangladesh's independence meaningless (Franda, 1982:287). While India was thus conceived as a greater country with her commanding and dominant influence by the Bangladeshi nationalists, Gen. Zia himself brought into focus all these anti-Indian propagation by arguing that, only the

Bangladeshi nationalism could wipe out “foreignism” from the country as well as be a safeguard against all evil designs on the sovereignty of Bangladesh (*Bangladesh\_Observer*, 29 December 1980).

Bangladeshi nationalism for Gen. Zia thus emerged as an alternative nationalist doctrine for the people of Bangladesh whereas Bangali nationalism in his perception demonstrates the conceptual integration with West Bengal of India. Islam accordingly from such a perspective has been used as an emotive tool to make the Bangali national identity enigmatic and to demonstrate the distinctive image of Bangladesh in the region. Whereas the integrity of the culture remains as a key concern in the Bangali nationalist project, there for the Bangladeshi demagogue’s religious nationalism remains as the key political force in contemporary Bangladesh for the protection of her sovereignty in the South Asian region (Kyum, 1994). While the Bangladeshi leaders intend to define the nation by denying the past linkages with West Bengal and undermining the Bangali culture, they employ Islam as an effective weapon to counter the cultural hegemony of India.

Hence, it is the Bangladesh government which is making a distinction between the veil and *Tiluk*, *Tupi* and *Dhuti* in Bangladesh (Huda, 2005, p.207). Although the fear of Indianisation and the propagation of the provocative slogan “Islam is in danger” (Chowdhury, 2002) are explicit in the political statements of the Bangladeshi nationalists, being the successor of Ziaur Rahman, the government of Khaleda Zia paved the way for the infiltration of the Bollywood culture in Bangladesh. While the government of Khaleda Zia did welcome STV with open arms in their conceived Muslim Bangladesh culture and did not initiate any attempt to challenge the threat of the Indianisation process through STV, it also made the STV role paradoxical in this regard (Huda, 2005).

Indeed, in one political speech Khaleda herself pronounced that in the wrap of the Bangali nationalism, “the Ulu Dhani (Hindu religious chant) will be heard in the mosque instead of Azan (Call to the Muslim for prayer) in the regime of Awami League” (Kabir, 2002: 182). Yet, neither she nor her administration ever raised the voice against the Indian cultural penetration through the emergence of the global satellite television. Instead of demonstrating any negative approach towards the penetration of Bollywood culture, they are found sonorous in case of opposing the display of *Shikha Chirantan* (which projects the eternal flame of *Muktiodho*) at a place in the Suhrawardy Uddan at Dhaka city by branding it as idolatry - something forbidden in Islam (Kabir, 2002: 182). Despite the coexistence of such propagation of Indianisation and Islamisation as the two essential components of the Bangladeshi nationalist project, they remain silent on the issue of Bollywood aggression in Bangladesh. This demonstrates their contradictions with the principle ethos of their nationalist project and the geo-political strategy (Huda, 2005).

## Conclusion

This research article unveils the enigmatic geo-political strategy of the Bangladeshi nationalists regarding the issue of the penetration of Bollywood culture through STV. Although the Bangladeshi government highlights the Islamic values and the ethos to override the Bangali national identity with the objective to construct its own Bangladeshi culture, its strategy is rather enigmatic in case of challenging the penetration of the Bollywood culture. While Bollywood films and music have succeeded in creating a new popular culture with the projection of the glamour of the consumer society and the principle of cultural modernity, the penetration of Bollywood culture through STV is remarkable in Bangladesh. With its massive entertainment programmes and the spectacular production, as the Hindi channels of STV are now influencing the middle class viewers from the centre to periphery in Bangladesh and creating a new phase of cultural dependence, several questions have been raised about the role and ability of the Bangladesh government in dealing with the phenomenon.

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## Book Reviews

***Political Economy of land Litigation in Bangladesh: A Case of Colossal National Wastage*** by Abul Barakat and Prasanta K. Roy, 2004. Dhaka: ALRD and Nijera Kori.

Land, the fertility of which was once the wonder of the world, is still the most important asset for livelihoods in Bangladesh. So it is also a major source of conflict in society. It has been particularly so because of a combination of factors including firstly, the imprecise nature of land ownership during the pre-colonial era as evident from the meticulous research by Barry Morrison and a host of other scholars (1980; Ali, 2000) and hugely complex labyrinth of land rights of the colonial and post colonial times. A second factor has been the deltaic ecology of this region that causes regular erosion and accretion of land caused by the hydrological dynamics of more than 250 rivers. A third factor has been the explosion of population from the late colonial period to 1980s within a very small geographical area with only 0.83 acre of land being available for a household and thus making land largely the sole source for survival for a majority of people. These and other factors, as Hartman and Boyce (1983:71) showed, give rise to fierce competition for land that 'constantly pits villager against villager.' Pervasive land litigation thus has been a central feature of Bangladesh society. The book under review illuminates this unexplored aspect of the social life of the country. This is an important and almost an indispensable book for those who are interested in rural Bangladesh or land relations of the country.

This book grew out of an important research work supported by the Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD) and Nijera Kori. The methodology included documentation, court visits ranging from village courts to divisional courts, and survey in six districts, each from one division of the country. The respondents comprised a sample of 340 people including plaintiffs, defendants or accused of both civil and criminal cases.

The authors also undertook 30 in-depth case studies with a view to achieving triangulation of quantitative and qualitative methods. The data of the research have been presented in 47 tables. The book also contains a rich store of additional empirical data within the text of over 452 pages and 18 chapters. Professor Abul Barakat, the first author is a leading political economist of the country who has made significant contributions to the study of the political economy of land in the country. The present book is a continuation of his engagement with this issue.

From the very beginning the authors have taken an empirical approach to the issue of land litigation and have provided a historical account of land rights in the country as a context for understanding the current problem of land litigation. The results of the study have been presented in 15 chapters which highlight nature, prevalence, costs, and consequences of litigation through numbers and narratives.

The authors provide the details of the staggering number of land litigations that occur in the country. They found that about four million litigations were being instituted annually and among these one million were being solved through *shalish* or informal arbitration. About 1.82 million cases were pending in the courts of the country. Of these 1.39 million (76.58%) were land litigation. The total operating cases of land litigation were 2.5 million. The authors make the projection that about 186 million people were affected by land litigation that represented, at the time of the study, 46 million (or about one third) more than the total population of the country! However as more than one person was involved in a case, one who was involved in litigation was also involved in several lawsuits. As much as 54 percent of the respondents were involved in from one to four lawsuits and 34 percent from five to eight. The annual total amount of land affected by litigation was 2.35 million acres or 25% of the total arable land. Lawsuits ran for years together even as long as 50 years. Each lawsuit on average ran for 9.5 years. Thus suffering due to land litigation, the projection shows, did run into 27 million years!! In a similar way the total amount spent for litigation was projected to be 250,387 million taka which was equivalent to 10%

of the GDP and was more than the allocation for annual development of the country. Land litigation provided ample scope for corruption. Bribes amounted to about one-third of the cost of litigation. The police and land officials took the lion's share of the bribe. Chairmen, and members of the local government and even members of Parliament also claimed it.

Litigations led to stress, sickness, and decline of income and food consumption; in many cases it triggered violence causing physical injury, riot and even murder. The economic consequences of litigation, the authors show, are very severe. It is a key factor for downward mobility and vulnerability. Litigation led to loss of household assets for most of the respondents. After litigation rich families were reduced by half, and the number of the poor doubled. It also led to the swelling of the lower middle income group by 10 percent. Thus land litigation creates 'an environment for exploiting the innocent people' and multiplying the process of pauperization. It has been an important cause for poverty and vulnerability of marginally well-off people. Land litigation "...accentuates distress and destitution among the families under litigation; acts as a powerful disincentive against human capital formation, and causes a colossal wastage for the whole national economy and the society" (p. 293).

Land litigation is a complex process and it leads to a broad range of deprivation. With a view to understanding this process the authors undertook 30 case studies that represented six major forms of deprivation. First they highlight cases of illegal land grabbing, irregular registration with the help of forged documents, problems with property of people who left the country at the time of partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, collusion of the police, land grabbers and local government bodies, and violence and death in the *charlands*. Through these case studies the authors show that the state, political parties and local government all act together to deny effective rights to the bulk of the citizens. The cases in fact highlight a variety of low human rights regimes and institutional linkages within each regime. The major causes of land litigation, according to the respondents of the study, are irregular possession, irregularities in sale, purchase and registration of land, dispute about inheritance, dispute among co-sharers and forged documents.

On the basis of their study the authors provide a comprehensive policy package for reduction of litigation. The list includes good governance, speedy disposal of cases, increase of courts and judges, provision for ADR, re-introduction of Upazila Civil Court, merging of different land-related offices, affixation of photographs of buyers and sellers, repeal of obsolete land laws, provision for meticulous and fair land records, identification of *khas* lands, completion of the survey of accreted and alluvial land, revision of the Abandoned Property Act, setting up of a land data bank.

It is to be mentioned here that the Government of Bangladesh has already introduced some of these reforms and hopefully it will reduce land litigation to a certain extent. But many of these reforms are yet to be achieved.

I have several trivial critiques of this unusually good book. The historical section does not do justice to the highly debated issue of land ownership in South Asia. The sample size [340 respondents] is technically inadequate for national projection. The use of some kind of theoretical framework such as social capital would have made this work more fascinating. The empirical approach is also reflected in the use of concepts like middle class, upper middle class or lower middle class. It is not clear if the categories refer to the social divisions of the peasantry or class divisions within the country in general. I could not find rural-urban distribution of litigation among the large number of tables. The comprehensive list of suggestions does not set up priorities for action. There are a few printing errors (the word *Zamindar* has been shown to have originated from the French, p22, n5 and so on).

In spite of some limitations, it is a major study on the legal pathology of developing countries and shows with a wealth of empirical information why good governance is such an important policy agenda for Bangladesh. The book will be very useful to scholars, policy makers, development

practitioners, and general readers who have interest in land relations and rural society of the country.

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### S Aminul Islam

Professor and Chair, Department of sociology  
University of Dhaka. Email: [aminuls2000@yahoo.com](mailto:aminuls2000@yahoo.com)

***Election Under a Caretaker Government: Empirical Analysis of the October 2001 Parliamentary Election in Bangladesh*** by Waresul Karim,(second edition), 2007. Dhaka: UPL, Pp 478.

It is extraordinary how quickly people these days move across disciplinary boundaries and move on to new areas. This work by Waresul Karim of the Department of Finance and Banking of the University of Dhaka is a testimony to that. This book provides a meticulous examination of the history of voting pattern since the era of democracy in 1991, especially the 2001 parliamentary election of Bangladesh.

The study of electoral behaviour is a highly important area of research in political science and political sociology and has given rise to an extensive body of literature. Since the classic studies of Herbert Tingsten in 1937, and V.O Kay in 1949 and pioneering election studies by Columbia University sociologists – Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee, a huge body of scholarly works have sought to explore the interfaces of individual citizens, social contexts and elections. The key concern of electoral studies is the nature of people's preferences and the way these preferences are socially shaped. In the West key variables such as social class, ethnicity, religion, generations, on the one hand, act as important and stable social determinants of electoral behaviour and political party, personalities, party programs, party performances as direct and often variable determinants of electoral choice, on the other.

There are few studies of electoral behaviour in Bangladesh. Karim's book, first published in 2004, is a very welcome addition to this vitally important area of study. In some ways it is a different kind of book – different from social science tradition in the way the literature review has been done and the logical structure of the study conceived.

Divided into 13 chapters and 3 broad sections the main objective of the book is to provide an empirical analysis of parliamentary election of 2001 with focus on party performance in violence-prone area, swings, party performance and voter turn out and finally multivariate analysis. The multivariate analysis seeks to find robust answers for three research questions:

1. What are the factors that lead to the success or failure of a candidate in the election?
2. What factor or factors influence the share of a party's vote in the constituency?
3. What were the factors that were responsible for the retention or loss of a seat won by a party in 1996?

The book provides a detailed and comparative analysis of results of elections held in 1991, 1996 and 2001. It shows that Bangladesh has achieved a stable two-party system. The Awami League gained 88 seats and 30.08 percent of votes in 1991, 146 seats and 37.46 percent votes in 1996, and 62 seats and 40 percent votes in 2001. The BNP, on the other hand, won 140 seats and 30.81 percent of votes in 1991, 116 seats and 33.61 votes in 1996, and 193 seats and 40.97 percent of votes in 2001.

This book tries to show what determined the election performance of these parties. Of the 100 seats won by the Awami League and its allies in 1991, it retained 66 of them and gained another 80 seats from other parties, particularly from the BNP and the Jamat. In 2001 the party lost 64 seats out of 72 seats in which it had lost by a margin of 10 percent and less. In 1996, the BNP in a similar way won in 80 seats held in 1991 and added 36 new seats from other parties.

In spite of the Awami League's loss in 1991 and 2001 parliamentary election, its electoral performance was better than any other single party. It has been able to improve its electoral gain over the years. But the paradox is that this gain did not translate into winning parliamentary seats. As the author points out securing popular votes and securing a seat is not the same thing. The study found that 4 variables had significant associations with the Awami League's performance. Its 1996 election margins and the existence of BNP or Jamat rebel candidates were associated with Awami League's win and perceived terrorism and alliance arithmetic or combination of BNP –Jamat votes had strong influence on its loss. The BNP also improved its position considerably, especially in urban areas and in the Rajshahi Division, particularly areas of the north Bengal dominated by the JP.

Thus the four-party alliance won on the basis of a combination of anti-Awami League forces and unusual vote swings in 58 constituencies which were violence-prone. In these constituencies the Awami League lost with a big margin. The test of association found no relationship between party performance and rural- urban location of the seats. But interestingly Dhaka led the nation in terms electoral outcome. There was a pounced pro-BNP swing in all the seats of the Dhaka city. A swing in Dhaka reverberated throughout the country.

The author has tried to speculate the reasons for the AL debacle in the capital city. The key cause seems to have been the rise of violence in the city and its perceived association with Awami League leaders. "[F]ew cases of highly publicized, high profile terrorist activates with which the names of some Awami league leaders and MPs appeared in the newspapers had made people to align the Awami League with terrorism. The government at the same time was not successful in clearing its name from alleged involvement with terrorism as they could not or did not find out and expose the real criminals who were perpetuating the crimes"(p, 254). Other contributing causes were corruption, mismanagement in the DCC and its mayor, load shedding, increase in hijacking, kidnapping and extortions etc.

The author did not find unusual swings in vote in more than 4-5 constituencies which could not be explained with known factors. The voter turn out was high in 2001 in the constituencies in which it was high in 1996. The voter turn out was low in urban constituencies, medium-level violence – prone area and where rate of increase in voters was high and where 4-party alliance had won in 1996. The author did not check on the proportion of minority votes which were cast, but the average turn out in 146 constituencies in which the Awami League won in 1996 was not significantly different from the average for the country. But the data allow the possibility interpreting that AL and minority voters faced intimidation.

This book has three minor shortcomings. The author has not looked across the disciplinary boundary and does not seem to have consulted, at least, a part of the enormous literature on electoral studies within political science and political sociology. The discrete literature review (using each work in isolation) uses mostly journalistic writings from Bangladesh. Thus, secondly, the research design has not been adequately built on the basis of theoretical logic.

Thirdly, the conclusion of such a good book is disappointing. It provides a very brief overview of each chapter rather than highlighting the key findings of its empirical analysis.

The book does not become directly engaged with the issue of how free and fair these elections were (free and fair election were cited in 5 different pages in the empirical section of the book and election irregularities in 2) the issue that has led to the current breakdown of the democratic process. But it does provide powerful empirical analysis of why the four-party alliance did win. To reiterate the Awami League lost the election due to the aggregation of the votes of the BNP and the Jamat and perceived terrorism. But the message of the book is clear. The voters of the country have acted rationally. But there are many constituencies where elections were dictated by the show of force and most possibly money. This study shows clearly that the management of elections is a complex process and the electoral roll is only one component of it.

It also does not offer policy suggestions. The view of one who has worked with such a wealth of election data on the issue might have been very illuminating in a country where both political and intellectual views are often shaped by narrow group interest or common sense.

An analysis of election results does not show the way people actually vote or factors that shape voter's preferences. It is surprising that in a country where there has been so much controversy over the electoral process, there has been so little empirical study on it! This book shows how badly and urgently we need more studies on public opinion, and quantitative and ethnographic study of electoral behaviour in the country. It might have saved a lot of political turmoil in the country.

The UPL should be congratulated for bringing out the second edition of a high quality book with such care. The book would be indispensable for anybody interested in the issues of election and electoral behaviour of the country.

**S Aminul Islam**

Professor and Chair, Department of sociology  
University of Dhaka. Email: [aminuls2000@yahoo.com](mailto:aminuls2000@yahoo.com)