

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

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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 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

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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, Sri Lanka 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 (Flournay 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 Ershad 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 it's 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 Bolloyood 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 *Mukhtiyodho*) 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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