

The Predicament of Democratic Consolidation in Bangladesh

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

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

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

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

Paradigms of democratic transition

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

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

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

Neo-patrimonialism

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

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

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

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

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

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

Patron-clientelism

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

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

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

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

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

Political Cultures

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Social capital and democratic political culture

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

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

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

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

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

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

Democratic transition

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

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

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

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

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

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

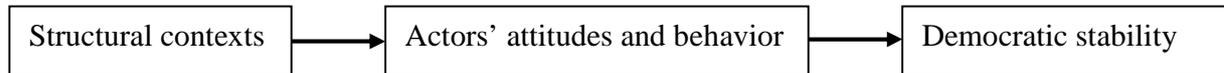
Phillipe Schmitter (1996) argues that no single rule or institution is sufficient for democratic consolidation, not even such cardinal criteria such as, majority rule, territorial representation, competitive elections, parliamentary sovereignty or party system. The key feature of democratic consolidation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

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

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

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

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



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

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

Use of violence

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

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

The rejection of elections

If political parties

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

The transgression of authority

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The case of Bangladesh

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

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

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

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

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

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

Contours of the conflict: Elections and Parliament

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Analytical framework

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

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

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

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

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

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

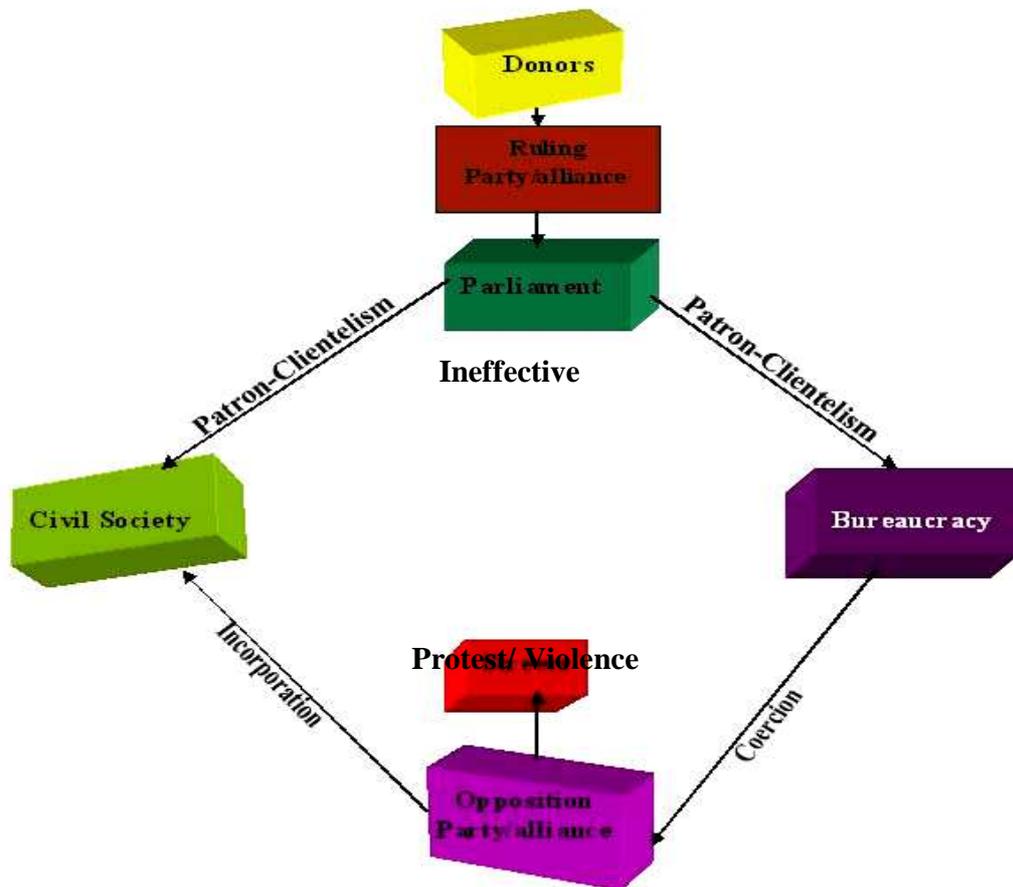


Figure: 1 The Ruling Party and the Opposition.

Low Social capital and political culture in Bangladesh

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Class structure

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

Patron –clientelism

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

Horizontal clientelism: the nexus between political parties and the bureaucracy

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

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

Political parties and patron clientelism

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

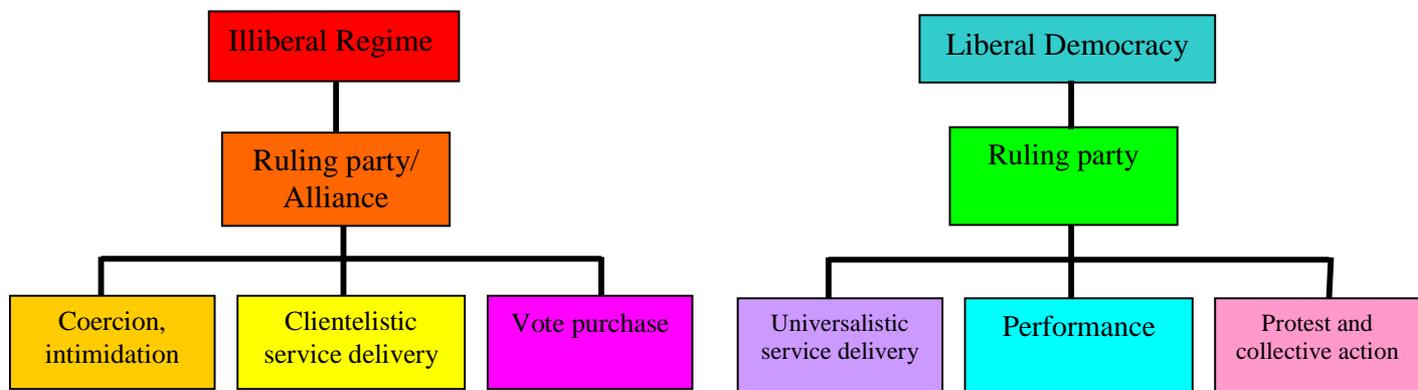


Figure: 2. Regime Type and Electoral Strategies

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

Enemy discourse

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

Data sources and methodology

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

The shaping of enemy discourse

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

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

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

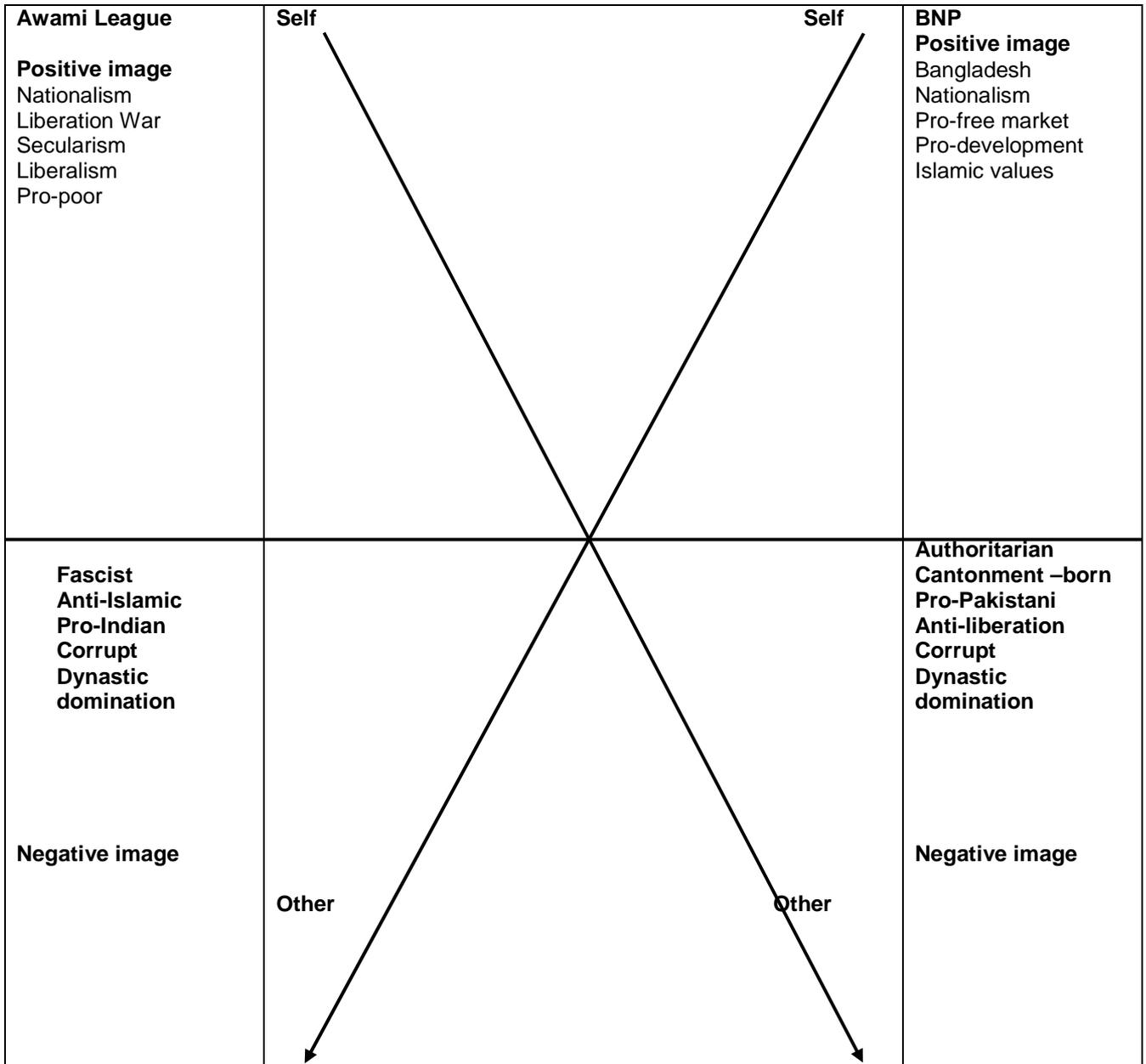


Figure 3: Enemy discourse: self and the other

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

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

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

Government	Number of Conflicts	Percent
BNP Regime	1066	44
Caretaker Government	102	4.21
AL Regime	927	38.25
Caretaker Government	328	13.54
Total	2423	100

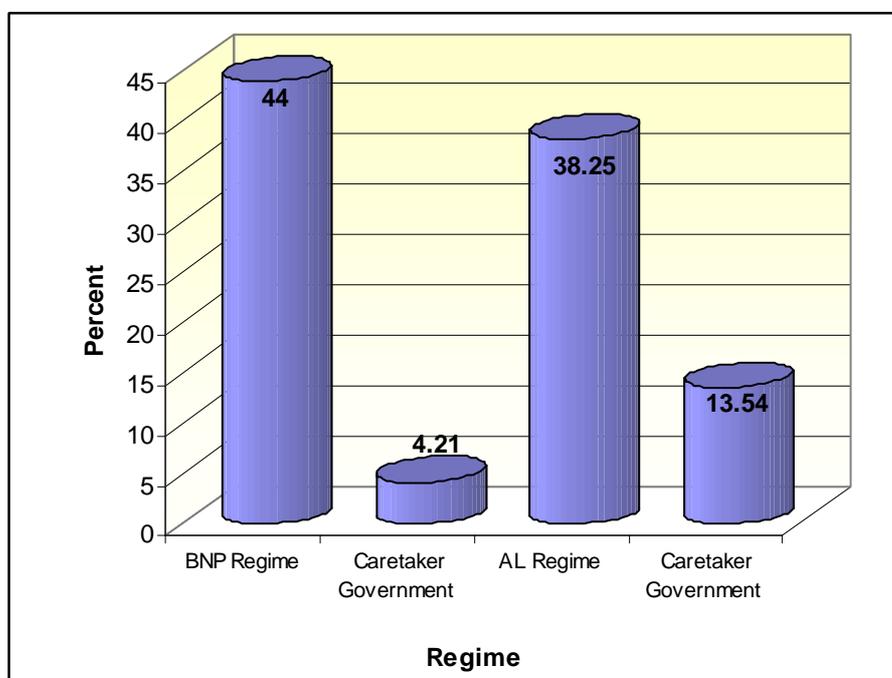


Figure 4: Political Party Conflicts in Bangladesh by Regime, 1991-2001

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

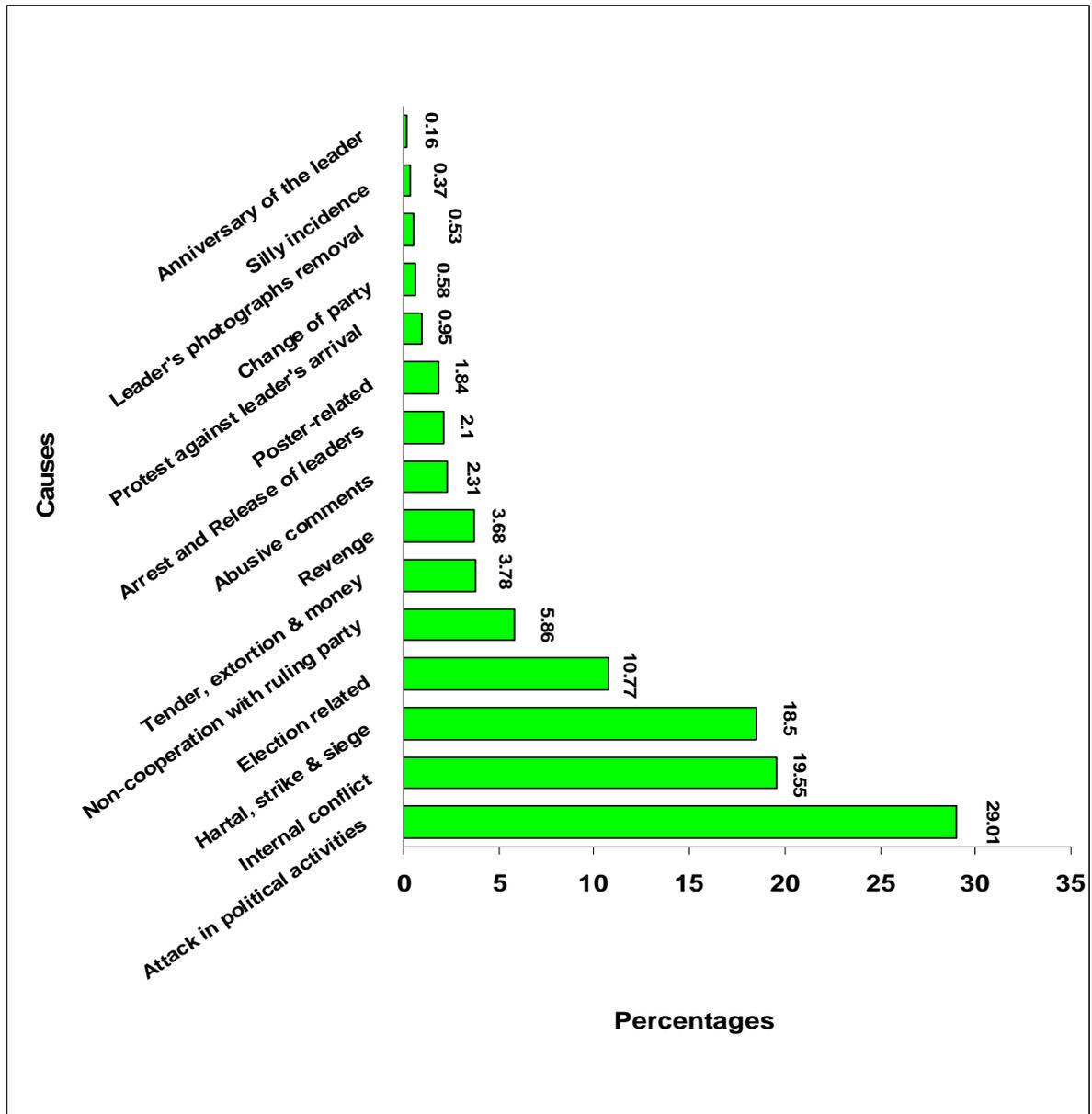


Figure 5: Political Party Conflicts in Bangladesh, 1991-2001: The Causes

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

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

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

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

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

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

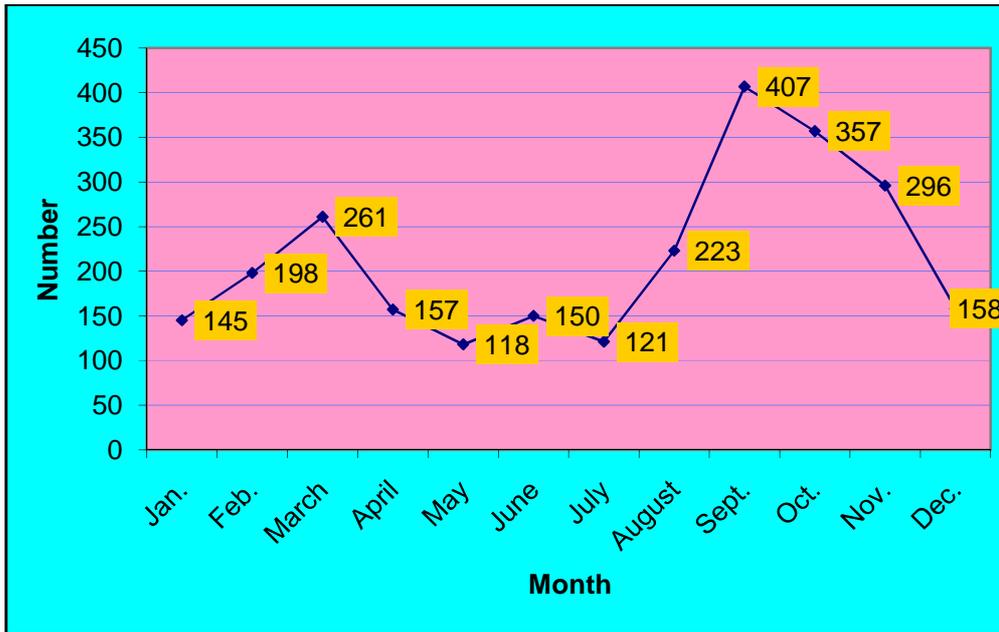


Figure 6: Political Party Conflicts in Bangladesh, 1991-2001: By Month

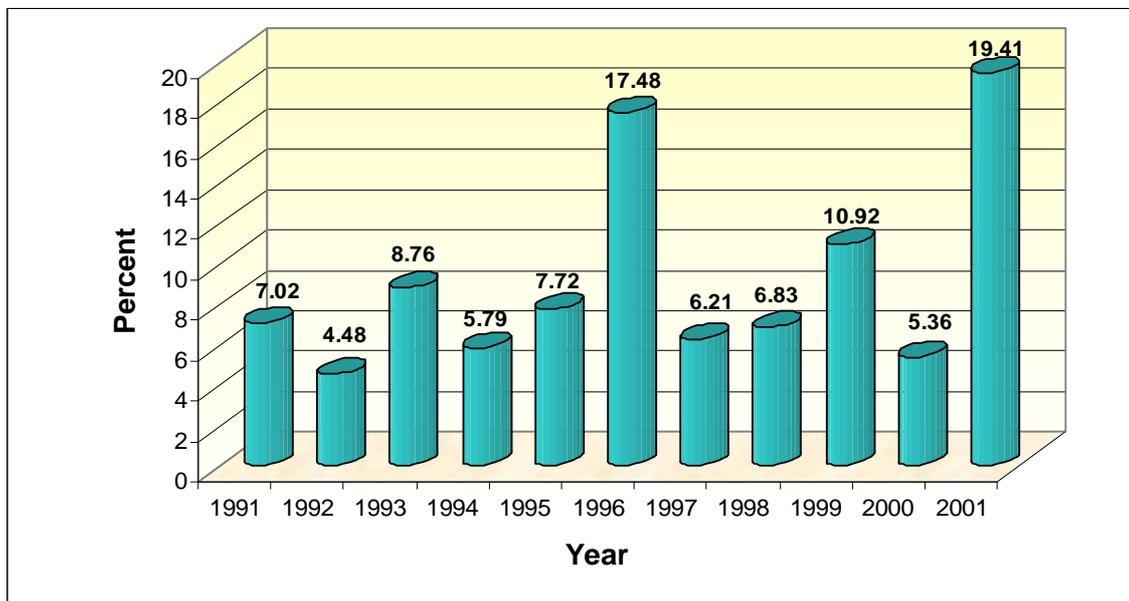


Figure 7: Political Party Conflicts in Bangladesh, 1991-2001: By Year

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

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

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

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

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