

Democracy in Bangladesh: Problems & Prospects

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Abstract

Democracy is a continuous political process, which can only be sustained and developed by giving due attention to certain issues. Though Bangladesh has passed 34 years of its independence, it has failed to establish democracy as an institution. First of all I have discussed the conceptual framework of democracy. The main aim of this paper is to identify what are barriers to institutionalization of democracy in Bangladesh. Then I have recommend policy measures for overcoming these problems. Lastly, I have also discussed in briefly the prospects of Democracy in Bangladesh. The paper is based on secondary sources of information like books, journals, research reports and newspapers. Relevant literature has also collected through Internet browsing.

Key Word: Democracy & Bangladesh

Introduction

We have passed about thirty-four years since independence but our achievements in the spheres of democracy and development are not noteworthy. In Bangladesh every political leader or party, civil or military, popular or unpopular, big or small, in or out of power, talk about democratic incessantly. Even so the nation has failed to put it into practice. Parties voted into power to strengthen democracy have all failed to encourage its values. Taking advantage of this situation, military leaders intervened to practice their own version of democracy, which only exacerbated the crisis. The country today is riddle with numerous problems threatening the very development of democracy. Our society with an under developed political culture and poverty ridden illiterate and incompetent masses is lacking democratic political organizations, institutions and practices. However, the prospects for a politically developed and economically prosperous nation is marked by people's eagerness to democracy and progress, nations march toward a two party system and politicians realization that there is no way but election capture power.

Conceptual Analysis

Democracy: Meaning & Concept

The term democracy is derived from the Greek words, demos and Kratos, the former meaning the people and the latter power. Democracy thus means power of the people. It is now regarded as a form of government in which the people rule themselves either directly, or indirectly through their representatives. Definition of democracy, as a form of government, are various, But like many other definitions in political science, they differ in their content and application (Kapur, 1993). Democracy, according to the Greeks, is the Government in which people rule over themselves. Aristotle considered it as a perverted form of government. Herodotus says, the democracy denotes that form of government in which in the ruling power of the state is largely vested in the members of the community as a whole. In the words of President Abraham Lincoln, it is a government of the people, by the people and for the people (Agarwal, 1991). According to Bryce, "Democracy is that form of government in which the ruling power of a state is legally vested, not in any particular class or classes but in the members of the community as a whole". Prof. Seeley says, "Democracy is a government in which every body has a share." According to Dicey, "Democracy is a form of government in which the governing body is a comparatively large function of the entire nation. On the other hand Gettell's opinion, "Democracy is that form of government in which the mass of the population possesses the right to share in the exercise of sovereign power.

Among the definitions of democracy given above, the definitions of Dicey, Bryce, Abraham Lincoln and Gettell are more important and popular. In brief, we can say that democracy is that form of government in which the sovereign power of the state is in the hands of the people and people are the source of the state power and the people take part in the government directly or through their representatives. Lastly, we can say that democracy is the government of the majority and the majority safeguards the interests of the people. In this form of government, the interests of minorities are not ignored.

Forms of Democracy

There are two types of democracy: (1) Pure or Direct, and (2) Indirect or Representative.

Direct Democracy: When the people themselves directly express their will on public affairs, the type of government is called pure or direct democracy. The people formulate laws in a mass meeting. Hearnshaw has said, "A democratic form of government, in the strict sense of the term, is one in which the community as a whole, directly or immediately, without agents or representatives, performs the functions of sovereignty." Direct Democracy was established in ancient Greek city-states. In India, direct democracy was seen in Vajji Sangha during the Buddhist xriods. Today when large and complex societies have emerged and when area of the State is very extensive, direct democracy is impracticable. This system now prevails only four cantons of Switzerland. They are Appenzell, Unterwalden and Glarus.

Representative or Indirect Democracy: In a Representative or Indirect Democracy the will of the state is formulated and expressed not directly by the people themselves, but by their representatives to whom they delegate the power deliberation and decision-making.

John Stuart Mill has said in this regard the “Indirect or representative democracy is one in which the whole people or some numerous portion of them exercise the governing power through deputies periodically elected by themselves.” Another writer Bluntschli has said, “In the representative democracy the rule is that the people govern through its official while it legislates, and controls the administration through its representatives.

This type of government was established in England in the seventeenth century. In France, it was established in 1830 and in Italy in 1948. In Germany it was established after the First World War according to Weimer Constitution. Again this system was established in West Germany after the Second World War. In India direct democracy was introduced in the Minto-Morley Reforms of 1909. Today this system is seen in many countries like Japan, Sri Lanka, India, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the United States of America, West Germany, Italy, France, Holland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Austria and Belgium.

Basic Principles or Requisites of Democracy

1. **Liberty:** The main basis of democracy is liberty and equality. The people enjoy maximum liberty and equality because criticism of the people is not only tolerated in this system, but it is also encouraged. In Great Britain, the government pays the leader of the opposition and the Prime Minister consults him in national emergency. For example, when south Rhodesia threatened to declare the freedom unilaterally and when later on it declared its freedom; the British Prime Minister consulted the leaders of the Conservative Party and Liberal Party. When Pakistan invaded India during August-September, 1965, Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri consulted the leaders of Opposition parties. The late Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri conferred with the leaders of the Opposition Prime parties before leaving for Tashkant for talks with President Ayub Khan of Pakistan of January 5, 1966. In Monarchies, Dictatorships, Aristocracies and Oligarchies the people and the Opposition parties have no say in matters of national importance.
2. **Equality:** Special emphasis is laid on equality in democracy and there is no disparity among the people on the basis of caste, religion and position of status. Besides this, all are equal before law and there is no privileged class in UK & USA. It is essential to establish political and economic equality along with social equality. Thus, in order to establish political equality, all disparities on the basis of caste, religion, color and sex have been removed in India and Adult Franchise has been introduced in order to give opportunity to all the citizens to contest election to Provincial Assembly and Lok Sabha (Agarwal, 1991). Efforts have also been made to establish social and political equality in democracies like England, Japan, France, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, West Germany, the United States of America and Italy. Politics and social equality is useless without economic equality. The Indian National Congress passed a resolution in its Bhubaneswar Session in January 1964 to bring about socialism through democratic means. Sincere efforts are now being made to implement this resolution.
3. **Fraternity:** Democracy can become successful only in a peaceful atmosphere; otherwise democracy has to face many difficulties. For this purpose Jawaharlal Nehru placed an idea of Panch Sheel before the world in 1954. Our government and many other democratic governments of the world are making efforts to promote world

peace. India is the President of the Non-Aligned Movement and propagating this policy.

4. **The people as ultimate source of sovereignty:** In a democracy, people are the ultimate source of sovereignty, and the government derives its power from them. For this purpose elections take place in democracies at certain intervals. In India and England, General Elections take place after every five years and in U.S.A. after every four years.
5. **Fundamental rights to the people:** In a democracy people are given fundamental rights because in the absence of these rights the development of an individual is not possible. Fundamental rights have been granted to the people in their Constitutions in India, Japan, U.S.A., France and Italy. In England the rights and freedom of the people are protected through the Rule of Law, Charters, Acts of Parliament, and Judicial Decisions given from time to time.
6. **Independence of Judiciary:** In a democracy, it is responsibility of the judiciary to protect the fundamental rights of the people. In our country the Supreme Court and the High Courts protect the Constitution and the fundamental rights of the people. Wherever judiciary is not free, the protection of fundamental rights is not possible.
7. **The people are considered as an end and State as the means in a democracy:** This is one of the main characteristics of democracy that individual is a mean and the state is an end. It means that the state makes use of the individual for its own interest. In a dictatorship no attention is paid to the freedom of the individual.
8. **Welfare State:** Democracy is a welfare state and in it special attention is paid to the welfare of the people as a whole and not to a particular class.

Conditions for the success of Democracy

To make the democracy a success in any country, the following conditions should be fulfilled:

- (1) **Sound System of Education:** Where there is illiteracy, it becomes difficult to make democracy successful because many qualities are needed to make democracy a success. The citizens can acquire these qualities only through literacy. The people should have the sense of understanding political problems. They should possess such qualities as sacrifice, sympathy, selfless service of the country, discipline, fraternity, etc. As far as possible, education should be free and the rich and the poor should be given equal opportunities for their development. The citizens should strive for mental and physical development through education. Otherwise employment shall prove harmful for democracy. In short, ideal citizens are prepared through education without which democracy cannot become successful.
- (2) **Enlightened Citizenship:** People should have the knowledge of their rights and duties to make democracy as success. So long as the citizens do not perform their duties is essential, it is equally essential for the citizens to become conscious of their

rights, without which there is every possibility of the government becoming autocrat. Therefore, it is said that ‘Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.’

- (3) **Political Awakening:** It is essential to inculcate political awakening among the citizens to make democracy a success. Where there is no political awakening, the citizens fail to understand the political problems. They are also unable to elect their representatives properly. Political disinterestedness does not help the citizens to understand the economic and political problems of the day and contribute their mite to the implementation of various national plans defense efforts of the country.
- (4) **Freedom:** Democracy guarantees the citizens the freedom of expression, freedom of profession, freedom of religion and freedom to form associations. A free and fearless press is the basic need of democracy in order to keep under checks the autocratic activities of the government. In the countries where press is not free, citizens cannot criticize the government with the result that they cannot fully enjoy much freedom. In Russia, china and other Communist countries, the press is not free to criticize the government. Press is also not free in the countries where there is military dictatorship.
- (5) **Equality:** Democracy does not recognize class distinctions. It is based on social, economic and political equality. In democracy all are equal before law and there is no discrimination on the basis of caste, color, religion, sex and economic status. Economic equality does not mean that everybody should be given equal emonuments; it means equality of opportunity and a fair and open field for all. This kind of equality ensures social justice, which is the very life-breath of a democracy. Equality thus means giving everybody right to vote and contest election irrespective of caste, religion, property, sex, color and creed.
- (6) **Law and Order:** The maintenance of law and order in society by the government is another essential condition for the success of democracy. Anarchy prevails where government fails to maintain law and order and the people’s faith in government is shaken. They look towards dictatorship in order to get rid of anarchy.
- (7) **Spirit of Co-operation:** Every democracy has to face many economic, social, religious and political problems. In dictatorship, these problems are solved b y the dictator according to this own whim. In absolute monarchy, the situation is similar to dictatorship, but it is different in a democracy. In democracy the Prime Minister or the President cannot act arbitrarily but they have to find the solution of problems according to the wishes of the Parliament or of the people. These problems can be solved by the co-operation of the people. further, a democracy can flourish only if there is no big gap between the thinking of the people and of the government and when there is a spirit of co-operation between them.
- (8) **Decentralization of Powers and Local self-government:** For the success of a democracy, decentralization of powers is essential. The concentration of power makes the government autocratic. With the division of power between he center and the provinces, the burden of the Center is reduced and the provinces get autonomy, which ultimately brings efficiency in the administration. With the introduction of local self-government, people take interest in the administrations and they give full

support to the government. The French writer De Tocqueville has rightly said that, “Local institutions constitute the strength of free nations. A nation may establish a system of free governments but without municipal institutions cannot have the spirit of liberty.”

- (9) **High Moral Standard:** The success of democracy also depends upon the high moral standard of the people as well as of the government. Where there is dishonesty, black-marketing, hoarding and smuggling and where the ministers and public servants are corrupt, the question of the success of democracy does not arise. People should have the spirit of patriotism, discipline, self-control, and honesty in payment of taxes and willing obedience to the laws of the land. The government should follow the ideal of service to the community, because a welfare state and a democracy are two inseparable things.
- (10) **Social and economic Security:** Economic security is essential for the success of democracy. The people should be given the right to work and it is the duty of the government to provide them with suitable employment. In case the government is unable to provide it to the people, it should at least provide them with shelter, clothing and food. In Russia and in many other Communist countries, the government has given this right to the people in their constitution. Our government should also recognize this right of the people for the success of democracy in our country.

Besides, social security is also essential. Now a days, the government fixes hours of work, salary, bonus, paid holidays and compensation for fatal accidents in order to save the laborers from exploitation by the capitalists. The government should provide social security to the people in case of their being disabled due to old age, illness, accident or any other cause. Without this provision, democracy shall be considered useless. People in Russia have full social security. In India, too, some concrete steps have been taken in this direction.

- (11) **Tolerance and Spirit of Unity:** It is the responsibility of the people to make democracy a success. For this, the spirit of tolerance and unity is needed in a country like India where we have a number of religions, languages and castes, and where we find a disparity between the rich and the poor, these qualities are very essential. In spite of mutual disagreements, the people should join together to face a national crisis. In case of foreign aggression, the people should forget their differences of caste, religion, language and province and try to preserve the freedom of their country with a spirit of devotion and sacrifice.
- (12) **Sound Party System:** In a democracy difference in views is not only tolerated but it is encouraged, because constructive criticism has an important place in a democracy. For this reason, many parties crop up in a democratic set-up. In the countries where there is only one party, and where other parties are banned democracy cannot develop, only dictatorship develops there. It happened in Germany during the time of Hitler and in Italy during the regime of Mussolini Now-a-days, this type of dictatorship is found in Russia, China, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria and Poland. In order to make democracy a success, a healthy and influential opposition is a must; otherwise the ruling party will become an autocrat

after winning the elections. The Opposition keeps a check on the autocratic activities of ministers. Without it, there is every likelihood of their being power-corrupt. Where there is a bi-party system, the task of making democracy a success becomes easier because one party rules and the other keeps an effective check over its activities. Where there are many parties, the legislature is divided into many small groups and no single party is in a position to form the government. The result is that coalition governments are installed which is not stable. Therefore, bi-party system is better than multi-party system. There is a bi-party system in England and in the U.S.A. There is a multi-party system in France, Italy and West Germany. That is why democracy is more successful in England and the U.S.A, than in other countries where there is multi-party system. In France during the Third and Fourth Republics the government was very instable. As compared to France, there are fewer problems in Italy and West Germany, because certain parties are very powerful in these countries. In India, after the Fourth General Elections, we witnessed political instability because the Congress Party was unable to secure majority in some states. In certain states opposition parties established coalition governments, which could not survive long (Agarwal, 1991).

- (13) **Written Constitution and Independent Judiciary:** For the successful functioning of democracy, people are given fundamental rights and written constitutions are introduced with a view to checking autocratic activities of the government. Where there are no written constitutions, the government can extend and exercise its powers in an autocratic manner. Judiciary is the guardian of Constitution and fundamental rights, and the independence of judiciary from the control of executive has been guaranteed. Where judiciary is not independent, there is no guarantee of the fundamental rights of the people and the constitution becomes useless. This is the condition in Russia, China and many other Communist countries.
- (14) **Independent, impartial and periodical elections:** Independent, impartial and periodical elections help in establishing faith of the people and the opposition in a democracy, otherwise the opposition party will not get an opportunity for forming the government and there will be no respect for public opinion. In the absence of independent, impartial and periodical elections, the opposition parties shall try to change the government by a revolution with the help of military or by the use of violent force. In Pakistan, elections were not held for many years. The result was that military dictatorship of General Ayub Khan was established in 1958, which gave a severe blow to democracy.
- (15) **Political security, good administration, economic prosperity and wise leadership:** Efficient administration is another condition for the success of a democracy. In fact, the success of democracy depends upon efficient administration. People's faith in democracy is shaken in a corrupt administration. Political security is also essential because people start feeling the necessity of dictatorship, if a democratic government is unable to protect the sovereignty and integrity of the country at the time of foreign invasion. If a government fails to remove the scarcity of essential commodities, if the prices of these commodities are abnormally high and if people starve owing to abject poverty, the people's faith in democracy is shaken and they start feeling the necessity of some other type of government. Thus to

protect democracy from being usurped by dictatorship intelligent leadership is very essential. For example, when Hitler started invading other countries, England was not prepared to face the challenge, but under the able and enlightened leadership of Winston Churchill not only democracy was saved but Hitler's dictatorship was also smashed. At the time of the Pakistani invasion in August-September, 1965 our late Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri provided very able leadership to the country. Similarly, at the time of Indo-Pak War in 1971, Mrs. Gandhi provided very strong leadership. It protected our country and inspired our army to give a crushing blow to the Pakistani army. An able leader can bring about economic prosperity in his country and give a clear administration to the people. Thus, he can make democracy very stable. Democracy has taken deep roots in our country, while it has not become strong in Pakistan because Pakistan had no leader of the stature of Jawaharlal Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri and Indira Gandhi.

Democracy in Bangladesh: An Overview

Historical Background

Bangladesh, like most of the third world countries, has a twin challenge to face: institutionalization of a democratic order and at the same time attains a target rate of economic growth for development. So democracy and economic development has to develop in parallel. The level of poverty, illiteracy, starvation, disease and malnutrition that prevails among nearly eighty percent of the population certainly does not make it easy for any country or government to undertake such a challenge. Since independence in 1971, democracy has been in crisis in Bangladesh. The country was born out of a long democratic movement initially aimed at achieving autonomy for the rights of the majority population of Pakistan. Towards the end of this movement almost the entire population of Bangladesh was drawn in an armed struggle to establish their rights of self-determination as guaranteed in the charter of the United Nations. The cherished goal of democratic rights of the people were enshrined in the constitution of the country in 1972 but in less than two years after the first parliament was elected, the structure and character of the fundamental law of the land was changed and the country's political system was turned into a one-party monolithic structure. All political parties were dissolved and all newspapers were banned except four to be retained by the state; the fundamental rights were suspended and made non-enforceable and the judiciary was reduced into a subservient agency of the executive branch of the state (Ahmed, 1994)

The crisis of democracy deepened further with successive army interventions when military leaders (Zia & Ershad) ruled the country. During all these years various social, economical and political forces have operated and influenced the course of democracy in Bangladesh. Not only did the leaders, both civil and military, create a crisis of democracy but they had aggravated it by trying to shape the laws and events to suit their own designs, disregarding the urgent need for development of democratic institutions and failing to provide the commitment required for accelerating the economic growth. During the long term (1976-1990) of military rule the institutions which have been mostly damaged but which are considered as the pivotal force for developing constitutionalism is the party system in the country. Since the political activities were banned repeatedly, the strength and cohesion within the most famous parties was destroyed. On the one hand, mushroom

growth political parties devoid of any ideology or program were created by money power just to give a democratic poster to the election of the military ruler. Finally, however, the Ershad regime was toppled by a popular man-movement in December 1990 when the military withdrew its support (Halim, 1998).

Thus in 1990 the country was freed from the clutches of military rule and the peoples' sustained struggle for democracy has at last triumphed with autocrat president Ershad and the time came to lead the nation on a new journey in search of constitutionalism and democracy. The second start of constitutionalism had its democratic and peaceful transit through the historic 5th parliamentary election under the Acting President Justice Sahabuddin Ahmed. 1991, by the 12th Amendment of the constitution government was reverted again to parliamentary form after 16 years. The starting of the second parliamentary democracy seemed fine and enthusiastic but lastly the celebrated 5th parliament also like every other previous parliament in the country could not complete its constitutional duration; it was to dissolve under the pressure of the opposition movements. The ruling party BNP has, in many ways, failed to make a positive turn towards the development of constitutionalism and democracy.

The case of 5th parliament, the major opposition party Awami League (AL) was not given adequate time in parliamentary deliberation and as a result they boycotted the parliament. The ruling elite did not show much tolerance as was necessary for bringing the opposition into parliament and they forcefully run the parliament as long as two years without the opposition i.e. ignoring the opposition. Lastly the BNP government denied to hold the 6th parliamentary election ignoring the opposition and it proceeded to contest the election with some sudden hand-picked parties as the military dictator Ershad frequently did. This was a flagrant wrong done by a democratically elected government and this showed the ruling elite's lack of political foresight. This is why the 6th parliament had only 7 days life. This negative trend in parliamentary democracy i.e. the trend of political intolerance done by the BNP government has proved the crisis of constructive leadership in the development of constitutionalism in Bangladesh (Halim, 1998). Later, the 7th parliamentary election was held under the neutral Caretaker Government with some hopes and aspiration and the majority voted for the AL. The new government of AL (1996) also practiced like the before BNP govt. without opposition participation. For example: ordinance making power is being used in the same way, policies concerning national interests or economy e.g. making water treaty, making CHT agreement declaring two days public weekly holidays, declaring 30% quota in public services for freedom fighters' families etc. have been declared in public gatherings and press avoiding the parliament; sessions of parliaments are being held for a very shorter period; the opposition BNP is boycotting the parliament and Sheikh Hasina, the Prime Minister, is just provoking this opposition trend. Thus the trend is still in the negative direction, the parliament, as the most important institution of democracy still remains a mere Cinderella body. The important mass media like radio, T.V. are being used as government mouthpieces; the lower judiciary is still depended on the executive though the government is repeatedly promising to take steps to separate judiciary from the executive. But it has not been implemented even today. After completing the term 5 years, the 8th parliamentary election was held under the caretaker government of Justice Latifur Rahman on October 1, 2001. And the BNP formed the qualification government. After formation of government they try to exercise democratic

culture but the path is not moisturized till now. The present status of democracy in Bangladesh has discussed by the following features.

Present features of Bangladesh Democracy

For better understanding of our democracy we should know the present situation of our country. Among various features the most noticeable and important conditions may be identified as under:

- i) **Absence of democratic political culture:** Bangladesh is lacking a democratic political culture. Democratic orientations and practices are not seen in our polity and society. People's competence to cope with the democratic norms and values is not adequate. Even opportunities for democratic learning are not available in our educational as well as political institutions. Thus, democratic norms and values could not strike root in our society and polity.
- ii) **Absence the rule of law:** In our country, rule of law became merely a face instead of making up the sun that shines on democracy. Today it has become the part of our political culture that police took action against oppositions and turned a blind eye to the real perpetrators. In case of bails to the political activists, the judge simply to the wishes of political masters.
- iii) **Lack of political morality:** Our politicians lack political morality which is marked by special provision for caretaker government instead of political government to arrange national election. It is a sign of popular distrust on our politicians. However, the provision for caretaker government is positive for democracy enough to teach our politicians about the lack of their political morality and trust on themselves.
- iv) **Absence of strong civil society:** Bangladesh has failed to establish a strong civil society, which could ground the liberalism and put flesh on the skeleton of democracy. Even we are lacking a civil culture which structure the social space of civil society in public regarding ways, anchoring individual identity and conscience in shared norms of solidarity trust and reciprocity. Our intellectuals are merely the prop of ruling classes.
- v) **Absence of strong political leadership:** Bangladesh is lacking of strong patriotic political leadership essential for leading the nation toward progress and stability. Our leaders do not hold image to unite the nation in a platform. Because they consider themselves as leader of their party not the nation as a whole.
- vi) **Confrontational politics:** Politics in our country is confrontational in nature where there is no cooperation, trust and solidarity among political parties and groups. There is no consensus among political parties on issues of national interest. They oppose each other only for the sake of opposition.
- vii) **Ineffective political institutions:** Our political institutions are not strong and developed enough to render required services on way of democratization and

political development. Our parliament does not work effectively due to continuous boycott by opposition and its role as a ground for deliberation proved to be ineffective. Our political parties are safe shelter of vested interests. Thus their role to institutionalize democracy is not only inadequate but also unacceptable.

- viii) **Corruption and terrorism:** Corruption and terrorism are two terrible barriers to democratic development in our country. Al though the then govt. refused the claim, Transparency International has ranked 4th times Bangladesh as most corrupt nation of the world. Terrorism is not unconcerned to none of our citizens. thus, greatest challenge. Before the nation is to uproot corruption and terrorism from our society.
- ix) **Negativity/Double standard:** Double standard attitude is a great barrier to democratic development as it discourages to accept others. Everything is just if it favors one's own interest, otherwise it is wrong. A election is fair if the result is favorable otherwise it is unfair. Such kind of attitude forces our politicians to stereotyped enmity and distrust.
- x) **Lack of tolerance and reciprocity:** There is a lack of tolerance, mutual respect, trust and reciprocity among our politicians and political parties. Compromise and consensus is absent from our polity, which inflames enmity among politician and endangers the growth of democracy in the country.

Other Major Problems & Impediments of Democracy

Beside the above trends and impediments of parliamentary democracy in Bangladesh there are some other institutions of democracy, which are beset with hazardous problems hampering the development of democracy in Bangladesh.

1. **Parliamentary Committee System:** It is through the functioning of the committee system that bureaucracy comes under the direct scrutiny of the parliament since the committee concerning a particular ministry along with its associated bodies can send for any official or bureaucrat to appear before it to justify his action or send for any paper or document.

The rules of Procedure of Parliament of Bangladesh were adopted in 1974 and it provided for almost 25 committees in parliament of these 11 are departmental standing committees. But though in thinking and insecting provisions for committees Bangladesh was well ahead of all other parliamentary system in the commonwealth, the effective working of the committee system has not yet been developed. The cruse of the problem lies with the provision in Rules 247 of the procedure which provided that Minister of State in charge of a subject relating to particular committee shall e ex-offico provided for almost 25 committees in parliament Chairman of every such standing committees. These undemocratic provisions were made by the same government, which piloted the constitution making. Of course, recently a change has been made to the provision providing that a minister shall not be the chairman of the committee but he may be a member of

the committee which still remains as an undemocratic provision. Again there is no provision in Bangladesh allowing taking evidence in public by committees which need to be remedied in order to make the administration accountable to the people through the committee hearings. This will help bringing transparency in government, which is a *sin qua non*-for growth of parliamentary accountability.

2. Problems of Bureaucracy and Public Administration

The Bangladesh bureaucracy is well known as hot bed of corruption. Corruption in the administration of Bangladesh worse than anywhere in the world. According to Transparency International, Bangladesh has already been 4th times identified as a number one corrupted nation of the World. Interestingly the politicians blame the bureaucrats for corruption and inefficiently in the public administration. On the other hand, bureaucrats blame politicians for corruption and inefficiency. Who are then really responsible? I would say that our politicians are responsible for the problems in bureaucracy. Because bureaucracy is like a cage of pet and trained animals to obey the orders of their masters, but to keep these animals always loyal and obedient masters must not forget to apply, some controlling devices. Our master-like politicians have not applied and sometimes have applied improperly those controlling devices to keep bureaucrats within their bounds. There are some universally recognised methods of ensuring accountability of bureaucrats. But Bangladesh administrative system lacks those methods from very inception of course, it is the fact the war of independence that created Bangladesh was actively participated by Bengalis civil and military personnel and the result was that the new Bangladesh government inherited a politicized administration. It was also the fact that the leaders of the newborn country had little administrative experience. Recently it has been observed by the Bangladesh Aid consultative group at Parish that 'Bangladesh Public Administration has not been able to deliver on some of the most important targets the government has set for it. Decisive action is now required at the highest level of government to being to break the bottleneck. The problem which beset our public administration today are (i) corrupted by bureaucrats; (ii) inadequate accountability; (iii) inefficiency; (iv) centralization of decision-making power and bureaucrats master-like interference in it; (v) politicization of bureaucracy and administration etc.

3. Problems of Political Parties

Political parties are backbone of democracy without democracy within the party-unit it is quite impossible to expect democracy at the governmental level. But in Bangladesh political parties are mostly fragile and fragmented. (Halim, 1998). There are more than 100 political parties in Bangladesh but very few of them have definite ideology or programmes to be followed by supporters and future generation. Though one or two parties have ideologies and programmes, the leaders often defy them for their selfish end. Almost all political parties are based around individuals and most of them do not have any grassroots organization or sufficient support to claim public representation. Mostly political parties are characterized by the politics of conspiracy, self-interest, greed and power-expectation.

The nature and composition of major parties reveal a disappointing state of affairs. The constitutions of the most of the parties are absolutely monolithic in nature. The party chairman can make and dissolve any committee from the highest to the lowest level. The party structure and committees are filled by nomination not by election. Political parties in Bangladesh are considered as safe abode for criminals, terrorists and extortionists, for these types of people are always given shelter in parties.

Another great impediment to the growth of democracy is the hereditary to dynastic element in the party leadership. Khaleda Zia became leader because she is the wife of late President Zia who founded the BNP and Sheikh Hasina because of her father who founded Bangladesh. The leaders of these two political parties are permanently settled in their respective positions canceling all the possibilities of emergence of any new leadership in their respective parties. This anti-democratic dynastic feature in the party leadership has been the greatest impediment to the development of constitutionalism in Bangladesh. This is on the one hand, destroying our political institutions and on the other hand, preventing and discouraging honest and dedicated people to come into politics.

All these are the factors in party politics in Bangladesh, which are discouraging as well as preventing educated and honest people to come into politics.

4. Problems of Press and Media

Transparency and openness in government transaction is a necessary part of effective democracy. And press and media fulfill these two necessary elements of government. 'A popular government without popular information or means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy or perhaps both'. So there should be unhindered flow of information of government transactions (Halim, 1998). Since independence both radio and TV have been using as mouthpiece of the government. This is why there appears to be a fairly large audience for non-Bangladeshi radio-sources, including All India Radio, BBC and VOA. Both BNP and AI had avowed commitment to the people that they would give autonomy to the state-controlled radio and TV. But nothing positive has yet been done.

5. Problems of Local Government

Local government is one of the most vital institutions of democracy. Modern state administration is almost unthinkable without devolution of power to the local governments. Due to increase of population as well as to huge expansion of governmental activities certain matter of policy and administration concerning national and international interests are reserved for central administration and the rest wide range of governmental functions are vested in local authorities (Jones, 1989).

The system of local government helps in different ways to bring transparency and efficiency within the state administration. First, it helps to solve local problems locally and relieves the central government much of its responsibility to deal with

trifle and local matters. Second, it relieves MPs much of their burden of local responsibilities, which people usually expects from MPs. If local government are institutionalized, they will help develop leadership from the grassroots level giving gradually a strong base in democracy.

Article 59 of the Bangladesh constitution provides that local government of every administrative unit 'shall be entrusted to bodies composed of persons elected in accordance with the law' and they will perform functions relating to:

- a. Administration and work of public officers;
- b. The maintenance of public order;
- c. The preparation and implementation of plans relating to public services and economic development.

Article 60 also empowers the local government to exercise 'the power to impose taxes for local purposes', to prepare their budgets and to maintain funds. But no government so far has taken proper initiative to fulfill the aspirations expressed in the constitution with regard to institutionalization of local government.

Elected local government should be autonomous and independent of the executive and the local administration should be under the control of the local government. But in Bangladesh every government has kept colonial mentality in respect of nourishing this institution.

- 6. Problems of Unconstitutional Laws and the Control Over Delegated Law:** The comptroller and Auditor-General, Election Commission. Public Service Commission, Local Government etc. are constitutionally created essential institutions of democracy. Institutionalization of democracy depends on the full independence and proper functioning of these institutions. The constitution has given these institutions full independence but statutory laws, which deal with their composition and functions, are vitiating all aspirations of the constitution. In most cases these Laws have been made violating the provisions of the constitution.

To give democracy a positive turn these unconstitutional laws should immediately be repealed and democratic laws in accordance with the provisions of the constitution should be made (Halim, 1998). The largest portion of laws in the country is covered by delegated legislation. Now over country is run almost by S.R. Os and these are often contradictory and they sometimes violate even constitutional provisions. This is the area where the executive is abusing its power almost rampantly. A statutory instrument Act should, therefore, immediately be made and a standing committee should be established to scrutinize these delegated laws before they are applied.

7. The Leadership Problem

The problem of democracy in Bangladesh as discussed above is politico-legal in nature. From socio-economic point of view Bangladesh is an underdeveloped

country. There is plethora of problems like over-population and its rapid growth, illiteracy, poverty, disease, malnutrition, unemployment etc. But our leaders have created almost all these problems. On the other hand, there are huge possibilities and factors in favour of industrialization and economic growth in the country. Many third World countries started their journey towards constitutionalism and economic development with fragile institutions as was in the case of Bangladesh still lags behind. The basic reason behind such a position is leadership crisis, which these nations have been suffering since its independence. The Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir is a classic example of a prudent and intelligent leader, He transformed his country from rudimentary stage of this 'tiger' status. Malaysia was beset with many problems earlier. South Korea's economy was no better than ours in the 60s. Its per capita income was lower than that of Bangladesh in 1953. But by virtue of solid leadership skill, it has surpassed us long back (Ahmed, 1997).

The age of our Independence is 34 years, which is a pretty long time. Unfortunately, we still talk about food, cloths, and shelter-three basic needs of the people. This 34 years period was enough for any civilized and hard working nation to change its luck and rise to glory. Ironically we failed even to meet our minimum needs over this long period. Our people are no less hard working than those on industrial nations. They do not know the way to do it. The leaders in our country only 'aggravate the crisis of democracy by trying to shape events to suit their own exigency while disregarding the urgent need for economic growth. Their commitments were limited to speeches and the ritual of annual plans are drawn up and implemented by bureaucracy ... No political effort was made to inspire the people towards sacrifice and growth and no serious national plan was envisaged to deal with these problems. The leaders remained too busy with small, peripheral, petty personal politics and ignored the fundamental issues of development and democracy (Ahmed, Moudud, 1995).

It is the fact that democracy cannot be established overnight. Those who have firmly established democracy have developed their traditions of social and political justice over the period of many ages. Although 34 years has been passed since independence, Bangladesh was under military and presidential ruled near about 20 years. Parliamentary form of government has been started since 1991 but till now no viable dedicated leader nor any viable constitutional government has yet evolved. Still politicization in the administration goes on. Both Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina have adopted the policy of creating a support-base within the bureaucracy and administration. Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina - these two ladies are struggling, as their activities show, not for the cause of democracy; rather for finding them in power any how (Halim, 1998). Both are showing their narrow outlook and are adopting the policy of provoking each other. They have also stopped the way to emerge any viable leadership in democratic way. Democracy may be captive at the hand of these two ladies if they do not come out from their narrow out look for the cause of democracy.

Now the condition of these two parties are one will be in power and other will be in opposition. And now more they will be intolerant against each other, more they will see the emergence of a third power, more people will be dismayed and more they

will bring possibilities of unnecessary, there will be no scope for economic development. The nation is still ardently looking forward to a dedicated leader who would take responsibilities to liberalize all-important institutions of democracy.

Suggested Policy Measures for Overcoming the Problems of Democracy in Bangladesh

To remove the difficulties and to institutionalize the democracy following measures should be taken immediately.

1. The system of allowing Ministers to act as Chairmen of standing Committees of their respective Ministries has to go. Instead, the Standing Committee on each Ministry ought to be comprised of eleven fifteen members drawn from each political party in proportion to their respective strength. Once the number of such committees and Chairman is determined, each committee will then elect its Chairman from among the members of the party to which the post of chairman has been designated and these will be no party whip in this regard. Each Committee may also decide to elect the Chairman by rotation among the parties on an annual basis.
2. The Public Accounts Committee and the Public Undertaking Committee must always be chaired by senior members of Opposition (Ahmed, 1995). The proceeding of such committee meetings will be open to public and media unless the committee itself decides to meet in camera on any particular matter.
3. The power to issue ordinance under Article 93 of the Constitution is being regularly misused. Except in an emergency such as war or total breakdown of law and order which calls for a proclamation of emergency, any ordinance the government intends to make under Article 93 of the Constitution must go through the scrutiny of the relevant Standing Committee and obtain its approval before its promulgation.
4. The political will of the government must be demonstrated in a way so that the bureaucrats cannot dare defy Minister's orders (Halim, 1998). The constitutional independence and autonomy for CAG must be ensured so that it can independently work in the way to make bureaucrats accountable in respect of financial matter and monitor their financial responsibilities.
5. A department of Ombudsman should immediately be created which will work as an all time watchdog against misadministration, red-tapism and inefficiency in the bureaucracy.
6. Directly elected local governments should be established according to Articles 59 and 60 of the constitution with proper powers and independence and the respective local administration with its officials and staff must be vested in the direct control of the local governments. This will on the one hand, decentralize administrative power, functions and responsibilities and as a result channel-based corruption, conspiracy and red-tapism by the bureaucracy would be reduced and on the other hand it will relieves MPs much of the burden of local responsibilities and they will therefore, be able to concentrate more in committee functioning whereby the central bureaucracy will come under the direct control of parliament.

7. Democracy within the party must be gradually strengthened so that leadership from grassroots levels can develop and leaders can gradually gather knowledge over administrative accountability and that they should not depend on bureaucrats.
8. Lower Judiciary should be separated from the executive. This will relieve the bureaucrats of exercising Judicial Power on the one hand, and on the other people will get rid of the problem of corruption in Magistrate's court where Justice for the poor people is almost captive at the corrupt hand of magistrate's. Separation will bring accountability in the Judicial Sector.
9. Corruption is the main problem in Bangladesh administration for implementation of any development programme. Corruption has engrained in our society. But this evil cannot be wiped out overnight. No Leader, howsoever powerful or charismatic he may be, will be able to wipe corruption out overnight. Only it can be wiped out gradually through the process of institutionalization of controlling institutions and it needs a dedicated leader for institutionalization of institutions, which controls the administration.
10. In accordance with the provisions of Articles 11, 59 and 60 of the constitution local government institutions should be set up for ensuring people's participation in the development of the country and there should be three tiers of local government at Thana, Union and Zilla levels and all the tiers should be composed of elected representatives of the people by direct election. Every local government should be autonomous and maximum devolution of power to be made to the local government. Local government institution should be made free from government interference except audit and inspection of funds provided by the government.
11. Local governments should be so designed that MP can also become the Ex-Officio adviser of the Thana and District Council. This will keep the Linkage between the local government and the MP and help MP to remain in touch with the development work in his constituency. This will also help develop relation between the parliament and the local governments.
12. Hereditary nature of leadership should be abolished and the party constitution should be amended to allow change in the leadership after each specified term. The party structure and committees should be filled only by election and this will encourage as well as develop leadership from grass-root level.
13. For the transparency within the government fabrics Radio and TV should immediately be given autonomy. Operation of private TV channels should be allowed. All restrictive Laws concerning press and media should be allowed to be self regulated by them through a code of ethical practice.
14. Our politicians should realize that they have responsibility to build up the nation and they should pay due respect to people's will and expectations. Both the government and opposition should work under democratic norms and values instead of confrontation and egoism. Our politicians should be positive in playing their role in the polity. They must realize that politics is not a zero-sum game rather it is a cooperative business for the greater will being of the nation.

Prospects of Democracy in Bangladesh

In spite of numerous problems and obstacles in the run up of democracy in our country, there are cheers for democracy envisaged in the vary process of our politics and governance, Such as -

1. Homogeneous character of the people

The people of our country are almost homogeneous in their origin, socio-economic and political belief. Except some minorities in CHT, almost all the people are from Bengali origin and about 85 percent of our people are Muslims. Such homogeneous character of the people is a positive side for democratic development.

2. Provision for caretaker government

In spite of some preordained blames of defeated parties, caretaker government has to be credited for holding a free and fair poll which given nation confidence on very process of election and politics.

3. Peoples eagerness for democracy

The presence of voters in polling centers, their enthusiasm about election and politics and their verdict against misdeed of govt. both in 1996 and 2001, proved that people are eager to democracy and it is increasing day by day.

4. Peaceful transition of power

After completion of five years term, the AL government has transferred power in the hand of a non-party caretaker government and after a free and fair election, the CG has transferred the power to an elected government. Such process of peaceful transferred the power to an elected (BNP) government. Such process of peaceful transition of power is positive sign of democratic development in the country.

5. March toward two party system

Although there are too many political parties in Bangladesh, the result of recent poll envisage the march of nation toward a two party system.

6. Response of civil society

Now a day's civil society is very conscious about various issues of democracy and governance. Very often-civil society response against government for any anti public interest. It is a good sign of democracy.

7. Independence of press, media and newspaper

Today all the press, media and newspapers are enjoying the full independence except govt. Radio and TV. So we can say it is another light of hopes for democracy.

8. Party campaign at the grass root level

Now a days Major Political Parties are campaign about political culture and aware the grassroots level people to their rights and duties to the state. They also aware them how to develop the socio-economic condition of our rural Bangladesh as well as the hole state. For example, we can mention both BNP and AL who are already meetings, seating and campaign every district and thana level one after another respectively with local level workers and leaders.

9. Privatization

Bangladesh has a long experience of carrying the privatization programme. The privatization programme starts in mid 70s and is still continuing. Since then it has privatized more than one thousand units. Privatization can ensure decision making for purely economic rationality rather than from political ground or personal ego at enterprise level. As globalization of the world economy is taking place, to keep peace with the other countries of the world, the economy should be made more market oriented. The privation is in right to move this end.

10. Role of NGO

A number of NGOs are working in Bangladesh. Most of the NGO's target is to organize the rural people and increase awareness to them for development of their socio-economic conditions. They have a lot of program like as, mass education, health and sanitation, micro credit programs etc. Name of some prominent NGOs are Grameen Bank, Proshika, BRAC, ASA, CARE etc. Most of the NGOs are working for democratic development.

11. Women Empowerment

The constitution of Bangladesh contains the provision of gender equality, prohibition of gender basis of discrimination and extension of opportunity of women in all spheres of civic life. It is also stated in the constitution that the local government institutions be composed of representatives of peasants, workers and women (Article 9); steps will be taken to ensure participation of women in all spheres of national life (article 10); right to guaranteed employment at a reasonable wage having regard to the quality of life [article 15 (b)]. Our political parties are fond of making room for women in their party politics. Both two women head the government and opposition parties, women's representation in the party committees and other bodies is noticeable. The participation of women in electoral politics is significant.

Conclusion

From the above discussion we can say that from very early of civilization democracy was discussed from various viewpoints and applied it various way. Today most of the people want to enjoy this form of government. The people of Bangladesh are not out of them. But Bangladesh has been facing various problems to institutionalize democracy since its independence. Yet it, prospects of democracy in Bangladesh today are not insignificant. I think the suggested policy measures given above would be helpful for the policy makers of the state for democratic development. For this the media, civil society and socio-political organizations and institutions must play the pioneering role.

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