



Islamization Under the Democratic Government: An Overview of Bangladesh

KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT *The South Asian region was under the British colonial power for about two hundred years. It came to be divided into pieces and religion played the key role for this. The legacy of use of religion in politics to fulfill narrow interest still continues. With the formation of this new state Bangladesh in South Asia, its struggle for democracy began. How the chief parties of government or other against parties have taken different steps in Islamization of Bangladesh and how India showed anxiety to the Islamic activities of those democratic governments.*

In 1947 two separate states named India and Pakistan emerged in this sub-continent on the basis of the theory of diarchy. At the very first stage of creation of the country, today's free Bangladesh had to be a part of Pakistan in the name of "East Bengal" and then "East Pakistan" till 26th March, 1970. Within one year from the day of 26th March that nation got freedom on 26th March, 1971. Infact, after emerging of Pakistan as an Islamist Country the Bengalee-Muslim Community became the part of Pakistan on the basis of their Muslim Identity. India had already emerged as a Hindu State. But the belief on religious identity for which the Bengalee Muslim Community became the part of West-Pakistan became fragmented within short period. At first due to attack on Bengali language and then as a strong reaction to the colonial rule East Pakistan started to propose for a separate state. The election of 1970 1st proved the role of creation of free Bengalee state. After that the Bengalees started to get tortured. At last the attack of West Pakistan was averted with the help of freedom fighters and Indian Army. Like this in 1971 Bangladesh emerged as a free sovereign country through armed rebellion it proved that religion can't be the basis of one nation theory and the Bengalees could make it feel the Pakistanis.

Bangladesh is Muslim dominated country, 88.3 % of total population is Muslim here. In 1991 more than 1/10th of the total population was Hindu (10.5 %), Buddhist, Christian and other religious sections were 1.2 % of total population. But as a reaction against the undemocratic state system which was a mixture of Pre-71 religion and politics the main principle of state was secularism. But secularism is no longer a constitutional characteristic of Bangladesh now ; during 1971 war Muslim world was enemy to Bangladesh for Pakistani propaganda ; but today she is not enemy, rather friend. There are three noticeable phases in this history of change. 1st phase was 1972-1975, 2nd phase 1975-1990 and 3rd phase 1991-till now. In the 1st phase secularism and futile relationship with Muslim world was the main theme. After analyzing the use of religion in politics the Mujib government was committed to establish a secular tradition in Bangladesh. That's why it was understandable that the secularism would be the basis of the state policy in the newly established Republic. The 1972 constitution declared secularism as one of the fundamental principles and prescribed some measures for its implementation. Due to this reason Mujib government faced two tined situations – radical lefts and under cover pro-political Islam forces.

Mujib took some measures like budgetary allocation for 'Madrassa', establishment of Islamic foundation, propagation of values and ideas of Islam propitiate pro-Islam critics. But at the end of this phase the relationship with Muslim world started to get emerged and secularism started to lose its importance as the main principle of the State. At the 2nd phase the process of Islamization starts. With the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the fall of his governments in the bloody August 15(1975) incident, a counter revolution occurred Bangladesh politics returning the country back to the Pakistan era. The secular, democratic ideals of the war of liberation were abandoned in favour of political Islam as a national ideology. This was affected by General Ziaur Rahman during his five-year rule to be followed by the next military regime hated by general Ershad. General Ziaur Rahman took several steps which changed the secular nature of the Bangladesh state. The constitution was misrepresenting by introducing "Bismillahir-Rahman ir- Rahim" in the preamble and declaring the intention of the state "to consolidate, preserve and strengthen fraternal relations among Muslim countries based on Islamic solidarity". Instead of 'Benglee nationalism' general Zia came up with the idea of "Bangladeshi Nationalism" to be based on political Islam, language, territory and anti-Indian feelings as a new national ideology. After demise of General Zia, General Ershad came to power he followed the same ideology of "Bangladeshi Nationalism". Throughout his rule he remained enthusiastic about continuation of the process of Islamisation. His regime remained fickle distressing from legitimacy crisis. That's why he had to declare Islam as 'the State Religion' on June 7, 1988 to win popular support for the regime. And the third phase is mainly a conjugated form of 1st and 2nd phases. The phase is such that you can't say with stress that Islamization of Bangladesh is certain, again you are unable to say that there is no trace of Islamization. After the fall of General Ershad, the BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party) headed by Begum Khaleda Zia came to power through the democratic elections held in 1991. Khaleda Zia was ready to make electoral alliance with the Jamaat-i-Islami side by side with others to secure necessary parliamentary seats to form the government. The period 1991-1996 under the BNP government witnessed some other intolerant incident-stoward secular ideals and multiculturalism. The secular Awami League under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina attracted popular support to their anti-government movement during 1995-1996. Awami League stood for separation of religion from politics and led the Bengali nationalist

movement to independence; after 21 years through the general elections was significant in Bangladesh politics. Sheikh Hasina was seen to use Islamic symbols during the election campaigning preceded by her frequent visits to Saudi Arabia intending to project herself as good Muslim and that her party was not a threat to Islam. In the 2001 elections, the BNP- Jamaat- Islami combine came to power in the name of four party alliance, this time with two top leaders of jamaat, namely Matiur Rahman Nizami and Ali Ahsan Mohammad Muzahid being included in the ministry formed under Begum Khaleda Zia. The period of BNP -Jamaat government (2001-2006) witnessed and unprecedented support for Islamization by the state. Thus Islamic tendency in politics of Bangladesh came out with time behind the democratic atmosphere. That's why it is a procession of problematic political system.

So, in this political background first two phases are of more historical importance regarding any kind of research about Bangladesh. It is to be noted that this historical analysis is not applicable on other states of the subcontinent; because the political atmosphere, international political atmosphere and changing neighbour of Bangladesh are little bit different. Those renowned Politicians who brought the democracy to the country started their leadership with first two phases. We can say that the leaders of third phase had mentioned as the preacher of political culture.

Two post 91 leading political parties of Bangladesh (Awami League and BNP) have been ruling the country alternatively with the principle of "Allied Politics". Herein, the chemistry of allied politics is very important, especially BNP-Jamat and Awami League Ershaad (this Mr. Ershaad on 14th January, 1983 claimed in a special speech that Islam will be placed in our constitution as the religion of majority people and if necessary an Islam constitution will be written) other political parties beside these different dimensional allied parties and other Islam organizations of the country. Otherwise, it is very difficult to understand the period of Islamization in Bangladesh.

At the background of Islamization of Bangladesh the matter of secularism (Moulana Vasani who founded the National Awami Party in Bangladesh in 1957 used to say not to be too obsessed with religion because during the past period, the obsessiveness regarding religion snatched away many innocent lives (The Anandabazar Patrika, Kolkata, Wednesday, 1st November, 2006) comes again and again. Infact the ideal of secularism is the strongest element of modern state system. The more modern and improved state is possessed with more powerful ideal of

secularism. Not only in statehood rather has the ideal of secularism been considered as the basis of nationalism in many countries. There are only a few states where the ideal of one nation is followed. People from different religion, race and caste are residing together on the basis of peaceful understanding about secularism. So in modern states the ideal of secularism has got the constitutional dignity. In 1972 it was successful in Bangladesh too but in spite of having a parliamentary system since 1991 the continuity of the constitution could not be maintained.

Besides, the perspective regarding changing concept of Islam is also a significant matter (9/11) to be mentioned. According to Mehmmud Mamdani, this incident has given birth to such a political culture where it is claimed that, we have no history, no political philosophy..... i.e. Muslims are evil, again according to another group, there are both good and bad Muslims in the presence of history and philosophy and on this perspective the background of the crisis of those Islamic State will be in the discussion. Moreover, this matter has to be noticed that in our world those states are more in number where there goes on continuous terrorist activities either openly or secretly e.g. in Bangladesh and Pakistan. It is not that there is no terrorist group in India or they don't show any activities but they do these behind the government. According to Amartya Sen, in fact secularism is included into that idealism of India which is present as the symbol of different religious sectors, languages and diversified customs and it recognizes unity in diversity entirely. If it is noticed properly then it can be seen that these terrorist activities are taking place in neighbouring countries of India constantly and sometimes with the help of the states. So, we can say that there is no rich tradition was present in Bangladeshi politics after Mujib. Only Shabaag movement might change in the tradition of politics and may give a stable and long standing democracy in Bangladesh.

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