



YOUTH ENGAGEMENT *with RELIGION and FAITH* *in the 21ST CENTURY*

Generational and Religious Norms among Youth in Bangladesh: Impacts of Governance

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INTRODUCTION

For ages, the relationship between state and religion, more particularly between state and the church, has been studied. Nevertheless, thoughts about this relationship have evolved. During the Middle Ages, in Europe, the Christian religion determined the position of the state as well as the position of the Church. Religion gave legitimacy to the state authorities and state power, and the government was the protector of the Christian faith.

Although the essence of state governing system and influence of religion cannot be inextricably conceptualized in this modern arena, still there are existing correlations, which are studied by sociologists. This study will try to engage this issue with the governance system through the lens of young generation aged 21-30 in the context of Bangladesh.

According to UNFPA Bangladesh, young people between the ages of 15-24 years make up nearly 20% of the population in Bangladesh; with the total population of Bangladesh expected to reach 220 million by the year 2050, even if replacement level fertility is met today. In this study, percentage points particularly focuses on the population aged 15-24. For instance, if the percentage of young people aged 21-30 are taken into consideration, the percentage would be roughly 30%. Another study shows that some 47.6 million or 30 percent of the total 158.5 million people in Bangladesh are young (10-24 years). Keeping aside the consideration of percentage, government needs to focus on the fact that this portion of the country should not be considered as negligible when any policy is taken into consideration. On the contrary, within next 10 years this portion of the entire population would work for the bureaucracy and the government as well. Then comes the issue of religious norms.

Since the partition of 1947, there has been a constant presence of religious ideologies in the political and social sphere of the sub-continent. The psychological space has somehow been shifted to the importance of religious ideologies. During the Ershad (military ruler of Bangladesh from 1982 to 1990) regime 'Islam' was recognized as the state language though the first constitution focused specifically on secularism. According to the latest amendment of the Bangladesh constitution secularism has been revived as one of the core national philosophies and 'Islam' has also been recognized as the state language with mentioning the fact that every citizen of the country has the equal right and authority to perform their own religion as well as religious customs. Religious norm basically refers to the notion of religious ideology, trend, culture, tradition and the entire belief system. Whereas social behavior refers to the fact of social interaction with each other within a community, social dealings regardless class, creed and ethnicity. Religiosity as a social norm. One aspect that, to our knowledge, has been consistently overlooked in previous research is religious beliefs and behaviour often represent a desirable way of life or, in other words, a social norm. Religious behavior and beliefs can be influenced by social norms as well (White, 1968). On the contrary governance comprises all of the processes of governing, over a social system (family, tribe, formal or informal organization, a territory or across territories) and whether through the laws, norms, power or language of an organized society. Different development agencies throughout the world and public policy practitioners have defined the term on few common grounds such as accountability of the governing body (Government in this instance), liability, transparency etc. So, there is a correlation between social behavior and governance system and in the context of Bangladesh social behavior is often characterized or defined by religious norms. This study aims to focus on the issue of youth engagement to the social behavior, the influence of religious norms regarding this engagement and its impact on the overall governance system. This study

will facilitate in drafting future day policies keeping in consideration the perspectives held by young generation. The analysis from this study will also add value to the burgeoning literature of governance and social science study and will also conceptualize the younger generation's approach, perspective and the overall thought process.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS, OPERATIONALIZING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

This research aims to figure out the youth perspective pertaining to religious norms, its impact on social behavior, and consequential effects on governance. The main focus of this research is to conceptualize and analyze the youth perspective regarding religion, state, and society. The questions also focus on whether religion plays a pivotal role in shaping out government policies or not and how the youth of the majority and minority group of Bangladesh think of certain policies adopted by the government when it comes to religious matters.

Bangladesh is predominantly a Muslim country with a 90% of its population being Muslim but for years the people of the country have lived in peaceful and harmonious conditions regardless of religious conditioning. The co-existence has been made possible due to cultural and historical attributes. Though by the constitution of Bangladesh, the country is a secular country even though Islam has been regarded as the state religion by the same constitution. So, there have been questions on how the youths perceive the notion of state religion, the inter-relation between religion, state, and society and potential scenario of the inter-relation in future.

This research will facilitate the study of religious integrity in the light of personal and national life. Then there have been questions regarding importance

of religious features in the social interaction process within own community to determine the fact if religious identity is somehow a factor to maintain social interaction and in regular social dealings. The importance of having a state religion by constitutional recognition has been asked. There will be questions regarding co-existence of differently held belief systems in the community and their rights as citizen. Through this study the probable acceptance and importance of Sharia law (Considering the fact that Bangladesh is predominantly a Muslim majority country) has been thoroughly studied.

Preferences in the governing pattern of the government, satisfactions or dissatisfaction pertaining to the mainstream governing pattern have also been asked. What the young generation would like to witness the country in future in terms of policy approach, diplomatic dealings and the influence of religion behind these factors have also been assessed.

This study is a qualitative one. The respondents have been asked questions mainly through online and in some cases, there have been one to one interview. All the collected data can be recognized as primary data. As no data from any previous research has been assessed. This study has covered the age group between 21-30. The sampling has been based on geographical consideration, and distinctive educational background consideration. This study has tried to cover 500 respondents through online mainly. The questions have been closed questions so the inputs have been objectively judged. There have been specified options for each question and no probability of multiple answers.

This paper is based on an exploratory study that followed a qualitative approach in finding answers to research question while relying on process-tracing. In conducting exploratory studies, the use of qualitative approach that relies on in-depth interviews of the relevant stakeholders is often considered as the most appropriate method. In fact, "...in the qualitative

paradigm, interviews are often seen as one of the best ways to enter into the other person's perspective and develop thick descriptions of a given social world analyzed for cultural patterns and themes" (Oltman, 2016; Patton, 2002: 341; Warren, 2002: 85).

INTER-RELATION BETWEEN RELIGION & POLITICS IN BANGLADESH

Since the inception of Bangladesh, the country has focused on establishing a secular political framework. But after the assassination of the founding father in 1975 the country gradually shifted toward religious politicization and the situation has continued since then. But the astounding fact has been that Islam was announced as the state religion by an authoritarian regime that came into power through military intervention in 1982. By analyzing the political status quo of Bangladesh, it has been assessed the usage of religious politics in Bangladesh can be regarded as identity politics just to be able to please the majority portion of the country. It has been witnessed that almost no Islamic ideology in terms of governance has been applied in the practical sense. Since 1991 when Bangladesh shifted to systematic parliamentary system the scenario remained the same and religious attributes have been used as just an election winning tool and less emphasis on the issue has been paid. Agents promoting modernization and development, including the USA, the European Union and the United Nations, have been providing substantial support to strengthen a democratic government through aid, technology and trade assistance. According to various reports, the West wants to promote Bangladesh as a model of a Muslim country in which democracy and Islam work well together (Alamgir, 2007; Haass, 2002). But the situation has not been the case in Bangladesh. When global terrorism started labelling all as 'Muslim Terrorism' since 1980s, there has been an upsurge of such

terrorism in Bangladesh. The situation of such terrorism deteriorated more in the 1990s and post 2000.

Globally unnoticed, on 17 August 2005 Bangladesh experienced its own 9/11 in a shockwave of terror when a relatively unknown Islamist group, Jamaatul Mujahedeen Bangladesh (JMB), detonated 500 bombs simultaneously across the country. Even less known are that pamphlets were left at every bombing spot with demands of establishing the 'Law of Allah' in the country by abolishing the present democratic system, claiming that democracy and constitutions are sources of polytheism. As if this was not enough, the JMB then struck Bangladesh's judicial system by several suicide bomb attacks, on 3 and 18 October and 14

November 2005, murdering four judges to underscore the seriousness of their demand. Ongoing tensions between the Bangladeshi government and two moderate but influential Islamist parties, the Jamat e Islami Bangladesh (JIB) and Hizbut Tahrir Bangladesh (HTB), open up interesting grounds to investigate the philosophy of 'Political Islam', its stance towards Bangladeshi democracy, and democracy and governance in general.

THE CONCEPT OF RELIGION & POLITICS AMONG THE MASS PEOPLE OF BANGLADESH

In the context of Bangladesh, the concept of religion and politics among the mass people can be regarded as a clandestine concept. If the scenario of Asian Muslim countries (based on the religious majority) is analyzed then it is almost evident that in most cases religion has a visible and effective and also to some extent negative impact. In the context of Bangladesh, the notion of religious matters and government institutions cannot be inextricably used. There is a portion of population who think of religious conditioning can bring about the positive

changes whereas there is a considerable percentage of people who directly oppose such a idea. This research paper has endeavored to focus on such issues and the common perception held by the university going and graduated youths.

Bangladesh has a diverse education structure. There are four versions of primary, secondary, and higher secondary education in general. It has been witnessed that due to differences in educational background there have been major shifts and changes in perspectives. When the analyzing of any policy takes place it is important to understand the essence of youth nature in the contemporary social history analysis and average perspectives held by the young people. Moreover, the youth who have graduated from any university or are currently pursuing higher education are supposed to be the policy-makers and government and non-government officials in the foreseeable future. Due to inter-generation information gap and changes in reality it is seen that there is a considerable gap in assessing a certain policy in Bangladesh and as a result there is a constant discontentment among youths about governance in general regardless of religion and education background.

Mostly there are illiberal and undemocratic practices of the two political parties that dominate Bangladesh politics. One such practice common to both parties is the attempt to impose monopolistic views on various symbols of national identity, despite the multi-racial, multi-religious nature of Bangladesh society. The conclusion is drawn that a democratic system of politics, which accommodates aspects of secularism, language, Muslim identity and 'Islamic ethical-moral-cultural-legal' codes, remains the feasible political discourse for forming and consolidating Bangladesh's multi-racial, multi-religious national identity over the long term and its survival as a sovereign state. (Hossain, 2016) The political culture of Bangladesh has led to a more confusing perspectives among the mass people and so as the youth.

THE RELATION OF RELIGION AND STATE GOVERNANCE IN GENERAL

There have been very few studies in this regard in particular. Several academicians have tried to show the correlation between state and religion but from a third-party overview. William Little in his book 'Introduction to Sociology- 1st Canadian Edition at Chapter 15 has tried to focus on the issue of historical interaction of religion and society.

According to Nieuwenhuis (2012) in his research 'State and religion, a multi-dimensional relationship: Some comparative law remarks' focused on fragmentary overview of current issues regarding state and religion.

So, neither of the studies has focused specifically on the Bangladesh context, its social structure and young generation perspectives in these regards. Whether this particular study will fill up the existing gaps on the study of the correlations between young generation, religious norms, social behavior and governance.

Secularism misconceived as a lofty ideal for national development rather than as an outcome of the complex forces generated by Western European Christian history, has demonstrably failed to create humane, progressive societies in the Muslim world. In Muslim countries, secularism was imposed from above and in an assertive form which ignored, and therefore necessarily failed to utilize, the civilizing role of Islam in national progress (Sardar, 2004; Hashemi, 2013). Consequently, secularist development policy banned religion-based activities, and many religious leaders were criminalized, following the path that communist countries had earlier taken. This occurred in Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Tunisia and Turkey. Iran then became an Islamic republic through an Islamic revolution in 1979 and the African and middle-eastern countries in this regard, went through several dimensions with the 2011 uprising among the latest major political updates.

Religious education in general was neglected, as it was considered antimodern and reserved for the poor to be ridiculed by elites as and when needed. Secularism thereby became simultaneously an enabler of, and a cover for, religious suppression or persecution. It has also been misappropriated as license to sustain an authoritarian political system (Sardar, 2004). Due to such conditioning in major Muslim countries, there has been discontentment pertaining to secularism and the status quo has almost been the same in Bangladesh. But due to Bangladesh's multiculturalism and multi-religious practices over the periods of time Bangladesh has somehow managed to uphold secularism as one of its national features. But there are still political connotations behind such scenario and constant disagreement and discontent among the diverse population of Bangladesh. This research has also focused on such issues as well.

FINDINGS REGARDING YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON IDENTITY

The concept of identity is fundamental in modern social psychology. The nature and formation of group identity, as well as the construction of individual identity, is the subject of much theoretical and empirical inquiry (see Cerulo 1997; Frable 1997; Howard 2000; Sanders 2002; and Vryan, Adler, and Adler 2003 for overviews). Identity is generally used to define and describe an individual.

Individual's sense of self, group affiliations, structural positions, and ascribed and achieved statuses can be regarded as an essence of identification. Identity results from internal subjective perceptions, self-reflection, and external characterizations. Contrary to earlier understandings of identity as fixed and immutable, today identity is more often considered an evolving process of "becoming" rather than simply "being" (Dillon 1999:250).

Individual identity can shift over time, due to personal experiences and larger social changes (Haddad 1994; McMullen 2000; Nagel 1995). Identity theory attempts to link the individual conception of self and the larger social structure within which the individual thinks and acts. However, these approaches to identity vary in their emphases on social structure, on the one hand, and the processes and interactions through which identities are constructed, on the other (Burke et al. 2003; Howard 2000).

Based on the primary data collected for this particular research, in the context of Bangladesh, it has been seen that majority of the youths in Bangladesh intend to uphold the national identity over religious identity while being in Bangladesh. 68.5% of the youths in Bangladesh intend to uphold the national identity 'Bangladeshi' whereas only 12.4% of the university going and graduated youths would like to prefer their religious identity first. Religious identity includes all the religions persisting in Bangladesh but 82.7% of the respondents have been from the majority group (Muslim). Bangladesh is pre-dominantly a Muslim majority country with 90% of its population being Muslim.

FINDINGS PERTAINING TO YOUTH PERSPECTIVE ON RELIGIOUS NORMS AND SOCIAL BEHAVIOR AND ITS INTER-RELATIONAL APPEARANCE

Although religion is a common experience among humans, it remains largely unexplored within the developmental sciences (Benson, Roehlkepartain, & Rude, 2003; Kerestes & Youniss, 2002; King & Boyatzis, 2004; Larson, Brown, & Mortimer, 2002; Weaver et al., 1998). The paucity of research on a central element of human functioning within the developmental sciences is surprising considering that youths and adults alike report high levels of religious

beliefs and participation (Gallup & Bezilla, 1992; Gallup International Association, 1999).

Although the field of the psychology of religion has produced a rich history of theoretical and empirical work, developmental issues remain relatively underexplored (Benson et al., 2003; Donelson, 1999; King & Boyatzis, 2004). The small body of existing literature has often focused on the relationship between adolescent religiousness and various behavioral outcomes. These studies suggest that among adolescents, religion likely serves a dual role of promoting positive development as well as offering protection against risk behaviors. Although interest has grown in the identification of the benefits of religion to adolescent well-being, many of the existing studies provide little theoretical explanation for these positive effects. To date, few theoretical models have been advanced to explain the positive relationship between religion and developmental outcomes (Benson, Donahue, & Erickson, 1989; Erickson, 1992; Jessor, Van Den Bos, Vanderryn, Costa, & Turbin, 1995; King, 2003; Smith, 2003).

Social behavior refers to the notion of day-to-day social interaction, and other as such developmental outcomes. The respondents have been asked whether their religious norms have somehow impacted their social behavior. 56.1% of the youths believe that their social behavior is impacted by their religious identification and religious norms. 22.6% of the university going and graduated youths do not think that their social interaction has anything to do with religious norms, practices, and identification. And 21.3% of the youths are not sure whether their social practices are somehow impacted by religious factors or not.

FINDINGS RELATED TO YOUTH PERSPECTIVE ON STATE RELIGION

Psychological functions of youth regarding religion are discussed from motivational and anthropological

approach including historical and cultural perspective. Bangladesh first adopted the idea of state religion by an authoritarian regime that came into power through military intervention in 1982. This was more of a political stance by the regime to kind of attain the legitimacy by emotionally manipulate the majority group of the country. But there has been disagreement regarding the notion of state religion as the country got independence on the core principle of secularism. The current regime has retained the core ideology of secularism while 'Islam' is still stated as the state religion. But the youths perceive this stance otherwise. On the other hand, there is a correlation between contentment on governance as the youth perceive that there are other significant factors more important than having constant debate and consequential turmoil situation surrounding the aspect of state religion.

63.3% of the youths oppose the ideology and notion of state religion. Whereas, 36.7% of the youths support the idea of state religion. Furthermore, 76.8% of the youths in Bangladesh are not satisfied with the governance system of Bangladesh. In the interviews, it has been observed that the youths prioritize some basic rights related issues and fundamental development issues more than the constant debates on state religion and so forth.

FINDINGS RELATED TO YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON SHARIA LAW AND CONDITIONING OF THE LIFESTYLE OF OTHER RELIGIOUS GROUPS

The main source of Islamic Law, the Sharia, provides not only spiritual leadership for human beings, or guidelines how to practice the religion of Islam properly, but also includes normative implications for the design of the political and economic sphere of a state.

While many empirical studies, based on sheer quantitative approaches, conclude that, in Muslim countries, democracy—and in a way market-oriented economic principles—is less developed, most of these approaches suffer from a relevant shortcoming. Indeed, these studies include countries with Muslim majorities and take them as a proxy for the influence of Islam on democracy or the development of a market economy. But this equation may be too easy. At least in modern national states with Muslim majorities, the principles of Sharia have almost never been applied (duly) when designing the political and economic system. Consequently, these analyses—in the best case—measure the biased effects of a “mixed influence” of Sharia Law and other societal or traditional factors on democracy and the shape and structure of the economy, but not the isolated effects of the Sharia Law. (Schomaker, 2016)

The main source of Islamic Law, the Sharia, provides not only spiritual leadership for human beings, or guidelines how to practice the religion of Islam properly, but also includes normative implications for the design of the political and economic sphere of a state. This duality is deep rooted in the Qur'an as the main source of Islamic Law (or Sharia), and dates back to the times of the origin of Islam, when the spiritual leader of the then newly formed Muslim group the prophet Mohammed was also the political leader. (Schomaker, 2016)

So, around the Muslim world the prevalence and importance of Sharia is a common topic. And the issue has become more prevalent in the modern state system and regulation in the Muslim countries as there are political attributes associated with the notion of Sharia as well. This has led to religious extremism and militancy in some parts of the Muslim world. So, among the Muslims around the world, there can be witnessed a distinctive division. The same scenario can also be witnessed among the Bangladeshi youths.

Based on the primary data of this specific research, it has been seen that 58% of the Bangladeshi youths do not think that Sharia would be a better option for governing the country. But it can be biased to some extent as the university going and graduated youths are supposed to be more progressive than the other parts of the community. The division among the so-called progressive group is quite visible as 42% think that Sharia law can be a better way out. Among this 42%, all of them belong to the majority religious group. There has been a common perception among youths from the minority group that Sharia law would oppress them and may deny their basic human rights. Lack of trust may trigger if Sharia law is imposed. Whereas, the youths of the majority religious groups are divided in their opinions and majority of them cannot show any viable reasoning whether to impose Sharia law or not except some religious verses. The fusion between modern state system and Sharia law is discouraged by both of the divided groups.

Furthermore, 55.55% of the youths from the majority religious group think that the minority groups in Bangladesh are in good and sound condition and 45.6% of the youths from the minority group perceive that the members of majority religious group in Bangladesh have somehow been given additional privilege in certain concerns.

LIMITATION & WEAKNESS

There might be limitations regarding closed question as broad overview would not be recognized. This study may have faults in project planning and probable risk management issues. Due to logistics shortage, there might be lacking in broadening the sample type.

OUTCOME

There have been very limited studies on these particular issues articulated in the above points. So, the outcomes of this specific study will be unique by its methodology, approach and data analysis. The outputs may play a vital role in drafting future policy-making. This study will create new scopes in determining multi-dimensional facts and will facilitate second thought on the existing literatures of such studies. The primary data will be a great resource in terms of government consideration of prioritization.

CONCLUSION

Religion is a common feature around the world. There have been a number of studies on religiosity. But in the context of countries like Bangladesh, there has been almost no study on the multi-dimensional and inter-related relationship between religious belief, social practices, and state concerns. Also, the perspective of the youths who are supposed to be potential pivotal stakeholders in the foreseeable future and the supposed to be policy-makers is also important to understand. So, this research paper will help conceptualizing such factors and may suggest policy recommendations.

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