

CLASS AND STATE IN BANGLADESH: POLITICAL ECONOMY OF AUTHORITARIAN DEMOCRACY

Habibul Haque Khondker

ABSTRACT

Bangladesh has a functioning democracy, yet the charges of "authoritarianism" against the government are routinely made by its opponents. Sometimes the opposition parties exaggerate, but mostly their allegations are not unfounded. Democratically elected governments once in power often behave in an authoritarian fashion until they are voted out and become the opposition party. The paper will try to examine the social basis of authoritarian democracy in light of the class background of the state elites with a special focus on the relationship between state and economy. The paper maintains that class continues to remain relevant as a sociological category. This paper also argues that class and especially class factions need to be taken into account in examining democratization and democratic transitions. Bringing class and class-faction back into the analysis, the paper also evaluates the potential for democratization in an economically challenged society characterized by a nexus of high external dependence and internal corruption.

"...the great mass of the French nation is formed by simple addition of homologous magnitudes, much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes". - Karl Marx

"The state is a machine in the hands of the ruling class for suppressing the resistance of its class enemies". - Joseph Stalin

"Class is defined by men as they live their own history, and, in the end, this is the only definition" – E.P. Thompson

Introduction

Bangladesh was ranked by the Davos-based World Economic Forum's World Competitiveness Report 2003-2004 98th of the 102 countries. Only Mali, Angola, Chad and Haiti trailed Bangladesh. The donors of Bangladesh openly criticize her faltering governance, manifested in rampant corruption, sliding lawlessness and poor human rights records. Bangladesh's lackluster achievements in of terms human development are often attributed to malgovernance. Yet to the bafflement of many political pundits, Bangladesh is a functioning democracy. Since 1991 two successive governments were removed by popular vote in elections conducted under a caretaker government headed by the retired Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Yet whenever a party in power is voted out to play the role of opposition it accuses the new party in power of being "authoritarian", "undemocratic" and even "tyrannical". The complements, needless to say, are returned. Indeed sometimes the behaviors of the government truly fall short of democratic norms. The peculiar nature of democracy can be best defined as "authoritarian democracy". Oxymoronic sure, but this term describes the realities on the ground. By authoritarian democracy, I mean that although the procedures of democracy such as free and more or less fair elections – thanks to the idea of caretaker

government – and the presence of a fairly free press make the polity democratic, in a substantive sense democracy is missing. What is conspicuously absent is the rule of law which has been seriously undermined by the rule of the people. The principle of separation of power is threatened as the institutions of judiciary remain under the tutelage of the executive and the parliament remains ineffective due the lack of consensus on the broad rules of the game between the ruling party and the main opposition. The appellation "illiberal democracy", a term more suitable for Southeast Asian democracies, is inappropriate for Bangladesh because of the presence of a free press, a civil society and open political protests on the streets. In a substantive sense democracy is limited because of the high degree of centralization of power in the hands of the Prime Minister and people close to her.

The authoritarian nature of political power has its corollary in the existence of rampant corruption. No wonder, Bangladesh has won the dubious title of the most corrupt perceived nation in the world for three years in a row. The government in power shows a high level of tolerance for corruption and is marked by an absence of accountability and respect for independent judiciary. The ruling political class remains highly predatory and uses hooligans, who are often given positions in the party to intimidate

opposition parties. Incorporating goons in the party fold give them immunity from law enforcement and administration of justice. The government starting with all the fanfare and promises of institutionalizing democracies ends up undermining the values of democracy that they themselves championed as a party in opposition.

How can this be explained? Is this a classic example of cultural-lag where political culture has not been able to keep pace with political institutions? Is it a case of incomplete democratization? If so why? What explains this failure? In solving this puzzle, one could be tempted to advance one of the following explanations. (1) a Lipsetian (and orthodox Marxist) would say, Bangladesh does not have the prerequisites of democracy, i.e., economic development, especially industrialization, high per capita GDP, high literacy, etc. (Lipset, 1994). (2) One could say following Almond and Verba that it has not developed a civic culture yet which sustains democracy or following Putnam one could say that Bangladesh is a new democracy and as it becomes matured enough things would improve. One would remind us of Putnam's analysis of Italian politics in the 1970s and in the 1990s (Putnam, et al:1993). Putnam, a Harvard Political Scientist found high degree of intolerance and absence of democratic values in the early 1970s which changed significantly in a span of twenty years. The political culture arguments may have some validity. One could even point to the recent spate of analyses (Karatnycky, 2002) that suggest that Islam and democracy do not go together. Bangladesh has a population of 140 million of which 85% are Muslims.

Although, I reject the association of Islam and non-democracy as spurious, [it is as spurious as Thomas Friedman's alleged association between McDonalds and democracy] it would be foolish of me to dismiss culture or an analysis that seriously includes culture. However here I try a more structural or class-centered analysis to explain the nature of democracy in Bangladesh. This is not to suggest an orthodox and reductionistic class analysis is still sustainable but to argue that class, especially class-faction still remains relevant to explaining political processes. Politics is embedded in society and culture. We need to consider both – the real politik as well as the broader social and cultural framework. Some writers such as Migdal, Atul Kohli et al (1994) incorporate a broad holistic model by looking at how various institutions of society and state interact with each other under the rubric of "state-in-society". This is an improvement over earlier modernization paradigms, yet it remains an unsatisfactory approach, for such an approach

remains more descriptive than analytical. Migdal in his discussion of weak society, strong state and vice versa provides a static picture of the social world and underplays the role of social movements and conflicts.

Even an adequate transactional model that looks at how society and state interact with each other in a dynamic fashion will fall short of sharp analytical focus. Who can disagree with a statement such as: "Both the state and society may mold, and be also continually molded by, each other"? In the end holistic approaches are too complete to be wrong and thus have little analytical value. A multivariate logic is highly desirable but rarely demonstrable. They are fool proof. An elegant analysis must take some risk in identifying variable or factors that are of greater significance even at the risk of being wrong and controversial. Here I take the Geertzian view of the role of an anthropologist or a sociologist. Our task is to disturb, to pull the rug from under the coffee-table. A sociologist is, as Bourdieu said, a "troublemaker" (Bourdieu, 1993:8). In that vein I would add, our task is to deflate the balloon of complacency and to echo the Shakespearean dictum that there are more things in heaven and earth than meets the eyes. But we need to prioritize the variables. Here I follow Engels closely, as he stated: "We make our history ourselves, but, in the first place, under very definite assumptions and conditions. Among these the economic ones are ultimately decisive. But the political ones, etc., and indeed even the traditions which haunt human minds, also play a part, although not the decisive one" (Engels in McLellan, 1988:70). In dealing with the case of Bangladesh, I argue that using political economy as the pivot of analysis may still be useful despite the paradigm shifts. With the growing popularity of race, gender, social status, sexual orientation, identity, diaspora etc. class has been neglected. As Collini holds: "In the frequently incanted quartet of race, class, gender and sexual orientation, there is no doubt that class has been the least fashionable... despite the fact that all the evidence suggests that class remains the single most powerful determinant of life-chances" (Collini, quoted in Milner 1999:9)

Towards a Historically Embedded Theoretical Framework

In 1972, barely a year after the independence of Bangladesh, Hamza Alavi, a Pakistani Marxist sociologist published an article entitled, "The Post-Colonial Societies: Pakistan and Bangladesh" where he dealt with the subject of "Military-Bureaucratic Oligarchy" and its politico-economic basis in

Pakistan and Bangladesh. Alavi's main argument was that in postcolonial societies the state is relatively autonomous vis-à-vis the dominant classes which is helped by the fact that the state is somewhat overdeveloped as it was created by the colonial interests. In the colonial situation the state was a tool of the metropolitan bourgeoisie. In advanced capitalist societies the state mediates the interests of the various fractions of bourgeoisie. Here he draws upon Poulantzas. In the postcolonial societies an overdeveloped state maintains its autonomy from three competing classes - the metropolitan bourgeoisie, the indigenous bourgeoisie (state-dependent "national" bourgeoisie) and the landed class. This is a variation from the two models of state class relationship in the classical Marxist discussion. In one model, state was presented as an instrument of the dominant class; in another state was autonomous from the class structure. Alavi's thesis of relative autonomy of the state was quite original and firmly grounded in empirical and historical bases.

Since the classic *New Left Review* article by Hamza Alavi, South Asian scholars with one or two exceptions have moved into all different directions and pathways without returning to his analysis. The world has changed. Socialism has now become defunct. Marxist analyses have fallen into disrepute. New ideas, theories and paradigms such as new history, post-modernism, cultural studies and the overall turn to culture and subjectivism have rendered politico-economic analysis a theoretical dinosaur. This paper seeks to return to Alavi's thesis three decades after its publication. I do so not for the sake of nostalgia of looking up some freshman year's romance but for some solid reasons. I believe that Marxist inspired politico-economic analyses have not outlived their utility. In returning to the Marxist framework, the paper does not make any apology. I assert that Marxist framework can still be a good starting point and then of course it has to be supplemented by ideas of recent origin. If Marxist analysis is not useful we will be quick to admit it.

The intellectual context of Alavi's analysis was the theoretical debates between the French structuralists and the English Marxists represented by Nicos Poulantzas and Ralph Miliband respectively. Miliband's instrumentalist theory was rooted in state as the executive committee of the bourgeoisie view drawn from *The Communist Manifesto* of 1848. The critics, who proposed the relative autonomy of the state, drew their inspiration from *The Eighteenth Brumaire* where politics was given a relatively autonomous position.

Alavi made a claim that the so-called "overdeveloped state" was a colonial legatee. The colonial rulers created a state machine for the purpose of exploitation, and now with hind sight (of past three decades of theoretical development) we may add for ideological reproduction. The dominant classes were subservient to the metropolitan bourgeoisie. They evolved as junior partners, or as Mao Zedong put it: comprador bourgeoisie. This class never evolved into a national bourgeoisie. Andre Gunder Frank termed this class as "lumpenbourgeoisie", a class which was no more than the passive (rather than 'active') tool of foreign industry and commerce and its interests were therefore identical with theirs. The members of this class are deeply interested in keeping the status quo - a state (or shall we say, process) of wretched backwardness from which foreign commerce derives all advantages - a state Frank termed as "lumpendevlopment" (Frank, 1972:5).

The political economy of Bangladesh in the 1970s fit very well the description of peripheral formations. According to Samir Amin all peripheral formations have four main characteristics in common: (1) the predominance of agrarian capitalism in the national sector; (2) the creation of a local, mainly merchant, bourgeoisie in the wake of dominant foreign capital; (3) a tendency toward a peculiar bureaucratic development, specific to the contemporary periphery; (4) the incomplete specific character of the phenomena of proletarianization" (Amin, 1976a: 27). The weak bourgeoisie and the presence of a hegemonic bureaucratic elite are the hallmarks of most of the peripheral societies. Amin regards bureaucracy as the only actor in the stage which he attributes to the weaker and unbalanced development of the local bourgeoisie. (Amin, 1976:38).

It would be useful to analyze the relationship between class and state and its implication for democratization in light of all these new developments; but the starting point, I choose, is Alavi mainly because Alavi sought to try out a Marxist theoretical perspective in explaining political realities in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Migdal criticized Alavi for assuming postcolonial societies as undifferentiated (Migdal, 1988: 19). But this charge is inappropriate because Alavi was analyzing the realities in Pakistan and Bangladesh with some hint at India and was aware of the differences.

Following Alavi, it is easy to see that the subservience of the local bourgeoisie to and dependence on the state explains why democracy is not viable and authoritarianism is the norm in Pakistan and Bangladesh. At the time of writing this

essay, Pakistan was reeling under a Martial Law – ironically - under a civilian politician, namely, Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. However, Bangladesh was a democracy at that time. What was astounding in Alavi's analysis that he almost predicted the collapse of democracy in favor of military rule in Bangladesh. He wrote, "It may yet be that a new bureaucratic-military oligarchy with outside aid will in due course consolidate its position and power in Bangladesh" (Alavi, 1972). Three year's after the publication of Alavi's article, Bangladesh fell into the hands of military rule. Writers such as Lawrence Lifschultz continue to explore CIA hands in that military coup. But does Alavi's analysis help us understand the transition to democracy or what I call "authoritarian democracy" in Bangladesh?

Surely, Alavi's analysis of "military-bureaucratic oligarchy" was more appropriate to Pakistan than to Bangladeshi. Pakistan emerged as an independent country in 1947. The state-led development in Pakistan from 1947 to 1960s led to the growth of 22 business families of enormous wealth. The Pakistan state had a visible hand in the development of this super rich class. Without the state patronage "small and medium enterprise had failed to prosper equally, and felt increasingly neglected" which led to anti-Ayub movement in the late 1960s. (Anwar Ali, 2001:112-113). Such uneven economic development which was translated into unequal regional development fomented the movement for regional autonomy in East Pakistan, paving the way for the independence of Bangladesh in 1971.

One interesting point that needs to be reemphasized is the relationship between militaristic policies of the Pakistan government under the tutelage of the military-bureaucratic oligarchy and their impact on inter-provincial disparity. An important source of Pakistan's military posture was a result of the global geopolitics. "...to achieve the twin objectives of an adequate deterrence to ensure the territorial integrity of Pakistan and maintain its claim on Kashmir, foreign policy was directed to the search for military aid. In the mid-fifties, at the height of the Cold War, this meant alignment with the anti-Russian policies of the United States in the region. There was a strong reaction in East Pakistan to Western military aid and Pakistan's accession to regional military pacts in order to contain communism" (Zaheer, 1994:67).

In some sense Pakistani ruling elites could take advantage of somewhat misguided US policies in this region. In January 1957, President Eisenhower called military aid to Pakistan "the worst kind of plan and decision we could have made. It was a terrible error,

but we now seem hopelessly involved in it" (quoted in Zaheer, 1994:67). By the time the error was recognized, it was too late to roll back the relationship.

As it became evident that West Pakistan [present day, Pakistan] was not giving due attention to the security needs of East Pakistan [present day, Bangladesh], the leaders from the East were becoming vocal and they could express their views in the Parliament [Constituent Assembly] thanks to the tenuous existence of democracy. Mr. Aatur Rahman of Awami League stated: "Let me give this warning in very clear terms that unless ... you give up this out-moded and exploded theory of defending East Pakistan from West Pakistan, you will lose us and we will all die before you are able to give us any help from here... the entire force for the defence of East Bengal must be raised within East Bengal and the money you are spending here [West Pakistan] for the purpose of defence must be shared also by the people of East Bengal" (Aatur Rahman of Awami League quoted in Zaheer, 1994:70-71).

Other Parliamentarians from the East such as Shiekh Mujibur Rahman even began to outline the grievous consequences that might follow if disparity was not stemmed. "Probably my friends of West Pakistan think that if any money is spent for the industrial development of East Bengal, the money will go to winds because some of them think that how long will East Bengal continue with them... East Bengal people are politically conscious; they know how to fight and get their rights" (Sheikh Mujibur Rahman of Awami League quoted in Zaheer, 1994:71).

The case of Pakistan and its eventual breakup illustrates the intricate relationship between militarization at the global level, i.e., Cold War and the external (U.S.) support that played a vital role in bolstering military-bureaucratic oligarchy in Pakistan. Global geo-politics and political-economy shape internal class relations and in some instances – as in the case of Pakistan – strengthened the state vis-à-vis the internal classes. An evaluation of state strength which may have consequence for regional disparity and the nascent growth of nationalism and sub-nationalism must pay attention to the global factors.

Both the global geo-political factors as well as internal political economy were not favorable for the rise of a military-bureaucratic oligarchy in Bangladesh, especially in the first few years. Kochanek argues that "Ever since its creation in 1971, Bangladesh's urban-based political,

bureaucratic, and military elites have dominated the political process and have been accountable to no one but themselves” (Kochanek, 1996:704). The actual launching of the military-bureaucratic dominance began with the commencement of the military rule in Bangladesh since late 1975 after the tragic end of Sheikh Mujib’s regime. Although, the first military ruler in Bangladesh General Ziaur Rahman loaded his first council of advisors or Ministry with retired senior civil servants from the Pakistan days, this seemingly “military-bureaucratic oligarchy” was short-lived. Bengalis were not represented in the Pakistan civil service or military in any significant number which was one of the resentments. In 1971 when Sheikh Mujib called for the non-cooperation movement, civil servants joined him. But they were not a major force. Many of their members joined the liberation war. After the liberation of Bangladesh, the political party in power had an ambivalent relationship with the civil service. Awami League, because of its vanguard role in the struggle against bureaucracy-dominated Pakistan developed a hostile relationship with the bureaucracy. This animosity and suspicion of bureaucracy lingered in post-independence Bangladesh. Some sections of the bureaucracy joined the liberation war after the crackdown of March 1971 and earned respectability among the political elite. After the repatriation of civilian bureaucrats and stranded Bengali military personnel from Pakistan, a new schism marked the machination of the government with important consequences.

The class character of the Awami League was composed of aspiring middle classes in the urban areas and the assorted rural classes made up of small peasants, landless peasants who suffered under the Kulaks nurtured by Ayub’s Basic Democracy. The vanguard role of the Awami League in the country’s liberation war brought together a huge coalition of classes that swelled the support base of the party beyond its wildest imagination. Sheikh’s popularity in 1971 was a testimony to that support. Unfortunately, this gave Awami League a somewhat false sense of exaggerated popularity and self-adulation. Once Bangladesh became independent the coalition built in the middle of revolutionary firmament gradually melted away. Factional politics underpinned by class-factions took the center-stage. The attempt on the part of the ruling elite to stem the tide of fragmentation by foisting a one-party rule also failed to revitalize the declining legitimacy of the Awami League government. 1975 marked a major break in the history of Bangladesh. The great tragedy of murdering Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family must not obscure the fact that the popularity of the

Awami League rule at the time of the coup was not nearly as high as it was during the early years of liberation. Although towards the end of 1975 the economy was recuperating after the famine of 1974 which was induced, in part, by the belligerent policies of the United States (Khondker, 1984), the popularity of the ruling elite was eroded by the economic mismanagement of the earlier years. The class-basis of the Awami League ruling elites was at odds with socialism nor did it ever have any commitment to socialist ideals. Socialism was more of a slogan than substance. In 1972 Awami League inherited an economy where the key means of production were owned by the non-Bengalees from India and Pakistan who evaporated after the liberation. Awami League a centrist party and often criticized as pro-American in the pre-independence days had to nationalize these industries. This statist nationalization was consistent with a patronage system where greedy party leaders and officials wanted something in return for their loyalty to the party even at great risk.

The five and a half year rule of Zia (1975-1981) consolidated the military-bureaucratic domination on the one hand and also created a support base amongst the right-wing forces. This phase has been characterized by one author as the emergence of an “administrative state” dominated by civil and military bureaucrats (Islam, 1986-87). In the post-Mujib period, Zia, a war hero and an astute politician, quickly moved to enlist support of both the sections of the military and bureaucracy who were actively involved in the liberation war as well as those who were repatriated from Pakistan and begrudged the Awami League government for not treating them with respect. Zia was also able to co-opt the support of both the right wing Islamicists and the left wing communists. The left and the right in Bangladesh had a common ground in their antipathy towards the centrist Awami League, the party of the petty bourgeoisie at the forefront of the country’s liberation movement. According to Franda: “Zia’s BNP government is composed of three distinct strands: (1) his own factional supporters within the Bangladesh military and bureaucracy; (2) the bulk of the leadership and party cadres of the Muslim League and other Islamic fundamentalist parties; and (3) the leadership of the major portion of the Maulana Bhashani faction of the National Awami Party (NAP)” (Franda, 1979:2).

The politico-economic basis of the Zia regime was more political than economic. Rather than being supported by a dominant class, Zia set out to create a new class through generous bank loans. One of the

popular refrains of his regime was “money, no problem”. Zia wanted to steer the country to the path of economic development through the development of a new class of industrialists. He set a high standard of personal honesty; yet ironically, the strategy of development through a patronage system created a highly corrupt system. Internationally, Zia was also quite active in regional politics moving to create SAARC and launching his initiative in the Middle East peace process. Bangladesh began to export manpower and foreign remittance began to fill the depleted state coffers. Zia’s patronage also created a new class of “entrepreneurs” some of whom invested in what came to be known as garments industries. Zia’s pro-capitalist policies can be understood more in political than economic terms.

As Quadir points out: “General Zia’s military regime embarked on a disinvestment program and set up the Disinvestment Board which was given the responsibility for implementing announced privatization. It reactivated the Dhaka Stock Exchange and established an Investment Promotion Center in Dhaka designed to foster private investment” (Quadir, 2000:197). Zia’s popularity among the new business class was understandable. As his regime rolled back the post-war socialist policies of the Awami League, his legitimacy increased.

The dismantling of the socialist looking economy was motivated mainly by political reasons but it had varied beneficial effects for the military regime. For one, it could draw support of the World Bank, USA, and the Islamic countries. The anti-socialist consensus was a powerful bloc that came to the aid of the new regime. As huge amount of foreign aid flowed in, the regime obtained a large dose of legitimacy. The abortive coup that killed Zia in 1981 and paved the way for the rise of General Ershad at the helm of affairs did not mark a regime change but a change of leadership. This may explain why it was so expedient and convenient for some sections of the leadership to switch loyalty from one person to another. By then Bangladesh was witnessing the rise of a new bourgeoisie. The dominant class – the owners of various industries – had no problem with a leader who was a great patron of the business class. One of the first moves of General Ershad was to help legalize “black money” by allowing the ill-begotten wealth to come into the market by allowing the new robber barons to set up private banks. From the donors’ point of view this was a positive step towards privatization. From the local business point of view, this provided an opportunity for many of the business men with dubious reputation to come out clean in

public.

By the end of the 1990s, the new business class was entrenched and confident enough to risk a transition from authoritarian rule to democracy. An alliance of the old intelligentsia, the backbone of Awami League support, and the new moneyed class was a deadly combination. In the late 1980s, the pro-democracy movements were gaining grounds internationally. Even in Pakistan military rule came to an end, though not exactly by pressure from the social forces, but by a freak accident that killed Ziaul Huq. In Bangladesh not only the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie sought the taste of democracy in view of the global trends, it provided the best way to compromise their factional squabbles. By then the donor agencies also reincarnated themselves as the great benefactors of democracy. NGOs that emerged in the post-independence Bangladesh and flowered under the authoritarian rulers in full force, though by default, played a key role too. In other words, civil society was reborn in Bangladesh. Many compared the anti-Ershad movement of 1988-89 with anti-Ayub movement of the 1968-69. Both regimes were marked by popular military rulers with tangible development work to their credit. Ayub built the Second Capital and Ershad built all the major roads in Dhaka. Ershad had a knack for development as well as other pleasures of life. In that regard he was closer to his old boss General Yahya Khan.

Despite the rise and fall of political regimes a certain of continuity is marked with regard to industrialization and social change that saw the rise of a home-grown bourgeoisie, a business class with close links with politics. Since the early days of 1970s, Bangladesh has created a small but increasingly powerful bourgeois. Take the example of one business house, BEXIMCO (Bangladesh Export and Import Company was its original name). As the original name suggests it started as an export-import business house by an enterprising wife of a former Minister of Pakistan Mr. Fazlur Rahman. The business house started under the rule of Awami League when it started exporting unconventional items. The business house received some patronage under the military regime. The military had no quarrel with business community. The CEO of the company had personal relations with the family of Awami League leader. However, two of the cousin brothers of Mr Rahman held cabinet positions under BNP administration. Some of the senior executives of this company have close family ties with important officials in the BNP administration. Family ties as well as friendship networks [for the later Dhaka Club has a key role] play a central role in the unraveling of

state-class relationship in Bangladesh.

Another example is Opex. Its CEO is a retired military officer who served under Zia during the Pakistan days. With a combination of drive, entrepreneurship and some help from the governments in power, Opex became a leading garment industry in Bangladesh. The CEO of Opex had close links with both the Awami League and BNP administration, but his cousin brother held a cabinet position in the succeeding BNP administrations. I use the example of OPEX because of the fact that this enterprise started from the entrepreneurial drive of its founder who had some relatives in business but he started off without any major political patronage. There are several business houses in Bangladesh that started off without political links but were gradually drawn to the world of political patronage. Both political parties want the support, especially the financial backing, of the business class. The entrepreneurial business class wants both the parties to follow democratic norms. In the annual convention of the Garments industrialists, both the Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition were invited to deliver pep talks. When there was a stalemate between the Awami League and BNP in days of periodic shutdowns and hartals in early 1990s, civil society organizations came to the forefront in trying to mediate between these two bickering parties. One of the leaders of the civil society was Samson Chowdhury, a leading industrialist of the country. Alongside the new bourgeoisie, there is a parasitical bourgeoisie whose wealth is due to the non-repayment of the loans. The list of bank loan defaulters includes many leading businessmen from both the dominant political parties. During the tenure of Awami League government Mr. Kibria, the Finance Minister prepared a list of defaulters which included slightly more Awami League MPs than BNP MPs. The disclosure seemed to be more academic since little was done to bring the defaulters to book.

Some writers show understandable skepticism about the role of class in the politics of Bangladesh as the state has come close to a point of disintegration. According to Rehman Sobhan: "...over the last two decades Bangladesh's social formations have become highly fluid at all levels of society with an increasing number of households assuming a multiplicity of earning modes to survive or prosper. This process has reduced the capacity for collective action along the traditional class lines. Rather, the tendency has been for much more parochial, particularistic or even individualized forms of action which seek sectional or private gain rather than the aggrandizement of a

class. This tendency itself derives from the disarticulated nature of the state, which represents no class, beyond serving the appetites of a large number of individuals driven neither by ideology or collective purpose nor even by an overriding commitment to a political party. These largely private aspirations may occasionally intersect with those of other private players to sustain a collective purpose. Thus, when it comes to competing for a business tender or an energy concession, there is no class interest, no political party interest, there are just coalitions of vertically integrated public and private interests engaged in the pursuit of their personal aggrandizement. In such circumstances, the state is seen to be progressively weakening itself to a point where it is degenerating into a functional anarchy where it has virtually lost its capacity to implement most public policies" (Sobhan, 2002a).

But this is not to say that there is no class but only individual interests. It is class faction rather than class as a horizontal entity that deserves closer attention. What may be happening is privatization of self-interest which is consistent with factionalization of class and the rise of a consumerist culture. Even civil servants, who do not form a class but an important social category - are not protecting the interest of the state as a collectivity. They are profiting individually or as a faction at the expense of their group or collective interest. Factionalism along party lines is rife in civil service. The factions are often linked to the political parties. There is a vicious circle in the sense that factionalism weakens bureaucracy as an institution which leads individual bureaucrats to establish linkages with the parties for survival and career advancement. Thus they remain dependent on the political parties as political parties also remain dependent on their affiliated factions for support and loyalty. A symbiotic relationship thus evolves. There is a vicious circle too in terms of the business class not paying taxes thus weakening the government. And a weak government is unable to pursue tax evaders and bank loan defaulters. The tax evaders and loan defaulters often settle for loyalty and bribe to the party in power and the affiliated civil servants. Since the business class pay bribe they justify tax evasion. Many of the members of the retired military join business and become successful. What is most important to understand in the state-class nexus in Bangladesh is class factions rather than class as a whole. Factional interests override larger class interests. State plays a key role in nurturing the factious culture by becoming a key faction itself. Crony capitalism in Bangladesh has assumed a new dimension.

While the above analysis helps us understand why there is no solid reaction to malgovernance and oppression along class line, it does not negate the argument linking the role of the state in protecting, promoting and serving the interests of the dominant class. It is understandable that the state has lost its capacity as well as its will to do much in terms of penetrating into the society in any meaningful way, but it may also be argued that the state is not representing the interests of any particular class as such. I would argue that the state is promoting the interests of the ruling class which is made up of the state elites of which bourgeoisie is a component. This class enjoys a certain degree of autonomy and cannot be reduced to either the bourgeoisie or the notoriously slippery category “middle class”. Following Michael Kalecki’s theory of “intermediate class”, Bertocci has argued that there are three institutional groupings at the helm of the state: (1) the civil bureaucracy, (2) the military, and (3) the civilian politicians and their parties (Bertocci, 1982:991). The relatively autonomous Bangladesh state has become dominant without being hegemonic. A hegemonic state commands consent, a dominant state uses naked force of repression.

Here it is unavoidable to make some remarks on the subject of class. The really existing classes in society and our conceptual or theoretical understanding of it can be at variance.

The concept of class has always been problematic. Marx’s discussion, it is well-known, broke off in Volume 3 of *Das Kapital*. If we approach it simply as ownership versus non-ownership of means of production we will only get a partial picture of the situation. In a note by Engles to the English edition of the Communist Manifesto of 1888, we find the following clarification: “By ‘bourgeois’ is meant the class of modern capitalists, owners of the means of social production and employers of wage labour. By proletariat, the class of modern wage laborers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour power in order to live”. [Note by Engles to the English edition of the Communist Manifesto of 1888].

For decades, orthodox Marxists insisted on a two class model – the bourgeoisie and the proletariat even in the face of multiple classes who came to the scene. Bourdieu’s distinction between “class on paper” and class in society is illustrative. Bourdieu insists that “...a theoretical class or a “class on paper,” might be considered as a probable real class, or as the probability of a real class, whose constituents are likely to be brought closer and mobilized (but are not

actually mobilized) on the basis of their similarities (of interest and dispositions)” (Bourdieu, 1987:7). Following Bourdieu, classes can be defined as “...sets of agents who by virtue of the fact that they occupy similar positions in the distribution of powers are subject to similar conditions of existence and conditioning factors and, as a result, are endowed with similar dispositions which prompt them to develop similar practices” (Bourdieu, 1987:6). Many people in Bangladesh regardless of their objective situation in society would like to present themselves as “middle class”. In Bengali, the term used for middle class is *maddhya bitto*, which is both an economic class as well as a status position. This class like the *uccho bitto* or *bittoshali*, which is a class of wealth meticulously conforms behaviors and lifestyles becoming of their class positions. Workers are often described and, more important, they define themselves as working people, uneducated people. A common expression is “we are uneducated people, sir, we do not understand things”. This display of deference can only be a Scottian act, a role-play to create an impression of docility, servility and acquiescence. The reality can be quite different. Middle class is a big category. Petty bourgeoisie is subset of middle class, lumpenbourgeoisie is another (degenerated) subset.

The subjective dimension in the definition of class has always been problematic. Marx’s distinction between “class in itself” and “class for itself” remains a source of controversy. How do we know when a class becomes conscious? Yet it is important to add the self definition of class. Bourdieu reminds us that “Any theory of the social universe must include the representation that agents have of the social world and, more precisely, the contribution they make to the construction of the vision of that world, and consequently, to the very construction of that world” (Bourdieu, 1987:10).

Ossowski found three cross-cutting dichotomies in the Marxist scheme of class: (1) Those who possess and those who do not possess means of production; (2) those who work and those who do not work; and (3) those who employ hired labor and those who do not. Writing on the class structure of Bangladesh three decades ago, Feroz Ahmed wrote: “In the absence of an urban bourgeois class and real economic power of the aristocracy, the emerging petty bourgeoisie, consisting of small traders, shopkeepers, professional people, teachers, and clerks, became potentially the most important class. Culturally, the influence of this class was predominant, but economically it was weak” (Ahmed, 1973:420).

In the last three decades since the independence of Bangladesh, class structure has changed. Here, I follow the model of Mao Tse-Tung's proposed class structure in China in 1926 where he modified a Marxist class schema to reflect the realities of China. Mao counted five classes in China: The landlord and the comprador class, the middle bourgeoisie (national bourgeoisie), the petty bourgeoisie, the semi-proletariat, and the proletariat. The dominant classes in Bangladesh today are:

1. State elites: They are the holders of the state power. There are two components in this class: the political elites and the senior civil and military bureaucrats. While the political elites changes depending on which party is in power, the bureaucratic elites remain influential. All other groups derive their power from the holders of the state power. The state elites are responsible for allocating and reallocating resources including means of production. They give out contracts and create a class of contractors, some people also benefit having contacts with the state elites. Alavi stated that President Ayub was creating a bourgeoisie in East Bengal (present Bangladesh) who could be classified as either "contractors" or "contactors" (Alavi, 1973:169). The process has continued in post-independence Bangladesh uninterrupted. In the immediate aftermath of independence, Awami League had to distribute patronage which often came in the form of contracts, employment in the public owned enterprises, and so on in return of their support for Awami League as well as cause for the liberation war. Many of the families affected by the war also received favors. Subsequently, such patronage system continued for purely political loyalty. It became common knowledge that having political contacts pay-off.
2. Big-business class and industrialists, who owe their wealth to family wealth accumulated through landholding (which includes ownership of houses) or ownership of business and industries in the past. They form the backbone of the bourgeoisie. A subdivision can be thought of between traditional moneyed class (AK Khan family would be a representative of this type) and newly moneyed class or nouveau rich (Bashundhora Group for example).
3. Retired civil servants and military officers (usually upper and mid-level) and other professionals such as doctors, engineers, judges, lawyers, officer cadre in private sectors, bankers,

airline pilots, etc. The professionals are often counted as the mainstream middle class.

4. Somewhat powerless professional class such as teachers, semi-employed, small-time business class. They are often counted as petty-bourgeoisie. Intellectuals who played a vital role in fomenting nationalism and in the liberation war have now become marginalized. Their enfeebled situation reflects the weakness of petty bourgeoisie in Bangladesh today (2003).
5. Rural landed elites, sometimes employed as political entrepreneurs, religious leaders with influence on their constituencies, school teachers, teachers of Madrasa, and Mullahs of the mosques, etc. These groups are often overlapping and share a collective consciousness to the extent that they can be considered as a class.
6. A class of touts, semi-lumpen class with some education and organizational skills. They are often pressed into service by various political parties as henchmen, thugs, and such other assorted services. This class provides the direct link between the political elites and the vast number of masses.
7. A working class which I define following Wood who says, "...there is such a thing as working class, people who by virtue of their situation in the relations of production and *exploitation* [emphasis added] share certain fundamental interests, and ... these class interests coincide with the essential objective of socialism, the abolition of class, ..." (Wood, 1986:189 quoted in Milner, 1999 p56). In urban areas they are the factory workers, in garment industries, textiles, and so on. In the rural areas, this class comprises small peasants, landless agricultural workers, fishermen, artisans. Some of them spill over into the urban areas to become the casual workers, rickshaw pullers and so on.

These classes are not as clear cut as one would ideally expect. There often is an overlap. Especially, the first three classes often overlap. There is also an overlap between rural and urban classes. Some overlap takes place inter-generationally. Children of rich or middle peasants may become upwardly mobile through education. In recent years overseas migration has also played a role in social mobility. Urban industrial or business classes often invest in farming, especially shrimp farming. There is a new direction in the flow of investment. However, the

largest group of entrepreneurs came from the RMG (Ready Made Garments) sector. The RMG has grown to the extent that at its peak it accounted for 76% of Bangladesh's export. In 2001, this sector employed 1.8 million workforce directly and many more indirectly (Shefali, 2003) of which 90% are women (Sobhan, 2002). The owners of Garments industries have become the most visible section of the bourgeoisie.

In Bangladesh since independence, the ruling Awami League tended to create a class of contractors who made good profit by buying and selling licenses and permits. The fastest growing class in post-independence Bangladesh was the class of *indentors*. Subsequently, under Zia and then Ershad, a class of industrialists was created through the availability of *Shilpo rin* or industrial credit from the Industrial Bank of Bangladesh. As Banks were privatized and many Banks were allowed in the private sector, loans were made available for the financially-strapped entrepreneurs who were politically connected. Sometimes, they were close relatives and friends of civil servants or politicians. The presence of military was minimal at the beginning. With time and successive coups, military and their relatives began to play a more central role. Many retired military officers were given appointment in the civil bureaucracy. Many of the retired officers became the new industrial class, especially in the garments sector. The late Nurul Qader Khan, a retired civil servant, was the pioneer in RMG. A large number of entrepreneurs in the Garment industry are retired military officers. There is a military-bureaucratic oligarchy (in benign form) in the RMG sector. The presence of retired military officers could also be felt in various state owned or semi-autonomous corporations, a practice that goes back to the days of President Zia.

The political class enjoys relative autonomy from the other dominant classes. Some members of the political class may come from industrial class or bureaucratic class but when they become part of the ruling class they are in a position to create a new class and not always favor the members of their own class of origin. The thuggish and predatory behavior of a section of the state elite is reflected by the fact that on many occasions they tend to use the instruments of the state for pursuing their narrow interests (without even paying attention to legal niceties). The executive arm of the state tends to capture the judiciary. Factionalism has now become the dominant feature of class dynamics in Bangladesh. The state becomes dysfunctional and de-institutionalization sets in. The high level of

corruption in Bangladesh originated in the new structure of clientelist relationship aided by the availability of huge amount of loans for so-called industrialization. A class faction of loan-defaulters with close links to the political class has become a semi-permanent feature of Bangladesh society. This faction of the bourgeoisie switches its loyalty to the government of the day to avoid facing justice.

Class and Consumption

One of the conceptual developments since Marx has been the focus on consumption in the discussion of class. Post-Marxist sociologists such as Baudrillard made important contribution by focusing on consumption if not replacing production completely. Some of these ideas apply well to Bangladesh. The rich in Bangladesh are conspicuous by their consumption. Class position is maintained in terms of consumption that gives the upper classes an exclusivity, a social distance. Medical service, educational service and tourism are the three indicators of changing lifestyles among Bangladeshi *bittoshali* or nouveau rich upper class. This new class is distinguished by its consumption.

Possession of material goods, such as television, and other gadgets has a class dimension. Recently, Dhaka saw a boom in the sale of BMWs. The webpage of BBC on Bangladesh has two stories almost side by side which reflect the realities of Bangladesh today. One story is on the rush for buying BMW the other story is on foreign aid.

Marriage ceremonies, for example, often provide an opportunity to show one's wealth and status. Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption can be applied to describe the practice of this class. One of Ershad's little known contributions is his keen interest in designer products. Since the rule of Ershad, the rich and the aspiring bourgeoisie in Bangladesh have become major consumers of branded items from *Dunhill* sunglasses to *Rado* watches and *Bali* shoes.

Even education has become an arena of conspicuous consumption. Huge amount of resources are spent on the education of children and not necessarily with a clear focus on returns. Children are sent overseas for education in secondary schools or in private universities in Bangladesh and other Southeast Asian countries.

The consumption of healthcare is another area of conspicuous consumption. The bourgeoisie class would often fly off to Singapore for a routine health

check-up. The state elite would often be seen in the private hospitals of Singapore or Bangkok. Some will go to England or even to the USA. It seems that the farther you can go, the more status you have.

A recent web surfing yielded the following results. BBC website had two stories on Bangladesh on July 24, 2003. One story had the caption “Bangladesh Seeks \$2 billion in aid” and the report indicated that Bangladesh will have to improve on its poor public safety record and cut down its poverty rate to receive the aid. Next to it was a report that at least 50 BMWs were snapped up as the car started selling in Bangladesh starting this year. These cars have been sold at prices ranging from \$70,000 to \$270,000.

Theorist of conspicuous consumption Thorstein Veblen, also noted a conflict in society between “industrial” class and “pecuniary” class. He saw the latter class as parasites living off the other classes (Veblen, 1934). Present day Bangladesh provides ample evidence of such conflict between the factions of industrial bourgeoisie and the rentier classes. Conspicuous consumption was a feature of early stage of capitalism. Bangladesh seems to be stuck in the early stage for quite some time.

Problems of Democracy and Civil Society

One of the interesting and ironic features of Bangladesh democracy is that the opposition accuses the government of authoritarianism and the government returns the compliment. Democracy is yet to be institutionalized and the democratic deficit shows no sign of improvement. According to Rehman Sobhan:

“The most serious threat to the democratic process in South Asia lies in the degeneration of democratic institutions....the quality of parliamentary discourse has deteriorated. Instead of sober discussion on issues of democratic public concern designed to improve the quality of governance, the parliament is exposed to intemperate exchanges, horse trading, periodic walk-outs by the opposition, ...The degeneration in the quality of the legislatures appears to be compounded by the increasingly confrontational style of national politics.. (Sobhan, 2002b:155).

Every coup in Pakistan and Bangladesh has followed a common cycle of promising good governance and practicing its opposite. Such military coups have, in the initial period, attracted civilian support. Well-intentioned professionals unable or unwilling to establish their representative credentials see the military as a short cut to power and influence. ...

Since such military regimes develop a strong appetite for staying on in power as reincarnated civilian leaders, they have to embrace a section of the same ‘corrupt’ politicians to provide them with a civilian front. Thus, in both Pakistan and Bangladesh, military leaders have ended up as political colleagues of the more odious segments of political life, who have used the military as a vehicle for restoring their depleted political fortunes and enhancing their private fortunes. (Sobhan, 2002: 179-180).

Alavi does not make any reference to the pioneering work of Barrington Moore. Moore’s arguments in explaining the rise and failure of democracy are seminal. By looking at the nature of class alliance and conflicts, he analysed the regime outcome. A successful social revolution led to democracy; a failed one to dictatorship. England, France, USA were example of the former; Germany and Japan of the latter. Ellen Kay Trimberger, one of Moore’s students, developed the idea of revolutions from above by looking at Japan, Turkey and so on. These discussions enrich the theoretical thinking on the issues of democracy and dictatorship. Juan Linz and the Yale school began to analyze transition to democracy from authoritarian backgrounds in the 1980s. Then came the explosion of democratization literature. The appearance of the *Journal of Democracy* was an indicator of this upward growth curve of democratization worldwide.

While a huge body of literature looks at the rise of the middle class as the real reason for the expansion and where existent a deepening of democratic process, others such as Goran Therborn, Michael Mann and John Markoff analyzed democratization mainly in terms of working class movements. Therborn’s classic essay dealt with the ebb and flow of working class movements in Europe and showed democratization amounted to conceding to the demands of the working class. Therborn in his trailblazing article showed the relationship between capital and democratization from the point of view of the working class movements. Similar line of analyses was followed to some extent by Mann and Markoff. Markoff went on to argue that major democratic innovations such as secret vote and women’s franchise took place not at the core of the world capitalist system but in the peripheries. Markoff questions the main assumption of the transition thesis by suggestion that such thesis assumes that there is an ideal state of democracy that we are striving for. He views democracy as a “moving target” (1997:54). He also questions the wisdom in Political Scientists defining democracy. As Markoff says: “Democracy is not theirs to define,

but is defined in the streets and in the palaces” (Markoff, 1997:54). Markoff suggests that it may not be productive only to look at the heartland of the capitalist core to understand the process of democratization. Many of the innovations arose in the periphery or semi-periphery such as Australia, New Zealand, Poland and so on (Markoff, 1999). In that light why cannot India or Bangladesh or Costa Rica be the sites of democratic innovations?

Class Basis of Authoritarian Democracy

The literature on transition to democracy focused mostly on the Iberian peninsula and Latin America in the 1980s and former socialist countries in the 1990s. Writers who looked at democratic transition in East Asia and Southeast Asia don't find much use of the earlier analyses. This points out that the transition literature to a certain extent is region or even country specific.

Bangladesh started as a democracy which in a matter of years went into an eclipse. The erosion of democracy began under the rule of Awami League with the founding leader of the country at the helms of the affairs (Evans, 2002). An amendment of the constitution created a single-party state by amalgamating a number of pro-socialist and pro-regime political parties. Then the military rulers decided to turn themselves into democratic polities. The authoritarian nature is either a legacy of the past and an absence of suitable political culture. Or, to put it boldly, it reflects undercurrents of class relations. The thesis of transition from authoritarian to democratic regime is often drawn in stark terms. The reality of Bangladesh politics is little bit more complicated for such stark portrayals. The democratic regime of the founding leader of Bangladesh in 1975 took a turn towards authoritarianism, a process that was consolidated in the successive military regimes. The military rulers, unlike their counterparts in Latin America (say, Paraguay or Argentina or Uruguay) did not want to rule by military alone. Military often changed clothes and under civilian garb enlisted other civilians to their fold.

Although hard evidence is difficult to gather, it is quite probable that either General Zia's or General Ershad's military rule had fewer political prisoners than the subsequent democratic rule. The procedural democracy in Bangladesh shorn off is symbolic and outer shell has often close resemblances with authoritarian regimes. In late 2002, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's democratic government let loose the military to control runaway crime. Dozens of suspects were beaten to death under military and police

custody. Such heavy handed methods were never taken under the military rule of General Zia or General Ershad. Hardly any allegations of torture were made against Ershad. Torture was alleged against a former minister and a civil servant during the rule of Begum Khaleda Zia. During the rule of Sheikh Hasina, journalists were beaten by political thugs who had close affiliation with the ruling party. A similar incident took place on August 3, 2003 when pro-government students inflicted attack on a peaceful student demonstration and beat up a reporter. According to the reports of human rights organizations such as Asia Watch or Amnesty International, violations of human rights, torture, etc take place in Bangladesh routinely. Now what is democratic, and what is authoritarian? Military rulers broke the procedures of democracy; democratic leaders undermined the substance of democracy. One can explain this with reference to political culture suggesting that the culture of authoritarianism, the cult of personality, and so on compromise the quality of democracy. There may be some truth to it; yet another plausible explanation lies in the political economy.

Some writers were a little carried away in suggesting that democracy came to Bangladesh only in 1991 through the removal of General Ershad in a popular mass uprising jointly organized by the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. A leading Political Scientist in Bangladesh and an advisor to BNP suggested that the BNP, especially its student wing played a key role in organizing anti-Ershad movement.

The main reason for the collapse of the Ershad regime was the withdrawal of military support for the regime. After Ershad called upon Lt Gen Nuruddin, chief-of-staff of the army who was known to Ershad goes back to the days of Pakistan Army called a meeting of his commanders. Officers over the rank of Lt. Col. apparently were asked to attend the meeting. In the exchange of views, a number of young officers raised the point that Ershad has created the mess, he should solve it. The attitude of the army was reported back to Ershad not by his trusted army chief, but by a senior officer, a friend of the Foreign Minister from Faujdarhat Cadet College, who told Ershad 's Foreign Minister Anisul Islam Mahmud that army was not going to support Ershad. Anis Mahmud passed the news to Ershad who was shocked at the desertion of his trusted lieutenants. Power was transferred not to Ershad's vice president Moudud, who was convicted by a military court when Ershad took over and was subsequently released. (Moudud is currently the Minister of law

under the BNP administration.) A Caretaker government under the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court was formed to oversee the period of transition.

Political transition from the Military to the Civilian politicians did not mark a sharp break or discontinuity. The change of the political guards was not a reflection of changes in the class-structure. The dominance of the economically powerful classes did not wane with the changes in governments. Pakistan had 22 super rich families. Bangladesh has more than 2200 such super rich families by now in 2003 who control the wealth and milk the system to their benefit. In a report based on the statistics of Bangladesh Bank, a Weekly magazine in Bangladesh indicated that there were 1,788 families with bank balances of one crore or ten million taka. The report also suggested that at the time of independence there were only 2 such rich families (Anis, 1992:12). They are strategically situated in terms of party affiliations. Some members are in AL others are in BNP. The two-party model that has evolved in Bangladesh is not reflective of political maturity based on mutual respect and tolerance (although some signs are there) but mostly because of the compromises made by the powerful business class.

Bangladesh has become a political equivalent of classic oligopoly. According to Sobhan, "Politics in Bangladesh is thus becoming a rich man's game where huge sums of money are spent to seek election. The less affluent, and particularly the poor, have been effectively disenfranchised from democratic participation even at the local level" (Sobhan 2002a:23). With 75% of the population living in the rural area, politics in Bangladesh is urban based. The leaders are drawn from the urban-based petty bourgeoisie, yet the vast majority of the voters come from the rural areas. Leaders deploy various means to woo the voters often through promises of development and so on and those who can project themselves as national leaders, reaching out to the villagers, are able to speak to them are the ones who can garner support. Once the victorious leaders are in government, the promises are quickly forgotten and they seek to continue pursuing their narrow factional (class) interests at the expense of both larger class and national interests. The heart of the crisis of the state, according to Sobhan, lies in the contradiction between a state held captive by a rentier elite and classes who have the most potentials to transform this society. These classes include small farmers, workers in the productive export sector, creative professional class and the productive sectors of the business community (Sobhan, 2002a:24).

The runaway corruption, manipulation, politicization of all the institutions of the government, centralization of power, absence of accountability and a lack of political vision or political will to institutionalize democracy reflect lack of consolidation of class interests. Class factions pursue short-term goals of accumulation resembling primitive accumulation. Unfortunately, in Bangladesh the phase of primitive accumulation has become a semi-permanent stage. In order to institutionalize democracy separation of power is crucial. And in order to move forward to that goal, an independent judiciary is precondition. Very little has been achieved to this end. Democracy in Bangladesh remains gestural, political power remains highly concentrated and the rule of law tentative. As the class inequality between some factions of the bourgeoisie and some factions of the proletariat become huge, and as a coalition of interests takes place between the lumpen or corrupt bourgeoisie and the corrupt politicians who provide protection to these class factions for a fee, the future for democracy remains bleak and would be trapped into a corrupt, hybrid system of authoritarianism and democracy.

Despite the failure of institutionalization of democracy based on the consensus on broad national issues of importance, the rule of legitimate law and separation of power, the situation is not totally hopeless to some of the nationalist leaders. The future of democracy hinges on the reform of electoral laws in Bangladesh which need to be tied to the fight against corruption. In an interview, Dr Kamal Hossain, one of the framers of the constitution of Bangladesh remarked that his electoral defeat can be attributed to his adherence to the electoral law of a maximum expenditure of 200,000 taka or about 4,000 US dollars. Most candidates spend much more and get away with. Such huge expenditure for a small minority can be explained by their commitment to public service or enhancement of prestige. But for the majority of the candidates, they want to make this investment for a huge financial gain once they are elected to office. The fact that the link between corruption and politics survives regime changes shows that there is a symbiosis between these two phenomena. A more substantive democracy will make it difficult to protect the corrupt factions of the bourgeoisie for long. An authoritarian democracy, secures state autonomy and guarantees that the bank-defaulters, and other lumpen-bourgeoisie are protected. And in perpetuating the authoritarian democracy, the state elites to some extent mobilize the extra-governmental forces drawn from the lumpen classes of thugs and the reserve of the army

of unemployed to intimidate not only the political opposition but also the civil society.

References

Ahmed, Feroz (1973) "The Structural Matrix of the Struggle in Bangladesh" in Kathleen Gough and Hari P. Sharma (Ed) *Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia*. New York and London: Monthly Review Press

Alavi, Hamza (1972) "The Post-Colonial Societies: Pakistan and Bangladesh", *New Left Review* No. 74 July-August

Ali, Imran Anwar (2001) "Business and Power in Pakistan" in Anita M. Weiss and S. Zulfiqar Gilani (Ed) *Power and Civil Society in Pakistan*. Oxford University Press

Amin, Samir (1976) "The Peripheral Formations", *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 21

Anis, Anisur Rahman (1992) "Deshey Kotipotir Sankhya Atharoshho Gojalo Ki Bhaba? (How did eighteen hundred "millionaires" grow in the country?) in *Robbar* (Bengali Weekly) Vol 15 No. 9 November 29.

Bertocci, Peter J. (1982) "Bangladesh in the Early 1980s: Praetorian Politics in an Intermediate Regime" *Asian Survey*. 22:10

Bourdieu, Pierre (1987) "What Makes a Social Class? On the Theoretical and Practical Existence of Groups" in *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*. Vol. 32

Bourdieu, Pierre (1993) *In Other Words*. Cambridge: Polity

Evans, D. Hugh (2002) "Bangladesh: An Unsteady Democracy" in A. Shahstri and A. Jeyaratnam Wilson (Eds) *The Post-Colonial States of South Asia* London: Curzon

Franda, Marcus (1979) Ziaur Rahman's Bangladesh Part 1 Political Realignment. American Universities Field Staff Reports No. 25

Islam, Syed Serajul (1986-87) "Relative State Autonomy and Development Strategy in Bangladesh, 1975-1981" *Pacific Affairs*. 59:4

Jahangir, Borhanuddin (1979) "Social Class in Bangladesh" *Economic and Political Weekly* 1979

Khondker, Habibul (1979) "Comments on Social Class in Bangladesh" *Economic and Political Weekly* 1979

Khondker, Habibul (1984) "The Famine of 1974" in M.M. Khan and J.P. Thorp (Ed) *Bangladesh: Society, Politics, and Bureaucracy*. Dhaka: Center for Administrative Studies.

Kochanek, Stanley A. (1996) "The Rise of Interest Politics in Bangladesh" *Asian Survey*

Lipset, Seymour M. (1994) "The Social Requisites of Democracy: Revisited" *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 59, No. 1 February (pp.1-22)

Markoff, John (1997) "Really Existing Democracy: Learning from Latin America in the Late 1990s" in *New Left Review*, 223 May-June

Markoff, John (1999) "Where and When was Democracy Invented?" *Comparative Study of Society and History*

McLellan, David (1988) (Ed) *Marxism: Essential Writings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Migdal, Joel S. (1988) *Strong Societies and Weak States*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Migdal, Joel S, Atul Kohli and Vivienne Shu (Ed) (1994) *State Power and Social Forces*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Migdal, Joel S. (2002 [1985]) "The State in Society" in Howard J. Wiarda (Ed) *New Dimensions in Comparative Politics*. Boulder, Colorado: West View Press.

Milliband, Ralph (1979) *Capitalism and State*

Milner, Andrew (1999) *Class*. London: Sage Publications.

Moore, Barrington (1967) *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*. Boston: Beacon Press

Poulantzas, Nicos (1973) "On Social Classes" *New Left Review*, 78

Putnam, Robert, R. Leonardi and R.Y. Nanetti (1994) *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Quadir, Fahimul (2000) "The Political Economy of Pro-Market Reforms in Bangladesh: Regime Consolidation Through Economic Liberalization" *Contemporary South Asia*. 9:2

Shefali, Mashuda Khatun (2003) "WTO's Impact on RMG Sector: Workers of LDC will Bear the Brunt" *The Independent.*, Dhaka August 21

Sobhan, Rehman (2002a) "Bangladesh in the New Millennium: Between Promise and Fulfillment" BIDS Lecture

Sobhan, Rehman (2002b) "South Asia's Crisis of Governance: Avoiding False Solutions" in Khadija Haq (Ed) *The South Asian Challenge*. Oxford University Press

Theroborn, Goran (1977) "The Rule of Capital and the Rise of Democracy" *New Left Review*, 103, May-June

Trimberger, Ellen Kay (1978) *Revolution from Above*. New Brunswick: Transaction Books

Veblen, T (1934) *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. New York: Modern Library.

Zaheer, Hasan (1994) *The Separation of East Pakistan: The Rise and Realization of Bengali Muslim Nationalism*. Dhaka: The University Press Limited.

Habibul Haque Khondker
Department of Sociology
National University of Singapore
Habib@nus.edu.sg

An earlier version of this Paper was presented at the ICAS-3 conference in Singapore held in August 22, 2003. I am indebted to two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments. I am also grateful to Professor Rehman Sobhan for his encouragement.