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Political Attitudes of Rural People towards the Political System of Bangladesh: A Study on Rajshahi District

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Abstract

Without assessing the attitudes of rural people, it is quite impossible to evaluate the existing politics of a country. An attempt is made in this study to explore the perceptions and attitudes of the rural people over the existing politics of Bangladesh. The research has been carried out in some selected villages of Rajshahi district of Bangladesh. A convenient sample of 225 respondents was collected from some selected villages with equal representation of both and a well-structured questionnaire was administered using face to face data collection technique. Respondents have been taken from various categories i.e. age, profession, educational qualification. Random sampling method has been used to select the respondents of this research. In this research, it is found that there are many conscious people in rural area who admit that the existing politics of Bangladesh has been suffering from remarkable shortcomings. It is recommended in the study that the attitude of political party should be improved so that the political environment of Bangladesh can be more participatory, positive and constructive.

Keywords: Perceptions, Attitudes, Politics, Bangladesh

1. Introduction

Rural level politics is very important for the national politics in a democratic country like Bangladesh. It has a great influence on national politics. Since the restoration of democracy in 1991, political activities have been spread over the years from the capital to periphery (Akhter and Wohab, 2004: 23). For this reason, the rural level politics can be a great platform to practice national level politics. There are promises by the candidates during the election, but after election periods they rarely look at the development in the rural area. Therefore, people of the rural area become unhappy and annoyed with the behavior of their leaders and they do not show interest in the election and politics (Jahan, 2000: 37). During the elections, various strategies are used by different political parties to get votes from the rural people. These strategies involve the people actively in the election process. To understand this political process in detail, the author gave an effort to conduct this research. In this research, the author has shown much interest to know about the rural level politics through conducting a study following the survey

method in some selected villages of Rajshahi district of Bangladesh. In particular, the research tries to investigate the political attitudes of rural people towards the existing politics of Bangladesh. In order to investigate the political attitudes of rural people, the researcher has tried to examine, opinions voting behavior and the political environment of the locality in reference with the existing politics of Bangladesh. By this way, the present research has aimed at developing an understanding of the aspects that led to change the political consciousness and attitudes of the people of Bangladesh.

2. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to explore the perceptions and attitudes of the rural people towards the existing politics of Bangladesh. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- a) To study the attitudes of the rural people about the existing politics of Bangladesh;
- b) To find out the ways of consciousness of the rural people about politics;
- c) To look for the opinion of the rural people about the current political situation;
- d) To inquire about the people's view on the existing election process of Bangladesh.

3. Methodology

To make this research fruitful, the researcher has taken the empirical method of research into his account in investigating the rural people's awareness and involvement in politics. In this regard, data have been collected from the rural area maintaining the interview schedule method. The researcher has chosen 255 respondents of 5 Upazillas (Mohonpur, Durgapur, Bagha, Charghat & Godagari) of Rajshahi district for collecting the required data using the purposive sampling method. 50 respondents have been chosen from each upazilla except the Mohonpur Upazilla. Only 55 respondents have been chosen from Mohonpur Upazilla considering the population size. All respondents have been selected categorically from Farmers, Businessmen, Doctors, Students, Day labors, Teachers, Govt. employees, Rickshaw pullers, NGO employees, Social workers, Housewives, from the study area.

Social science deals with human nature, feelings, emotions and minds. To study all these factors the researcher has tried to use the data collection tool very accurately and to make it reliable. A structured questionnaire exclusively for the rural people has been formulated, administered and stimulated. Interview schedule has been prepared with open and close-ended questions to collect the data from the respondents. The questionnaire has been designed to get all the required information from the respondents. Based on designed questionnaire, interview method has been used to collect data from the respondents.

To make unbiased response, the researcher himself has interviewed each respondent. Then he has rechecked each questionnaire considering accuracy and uniformity because it is very difficult to approach the same respondent at any subsequent stage.

After collecting the data, the researcher has analyzed all data taking system help of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). Then he used computer coding and analyzed the data using single variable or multi-variable tables. Statistical tools such as averages have also been used to analyze the data.

4. Review of Literature

The political awareness and attitudes are both broad terms in the literature of political science. It is indispensable to have a little awareness of the people not only about the political institutions and the process of politics but also about the issues and culture. Therefore, it stands to reason that people who are unfamiliar with politics and related issues they would be less interested to participate in politics. In other words, political awareness is important for making an informed choice. Political participation and involvement of the rural people in matters of state guarantees stability of political system and this stability of political system reinforces the legitimacy of political authority (Khan, 2008: 78). Rounaq Jahan thinks that the political attitude, a key indication, plays a significant role in explaining variation in political participation (Jahan, 2000: 123). Ali Riaz thinks that the importance of political attitudes and awareness for electoral participation need hardly be over emphasized. Democratic citizens should have a minimum understanding of the political system in which they express preferences and elect representatives (Riaz, 2015: 27). David Lewis stated that “certain level of political awareness is indispensable for voters’ activity. They need to keep themselves informed about political issues, functions of political institutions, and more importantly their political rights and their role as political participants. It is necessary to have some awareness not only of the political institutions and the process of politics but also about the issues” (Lewis, 2018: 65). Political scientists argued that national level politics might not always play a large scale role in rural politics and rural politics is highly relevant to national politics because rural politics often has significant role on the formation of national politics (Khan, et al., 2008: 41). Political scientists also argued that attitude of rural people ultimately have put impact on politics, which reflect on national politics (Rashid & Gao, 2012: 183-193). According to Ali Riaz, appropriate levels of political attitude are considered to be important for allowing individuals and groups to effectively participate in politics, represent their own needs before the system, and develop attitudes that are based on more than emotion. He also marks a watershed when it comes to political awareness and engagement in politics (Riaz, 2015: 2). David

Lewis said that those who are interested in politics will try to acquire political information that will ultimately lead, in turn, to higher levels of political information. Political awareness of the voters is mostly influenced by the information that they get from different sources (Lewis, 2018: 102). Robert C. Luskin defined political awareness as a function of three elements:(i) Level of exposure to political information (ii) Intellectual ability to retain and organize the encountered information; and (iii) Motivation to obtain and comprehend the political information (Luskin, 1990: 14). Political awareness and attitudes mean access to political information, political participation, media exposure, interest in politics and education with political information being the best indicator over all. Democratic citizens must have a minimum understanding of the political system in which they can express their preferences and elect their representatives. Political interest is also considered to be a consequence, as well as a cause of political activity (Verba et. al, 1978: 42). Mass media is one of such source of information on politics. Voters' pattern of media use is likely to increase their level of political awareness (Gerber et al. 2006). Those who are engaged in political discussions with others usually show an interest in politics. The experience of discussing politics with others may also stimulate a sense of political engagement (Gastil and Dillard, 1999: 26).

5. Theoretical Structure

5.1. Political Attitude

Every society devices its ways to ensure the smooth functioning of the society and system and to maintain peace and harmony within the society. To have the effective governing of its people, every society develops few mechanisms or agencies such as the state, the government, the political parties and election or selection of representatives. The political attitude formation throws light upon how people cultivate their political beliefs and how they pass on their values to others from one generation to the next. Political attitudes formulation process is an essential element of a political system. Political attitude formulation and political attitude go hand in hand (Chakraborty, 2005: 10).

Political attitude formulation is a learning process by which an individual acquires orientations, beliefs, values and norms and behavior patterns in political system. Formulation of political attitude determines the pattern of socio-political behavior. It is a psychological concept as it is concerned with the society, in general and with individual in particular (Acharya, 2013: 67).

It means the beliefs and values which strengthen the operation of a particular political system. These attitudes were seen as including knowledge and skills about the political system. It is the combination of positive and negative judgments about the system. These attitudes also determine how people participate, whom they vote

for and which political parties they support. Voting behavior and political attitudes have an intervening function since they are a predictor for vote choice (Chakraborty, 2005: 12).

Political scientists opine political attitude in various ways. Franklin defines attitude as “a disposition to respond favorably or unfavorably to an object, person, institution or event” (Franklin, 2004: 12). Kiesler Collins and Miller said that “Opinions should be defined as overt expressions of a covert attitude” (Kiesler, 1969: 14).

Eagly and Chaiken define attitude as “a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor” (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993:1). This definition evidently speaks of attitudes and stresses the point of expression and evaluation. This definition is the most suitable considering the concept of an attitude in this study.

Political attitude formulation is an ongoing process and it is accomplished through a variety of institutions and agents. Various agents of political attitude formulation can be classified into following groups- 1) Family and peer groups which are the interpersonal agencies; 2) Organizational Agents- Schools, religious institutions and workplaces; 3) mass media, newspaper, TV and Radio; 4) The legislature, executive courts and the bureaucracy which are specialized political input structures.

5.2. Politics

Politics is intimately linked to the phenomena of conflict and cooperation. On the one hand, the existence of conflicting opinions, different wants, competing needs and opposing interests guarantees disagreement about the rules under which people live. On the other hand, people recognize that, in order to influence these rules or ensure that they are supported; they must work with others (Lewis, 2018: 123). This is why the heart of politics is often represented as a process of conflict resolution, in which rival views or competing interests are settled with one another. However, politics in this broad sense is better thought of as a search for conflict resolution than as its achievement, as not all conflicts are, or can be, resolved (Riaz and Christine, 2015: 145).

The classical definition of politics, developed from the original meaning of the term in Ancient Greece. The word ‘politics’ is derived from polis, meaning literally ‘city-state’. Ancient Greek society was divided into a collection of independent city-states, each of which possessed its own system of government. The largest and most influential of these city-states was Athens, often portrayed as the cradle of democratic government. In this light, politics can be understood to refer to the affairs of the *polis*- in effect, ‘what concerns the *polis*’ (Chakraborty, 2005: 123).

The modern form of this definition is therefore ‘what concerns the state’ (Siddiqui, 2005: 23). This view of politics is clearly evident in the everyday use of the term: people are said to be ‘in politics’ when they hold public office, or to be ‘entering politics’ when they seek to do so.

In many ways, the notion that politics amounts to ‘what concerns the state’ is the traditional view of the discipline, reflected in the tendency for academic study to focus on the personnel and machinery of government. To study politics is, in essence, to study government, or, more broadly, to study the exercise of authority (Khan, 2008: 45). This view is advanced in the writings of the influential US political scientist David Easton, who defined politics as the ‘authoritative allocation of values’ (Easton, 1953: 23). By this, he meant that politics encompasses the various processes through which government responds to pressures from the larger society, in particular by allocating benefits, rewards or penalties. ‘Authoritative values’ are therefore those that are widely accepted in society, and are considered binding by the mass of citizens. In this view, politics is associated with ‘policy’ that is, with formal or authoritative decisions that establish a plan of action for the community.

6. Significance of the Study

Political attitude is the ability of human being to acquire and possess the political knowledge through perceptions, reasoning, or intuition. It determines their awareness and predicts the attitude and behavior (Rai & Shahila, 2013: 4). According to Plato, “the price of apathy towards public affairs is to be ruled by evil men” (Jowett, 2010: 42). The mass media and the social media can play the vital role as the mediator to fend off the malicious intentions of the political parties and thus spread the right information to all levels of people (Rai & Shahila, 2013: 4). Rural people are considered as the strong pillar of any society because their involvement in politics is taken into consideration for making changes and progress of any country (Sasikala & Franciska, 2017: 80). Thus, the present study concentrates its attention on the rural population to figure out the level of political awareness of the people about the existing politics. The finding of the study will redound to the benefit of the society and country as a whole considering that political awareness. It also will play an important role to prepare of the rural people for performing their exact role to the nation effectively as they grow up. It will be helpful for the greater demand of citizens which is correlated with political knowledge, strong political beliefs, political decisions and political issues. As many researchers have not explored such type of study, so it is important to explore political attitudes towards the existing politics of Bangladesh for the future development of democracy.

7. Selected Categories of Rural People

For the purpose of effective research, rural people have been categorized into three levels in the light of age. Considering the age level of the respondents, they have been categorized into three groups. Firstly, about one third of respondents (33.7%) belong to 18-27 years of age, followed by 34.1% who belong to 28-27 years of age. Similarly, 32.8% of respondents belong to the age 38 years and above. Table 1.1 shows the percentage and frequency of respondents of all categories. Table 1.1, also shows that that in regards to age groups of respondents, all groups belong to almost similar number and percentage.

Secondly, respondents have been categorized into four levels in the light of educational qualification. In this regard, table 1.2 represents that around one-fourth respondents (25.5%) have completed primary level education followed by, secondary level (22.7%), higher secondary level (20.4%) and higher education level (31.4%). Thirdly, professional areas are covered and categorized in twelve level i.e. farmer (6.3%), businessman (20.8%), doctor (3.9%), student (3.9%), day labor (3.9%), teacher (11.8%), government employee (7.8%), rickshaw puller (3.9%), NGO employee (10.2%), social worker (2%), housewife (5.2%) and others/randomly selected (20.8%). Table 1.3 shows that almost all the professional categories in rural level have been covered in the research.

1.1 Table: Age

Age	Frequency and Percentage
18-27	86 (33.7%)
38-37	87 (34.1%)
38-above	82 (32.2%)
Total	255 (100%)

Source: Field Data, 2018

1.2 Table: Education Qualification

Education Qualification	Frequency and Percentage
Primary	65 (25.5%)
Secondary	58 (22.7%)
Higher secondary	52 (20.4%)
Higher education	80 (31.4%)
Total	255 (100%)

Source: Field Data, 2018

1.3 Table: Profession

Profession	Frequency and Percentage
Farmer	16 (6.3%)
Businessman	52 (20.8%)
Doctor	10 (3.9%)
Student	10 (3.9%)

Day Labor	10 (3.9%)
Teacher	30 (11.8%)
Govt. Employee	20 (7.8%)
Rickshaw Puller	10 (3.9%)
Ngo employee	26 (10.2%)
Social worker	5 (2%)
Housewife	13 (5.1%)
Random (various profession)	53 (20.8%)
Total	100%

Source: Field Data, 2018

8. Rural People’s Attitudes towards Political System of Bangladesh

Table: 1.4: Rural People’s Attitudes

No	Question	Yes	No	No reply	some	Total
1	Political involvement of Rural People	47 (18.4%)	193 (75.7%)	15 (5.9%)	-	255 (100%)
2	Influenced in Voting by other person	3 (1.2%)	231 (90.6%)	21 (8.2%)	-	255 (100%)
3	Religious based Politics in Bangladesh	76 (29.8%)	135 (52.9%)	42 (16.5%)	2 (0.8%)	255 (100%)
4	Existence of ‘Rule of Law’ in Bangladesh	160 (62.9%)	71 (27.8%)	23 (9%)	1 (0.4%)	255 (100%)

Source: Field Data, 2018

Table 1.4 shows that most of the respondents (75.7%) are not directly involved in politics while a few (18.4%) are directly involved in politics. Some of them (5.9%) did not reply in this regard. There are very few voters (1.2%) who are influenced to cast their vote in favor of a candidate by other persons or government mechanism. But a significant number of respondents (90.6%) are independent to participate in the electoral process. In this research, it is found that most of the rural masses are free from the influence of other persons or government mechanism when they cast their votes, but very few people think that they are influenced by others in voting process. More than half of respondents (52.9%) feel that there is no influence of

religion on politics. At the same time, more than a quarter of the respondents (29.8%) think that there is religious influence in politics in rural areas. Majority of the respondents (62.9%) believe that the rule of law exists in the country, but some of the respondents (27.8%) think that there is no rule of law in Bangladesh. According to table 1.4, we can say that most of the rural people have provided mixed response about the existing political system of Bangladesh. In the current political situation of Bangladesh, rural people have become partial from politics. However, there is no major tendency is found for others to be influenced by voting. In that case they decide for themselves in electoral process. This attitude is regarded as a positive trend in the case of Bangladesh politics.

9. Rural People’s Consciousness towards Bangladesh Politics

Table: 1.5: Rural People’s Consciousness

Question	Regular	Irregular	No	Others	No reply	Total
Newspaper Reading	47 (18.4%)	113 (44.3%)	92 (36.1%)	-	3 (1.2%)	255 (100%)
Watching TV	113 (44.3%)	116 (45.5%)	26 (10.2%)	-	-	255 (100%)
Vote Cast	176 (69%)	25 (9.8%)	19 (7.5%)	14 (5.5%)	21 (8.2%)	255 (100%)
Political Discussion with family members	18 (7.1%)	57 (22.4%)	179 (70.2%)	-	1 (0.4%)	255 (100%)
Political Discussion outside the family	21 (8.2%)	53 (20.8%)	179 (70.2%)	-	2 (0.8%)	255 (100%)

Source: Field Data, 2018

Table 1.5 indicates that 44.4 % of the respondents do not read newspaper regularly while 18.4 % read newspaper regularly. On the other part, 36.1% of total respondents don’t read newspaper at all. Only a few have not answered. 45.5% respondents watch television irregularly while 44.3% of total respondents watch television regularly. A few numbers of respondents (10.2%) do not watch television at all. Majority of the respondents (69%) cast their vote regularly while 9.8% of total respondents cast their vote irregularly. On the other hand, 7.5 % of respondents do not cast their vote. 8.2% respondents did not give answer. Most of the respondents (70.2%) do not discuss politics with the family members while 22.4% of total respondents discuss political issues and events with family members. Only 7.1% of total respondents discuss political matters regularly with their family members. Most of the respondents (70.2%) don’t discuss politics outside the family but some of them (20.8%) discuss irregularly outside the family.

Very few rural people (8.2%) discuss politics regularly outside the family. In this study, it is found that rural people try to get the latest information about national politics through reading newspapers. In fact, many people are becoming conscious about existing political updates from newspapers. Many conscious people are found in the rural areas. By investigating the patterns of political awareness of rural citizens, it has been found that they make themselves sufficiently aware about politics. Even they talk about politics in tea stall, market etc.

10. Rural People’s Opinion regarding the Current Political Situation of Bangladesh

Table: 1.6: Current Political Situation of Bangladesh

Opinion	Frequency	Percent
Parochial	42	16.5
Undemocratic	38	14.9
Participatory	115	45.1
Religion based	10	3.9
Others	3	1.2
No reply	47	18.4
Total	255	100.0

Source: Field Data, 2018

Table 1.6 shows that 16.5% of rural people believe there is a lower political culture in the existing politics of Bangladesh while 14.9% believe that the political culture of Bangladesh is very participatory. A few respondents (3.9%) strongly believe that religion has a great influence in the politics of the country. On the other part, 1.2% of the respondents think that there are mixed political culture in Bangladesh while 18.4% did not answer in this regard. 14.9% respondents think that the current political culture is undemocratic while 45.1% respondents believe that there is a participatory political culture in Bangladesh. In fact, the rural people are trying to perceive an idea about the political system of Bangladesh and that is obvious in this study. Based on research data, attitude of rural people regarding the existing Bangladesh politics can be easily assessed. By this way, it is possible to get a proper perception of rural people about the current political situation of Bangladesh.

11. Rural People’s View on Election System of Bangladesh

Table: 1.7: View on Election System of Bangladesh

Nature	Frequency	Percent
Acceptable	118	46.3
Free & fair	47	18.4
Unfair	20	7.8
Influenced by government	43	16.9

No reply	27	10.6
Total	255	100.0

Source: Field Data, 2018

In order to assess the views of the rural people about the election system in Bangladesh, some questions have been raised from the respondents to find out the correct answer. Table 1.7 proves that 46.3% of the rural people think the election process of Bangladesh is very acceptable. 18.4% of the respondents think that the country's election process is free and fair while 7.8% of people think that the election process of the country is biased in nature or not neutral form in the light of free and fair election system. On the other hand, 16.9% of the respondents think that the process of election of the country is influenced by the government mechanism. 10.6% of total respondents do not want to give any opinion in this regard. The study indicates that only a small number of rural people think the election system of Bangladesh is free and fair. In this research, it is found that there are many conscious people in rural area who can express his/her views about the election process as well as political system of Bangladesh. This study has given an emphasis on the attitude of rural people towards the political system of Bangladesh as well as present politics. It is already mentioned in the table 1.4, that almost three fourth (75.7%) of the respondents have no political involvement. This finding and other related references mentioned in this study mirrored that present politics in Bangladesh is suffering from remarkable shortcomings. This study also claims that a major proportion of rural people vote without any kind of influence by other persons and government mechanism. This table shows a precise picture of the electoral system of Bangladesh. There is a clear picture of how the rural people consider the election system of Bangladesh.

12. Findings and Recommendations

This study explores that perceptions and attitudes must have a relationship with political participation and awareness. From the rural perspective, individuals will act on the basis of political information which they receive through taking part in the political process. The study also finds that political participation of an individual is not only influenced by external factors but internal factors of the particular individual, such as interest, also encourage him/her to participate in the political process. This interest is driven by a person's social experience through political socialization and the surrounding political situation can sometimes aggregate the interest of an individual to participate in politics. In this research, only 18.4% of respondents are satisfied with the working of the election system of Bangladesh. It is also found that most of the rural people (75.7%) are not directly involved in politics while a few (18.4%) are directly involved in politics. It is very hopeful for an effective democracy that there are a very few voters (1.2%) who are influenced in casting their votes by other persons or government mechanism.

Almost all respondents except a very few respondents (3.9%) feel that there is no influence of religion in politics. Most of the rural people (62.9%) believe that there is an existence of rule of law in the country, but more than one-fourth respondents (27.8%) think that there is no rule of law in Bangladesh. On the other hand, 16.9% of the rural people think that the electoral process of Bangladesh is influenced by the government mechanism.

In light of the research findings following recommendations can be put forward for increasing the consciousness of rural people so that they can play a very positive role in national politics:

1. Involving more rural people in local organizations to be created as participatory so that positive political attitude and socialization can be institutionalized;
2. Media can play important role in developing a positive political attitude among rural people. Because they have very limited chances to get political knowledge from other formal institutions. So, for the development of political attitude of rural people, media is very important agent;
3. Political parties should create a space for rural people about their party structure and selection process of leadership so that it can be helpful for democratic development in Bangladesh; and
4. It is strongly recommended that the attitude of political party should be improved so that the political environment of Bangladesh can be more participatory, positive and constructive.

13. Conclusion

In this research, it is also found that there are many conscious people in the rural areas who can assume the election process as well as the political system of Bangladesh. This study has mainly considered the attitude of rural people towards the political system of Bangladesh as well as present politics. It is found in this study that the present politics of Bangladesh has been suffering from remarkable shortcomings. On the other hand, we have also observed opposite picture of people's attitude towards politics. In fact, rural people's attitude towards politics is not frustrating. It is already found and said that majority of rural people cast their votes without any kind of influence of government or other mechanisms. Most of the rural people of the country are not directly involved in politics. They only participate in political activities during the election. But they need to change this mindset. For the betterment of politics, to spread the spirit of patriotism, to speak on various issues of the country, people have to present their claims to the government in a systematic way. That is to increase the level of political participation and involvement.

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