



RESEARCH PAPER

Bureaucratic Accountability Mechanism in Bangladesh during 21st Century: A Question Mark against Meritocracy and Transparency

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PAPER INFO ABSTRACT

Received: February 7, 2020	It is said that Bangladesh has weak administrative system because of having complex rules and procedures. This study investigates how meritocracy and transparency has almost been wiped out from bureaucratic accountability mechanism in respective country. Due to highly politicization of institutions, bureaucratic effectiveness has been reduced gradually in the Bangladesh. Although, democracy has been restored, but the mechanisms for institutional accountability within the bureaucracy could not be strengthen. Therefore, by comparatively analyzing different regimes since 1971, this study qualitatively examines how meritocracy and transparency in between bureaucratic functioning is not being followed in the country so far. Moreover, study also finds the role of political parties in Bangladesh, which played a vital role in politicization of institutional functioning and bureaucratic accountability mechanisms. Thus, the need of implementing true spirit of constitutionalization and democratization regarding applying meritocracy and transparency within the bureaucratic accountability mechanisms is being described in the last
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Introduction

Accountability around the globe has been highlighted as an essential component for attaining good governance. Newly established states (having no longer historical traditions regarding institutional accountability within the bureaucracy) usually experience different sorts of challenges for implementing responsive, fair, effective and efficient governing structure. Since the 1971, Bangladesh has faces lot of administrative, economic, social and political complications. Military involvement, political instability or chaos, natural

disasters, overcrowding, malpractices, irrational and non-professional administration, corruption and a number of several other aspects have hindered the country's socio-political growth. Although, the colonial heritage of the Great Britain and the post-colonial legacy of numerous Pakistani rules are the major hurdle, but this study describes what are the further contributions of different Bangladeshi regimes that generated various sorts of obstacles for ensuring good governance, meritocracy and transparency within the bureaucracy.

Bangladeshi Civil Service through Ages

In fact, Bangladesh is principally a controlled society. There is difficult to judge any sphere of public life away from the (direct or indirect) connection with the government and its officials or representatives. The complete governing structure is further divided into three sub-structures;

- Legislature, executive and judiciary by allocating distinct liabilities and responsibilities,
- Roles and jobs(by defined laws), and,
- Rules and regulations.

In between these three sub-structures, the executive branch has direct duty and liability for ensuring socio-political and economic change, development and growth in the country by implementing public policies and programs. However, because of numerous problems, displacements, disturbances and malpractices have been / still being arisen out from bureaucratic institutions. Bureaucracy, therefore, is not properly functioning regarding doing well and satisfying the common people by fulfilling their aspirations, needs and demands. Such lack of efficiency, accountability and transparency in bureaucratic system of Bangladesh has been recorded not only in 20th century but being exhibited in 21st century too("Constitution of The People's Republic of Bangladesh," 1972).

Now, the next section aims to address respective issues by presenting a brief historical overview that would facilitate to examine the current level of bureaucratic efficiency in the Bangladesh.

Bureaucratic Accountability, Efficiency and Functioning in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is a country that is canted by it past. In the past, it has been in the clutches of the Great Britain. The remains of that monstrous past linger in all the speared of life up to this very day. Particularly in the way the government works. When the British left, they divided India between Hindus and Muslims. The present-day Bangladesh became the part of Pakistan. The British had established the civil service in this region in such a way that it had become the engine that pulled the whole British rule in India. The Bangladeshi civil servants followed the traditions they had inherited from their predecessors. Those traditions included siding with whosoever was in the power(Ahmed, 2016).

The civil service in Bangladesh in the present day is very selective. It is like the club of few powerful people. It forms a chain of command that looks like a pyramid. It is influenced by the social environment as well as politics of the times. The states now days cannot make do without civil service. This is the civil service that works as the wheels on which moves the vehicle of the governed. Without it there would be no economic development. The government would not be able to implement its reforms and development its reforms and development programs. The ruling party would not be able to fulfill the promises it made before the elections. A Well-formed well performing and neutral civil service is necessary for any government. The system of civil service has come a long way in whole of the South Asia. It stated in Europe in its modern form. Experts and academics from varying fields of science have studies the system of civil service and they have expressed their unique opinions and theories (Dwivedi, Jabbra, & Stone, 1989).

Now, study has to look at the Bangladeshi civil service through different phases of its formation and through different periods. Study sees what it has achieved and what it lacks now.

Bureaucracy during Colonial Rule: From 17th century up to 1947

The Britishers (or the “Firangees (Word specifically used for Britishers in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh)” as they sere popularly called) running the governance and hold the entire sub-continent with the help some local elites of that time. They made many changes that were very lasting; even linger up to this day. Indeed, the traditional elite class of princely India and big landlords were to prove their self as useful allies of the Firangees.

However, they (landlords) were also helped the Britishers, by dint of led them theirmen and materials along with critical monetary and military support during WWII. For Example, Hyderabad was collectively the size of England and Wales, and its ruler, the Nizam, was the richest man in the world, helped the Britishers through thick and thin (Chandrika, 2011).

The British Viceroy in the capital kept almost each and every reports of decision-making and holds all the power in his own hands. He would exercise his power in the far-off region of India. Through, a bureaucracy that was established with kept in mind that stability of the colonial rule was the most important thing for him. The loyalty to the Britishers was the most sought-after feature in a civil servant. These civil servants worked as middle men between the British and the Indian masses. The Bureaucracy during the colonial rule worked to achieve twin objectives these were:

First was the issue of collecting taxes and filling the offers of the rulers. The second was the implementation of the laws that were made by the British as well as making changes to the Indian society at the will of the rulers. This civil service also worked as a wall that blocked democracy in India. By discussing objectives

described above, study finds four stages of civil service in Bangladesh during colonial rule (Spangenberg, 1976).

The Mercantile Period (From the Start of 17th century to 1770)

During this period, the British were working in this region only as traders. So, the civil service also was formed to focus on maximum profits for the Firangees. During this period, the bureaucracy consisted of the officials of the East India Company (Rothermund, 2002).

The Pseudo Company Period (1770-1835)

The East India Company (EIC) was actively involved in trading in the East Indies at the beginning of 17th century. During this period, the East India Company (EIC) started functioning as a colonial power after the battle of Plessey in 1747, and further paved the way by the drastic defeat of the Marathas in 1818. It started to rule and subjugate all the people of the sub-continent and lastly dominated the entire region, where the EIC had working just for trade. Soon after, EIC started to make laws and manage the political affairs of different regions. And thus the merchants became the masters of the Indian sub-continent (Campbell, 2019).

How the Traders became Masters (1835-1857)?

During this period, the East India Company had completely abandoned its disguise and had come out as a colonial government with its own army, bureaucracy, police and judiciary. It employed hundreds of thousands of people and it ruled on a region and a people who were much bigger and greater than the Britishers were itself. The company had almost forgotten how to trade. Instead, it had learnt how to levy and collect taxes from the indigenous East Indians. Gradually the EIC felt that no need to do trade further, as its coffers was always full with the revenue collected from the local population and thus the company controlled all the affairs of the sub-continent. At the same time, the company had a sort of thought that trade was below its status, now they had wished to become masters and risen to rule the most of India (Finn & Smith, 2018).

East Pakistan Period (1947-1971)

Pakistan also inherited system of bureaucracy from British India. As Pakistan initially adopted Indian Act of 1935 with certain amendments, it also followed bureaucratic system under respective constitution which was obviously state-centric (or centrally focused). Furthermore, during the impositions of the Constitution of 1956 and Constitution of 1962, bureaucratic system was still centralized. Therefore, such centralization generated several administrative, economic, ethnic, political and social issues between East and West Pakistan that further led the East Pakistan Civil War soon after the first general elections in 1970

in the Pakistan. This civil war went to an end with the formation of Bangladesh as a sovereign country.

There is a notable thing that numerous pro-Indian Bengali scholars highlight Pakistan's rule over respective territory as another colonial rule. However, the fact is, Bengali people were played a vital role in formation of Pakistan. From the formation of All India Muslim League in 1906 to the Pakistan's Resolution, Bengali Muslim leaders always initiated any major step (towards getting separate Muslim country in the subcontinent) than the Muslim leaders of the territory (later called West Pakistan). Therefore, Post-1947 conflicts between East and West Pakistan cannot be called as "East Pakistan's suppression by the colonial rule of West Pakistan" (McCartney, 2011).

Bangladesh received the gift of a selective bureaucracy from the colonial past and then from Pakistan. This bureaucracy is very centrally focused (McCartney, 2011, P.96). After liberation from Pakistan, Bangladesh chose democracy as its favored mode of governance. However, in 1975, Sheikh Mujeeb changed the constitution and tried to accumulate unlimited powers for himself. He unnecessarily tried to eliminate the democracy and got initiative to prolong his own rule at all costs. This act was the first major step for poetizing bureaucracy in Bangladesh after 1971. For strengthening his rule, he used bureaucracy against each of his political rival. In reaction, the army planned to counter his civil authoritarianism. So, it launched first coup in the Bangladesh (Shah, 2007).

Study, now analysis the role of bureaucracy during different regimes in Bangladesh. This also assists to understand the institutional effectiveness and efficiency. So, firstly, bureaucracy during Mujeeb Government is being discussed below;

Bureaucracy during Mujeeb Regime

Mujeeb government also formed a committee "The National pay commission: NPC" in 1973. This committee was aimed at bringing uniformity among all the civil service with regard to financial compensation for their work (Farazmand, 1989).

The finding of the committee never turned into a real change many high-ranking officials in the service were against change. Any change would have stripped them of their benefits and privileges. These officials were used to enjoy these perks and privileges since the time of the British they refused to yield to the efforts for change. Their power became a stumbling block in the way of change (Smith, 1991).

The fate of the finding of the ASRS was even worse. These finding were not taken into consideration at all by the ruling party. Many things led to this event. It is believed that high level civil servants did not want to part with the perks and

privileges they were enjoying. So a result all these efforts by the Mujeeb government to bring a change in the Bangladeshi bureaucracy failed. It is also believed that in spite of making tall promises of changing the bureaucratic system of Bangladesh before the election, the Mujeeb government found itself at the mercy of the powerful and experienced bureaucrats. Soon the ruling party found that they could not the affairs of the state without the cooperation of these powerful figures in civil service (Jamil, 2007).

Many academics have tried to probe into the failure of these reforms. They found that there two main reasons for the failure of these reforms. The first was the poor economy. The second hurdle was the fact that all the powerful ministers in Mujeeb government were quite novice at managing the affairs of their respective ministries. On the contrary to this viewpoint, there are academics who believe that these reform fails to bore fruit mainly because the Mujeeb government was not sincere in carrying out these reforms.

This half hardness on the part of the ruling party led to the continuity of the status quo. The atmosphere during the Mujeeb government was regressive rather than progressive this is evident by the efforts to establish a single party system in the country (Cochrane, 2009).

Bureaucracy during Zia Era (1975-1981)

The Zia-ur-Rehman continued in the footsteps of his predecessors in making big claims about reforming the civil service structure in Bangladesh. To achieve this purpose, he formed a commission. It was named as "Pay and service commission".

This commission was assigned the huge task of thoroughly observing the Bangladeshi civil service structure and come up with their suggestions to make improvements in it. There were many maladies plaguing the system. The commission proposed more transparency in the selection process of the civil servants. Similarly, the promotion within the structure was proposed to be fairer and more based on qualification and acquired skills of the bureaucrats. The commission also suggested bringing more uniformity and equality in the system.

The suggestions of the commission were incorporated into the government policy but not in their complete form. Still the civil service structure was changed up to an unprecedented level. The bureaucracy was reorganized its "28 cadres". This is to a far better and improved civil service structure (S. A.-M. H. Shah, 2009). In spite of all these reforms, the Zia regime favored the "general cadres" order "specialist cadres". This unfair treatment of the civil servants killed the opportunities for promotion for that civil servant who were specialized in their fields. "The senior services police (SSP)" formed by the Zia regime was a death call or at least an obstacle for the careers of many specialist bureaucrats.

The Zia regime recognized the pay systems as well. Because of these reforms, the inequality between senior and junior civil servants reached at its peak. Some civil servants were earning way more than the others and this situation was not good for the overall health of the system. However, the reforms made by the Zia regime achieved some real results on the ground but they proved insufficient change. These reforms failed to bring any meaning full change for the masses. The common man could not feel the change. Moreover, this change did not improve or strengthen the democratic stability in the country. The main issue was the demoralization of the bureaucratic power. This issue was left untouched. This was the biggest failure during the reforms in Zia regime. The cosmetic change that was brought only forced the experienced civil servants to find new and innovative ways to do corruption(Farazmand, 2009).

Bureaucracy during Ershad Era (1982-1990)

Ershad regime was different. He also made tall claims to reform the structure of the Bangladeshi bureaucracy. He formed “committee for administrative Reorganization/Reforms (CARR)” in 1983. This committee, after a lot of hard work, made its recommendation. Many issues were wasted. The common citizen was not getting a due benefit from the civil service structure. The flow of information was too weak. And the civil servants were too alienated from the common people. The promotion and selection process of the civil servants linked merit. Too much political interference, personal relations the lack of grass-root level democracy was also taking their toll on the system(McCartney, 2011).

The committee suggested relegation more power to the democratic units at the grass root level. They suggested strengthening the powers of the district administration and even further down. Then concept behind this suggestion was to bring in the general masses into the set of authority. The committee favoured handing over all type of control to the local government it was also suggested the government in the capital must leave local government units on their own and let them work free from any pressure (Farazmand, 2009). The Ershad regime yielded to these suggestions to some degree. Bangladesh saw local government System up to the sub-district level in 1983. The later reviews of this imitative reveal that it was nothing but a sham for prolonging the rule of Ershad. Actually, his slogan of grass-root level democracy and change in the system were a disturbance. He was to prove to the Bangladeshi Masses that he was their savior. That only he could deliver them. He made his own political party.

Erahad bought Army Generals to bring change to the country. Some of the reforms made by these generals were very beneficial for the laymen Bangladeshi. This process of change was not favorable for bureaucrats. So, they tried to do their utmost to stop the way of grass-root level democracy. The heads of the local government unit elected by the popular vote did not have as much authority as they were supposed to enjoy. So the reforms did not achieve the objective they

crimped to do. The heads of the local government units were to write confidential reports about the civil servants working in their area. But these were not taken into account by the government. It was another proof of the insincerity of the government in carrying out these reforms (Gilbert, 1959).

Bureaucracy after Restoration of Democracy (1991-2000)

This was the period when democracy was restored in Bangladesh. In spite of democratically elected government being in power, the policies and the attitude did not change much. During this period, there was a lot of foreign pressure that forced civilian governments to take initiatives for conducting reforms in the bureaucracy and political system. Again many commissions were formed. All of these aimed at eliminating corruption from the system (Farazmand, 2009). Begam Khalid Zia formed "Administrative Reorganization Committee (ARC)". The task assigned to this committee was very limited. Rather than aiming any basic and long-term change, the committee aimed at aligning the civil service. They were to bring limited change within the structure of the civil service. The committee had many civil servants in it. It lingered on and on.

The political system in Bangladesh is very hostile. Sometimes, political differences turn into personal enmities. Therefore, the recommendations made by "ARC" went to the dustbin during the next government period. Haseena Wajid considered it an insult to follow or implement the suggestions made by a committee formed by her political rival. She formed another commission "Public Administration Reform Commission" (PARC) (Gilbert, 1959). This committee suggested that the sluggishness in the system was the biggest problem they also suggested fairness and equality between different ranks and groups/cadres with the service. They suggested making public service more public friendly. They suggested that if the civil servants wanted to retire out of their own free will, they must have a venue for it. Uniformity of reforms throughout the structure, pro nation is and benefits based on achievements during the job period, increasing the power and reach of the common people were part of suggestions made by the committee.

It is believed that findings made by this committee did not build anything over what had previously been discovered or recommended, nothing what it suggested was new. Although this committee recommended many, they did not have any coherence. The committee could not provide any critical defense for the recommendation it had made. Moreover, it did not provide any practical solution (McCartney, 2011). The sub-sequent treatment of this report by the ruling party showed that the government was not true to its promise of reforms. The actual change on the ground was too slow and sluggish. Neither the government nor the high-ranking civil servants wanted real change. All that they aimed at was cosmetic change. This halfhearted effort for change was very hot topic in those days. As a result, the issue of position change in the civil service of Bangladesh is still a provocative question.

Accountability and Answerability Mechanism in Civil Service of Bangladesh

The structure of civil service is in the shape of a pyramid. This structure is as old as the modern civil service in Bangladesh. The Bangladeshis inherited this system from their colonial masters and then from Pakistan. Zafarullah (1998) divides the Bangladeshi civil service into different groups and sections. These wings have been assigned different tasks. Some are to look for ways for innovation and evolution of the structure. Some have been assigned the task of dealing the affairs related to general public. Some wings have to give advice on different challenges being faced and some to hide into the regular mommies, there is the higher-up section of the structure that looks after the overall performance of the whole structure that looks after the overall performance of the whole structure. Then there is the wing that deals with everything foreign. So, the Bangladeshi civil service is spread over a best spectrum of challenges. In such vast structure, some arrangements for the answerability of the powerful officials are of utmost importance (Jamil, 2007).

The civil service in Bangladesh is a because of functions they perform. The authority decreases from the top to bottom. The political atmosphere in Bangladesh has been very unstable since the independence of this south Asian country. This instability is due to the respected military interventions. The military and the democratically elected government have been taking turns. During these times, only the civil servants have been the most skilled and experienced authority in the country. As a result, they got great power and have helped the military during taking over the power.

During military rule, no one had enough guts to hold the powerful general answerable for any of their actions. But this does not mean that the service is devoid of any concept of answerability or accountability. Usually the superior officials in the service are responsible for looking after the performance of their sub-ordinates. In addition, this includes making them answer for any abuse of power inefficiency or corruption of any kind (Jamil, 2007). This accountability of the officials by their higher ups works through the "Annual confidential Reports (ACR)" (Sabharwal, 2016, P.305). These reports are very important in the civil structure. They can clear the way for an upward promotion of any official or they can lead to the demotion of the said officials. It is the default and official way of the evolution of the civil servants. It defines their worth and becomes a basis for any kind of good or bad decision about their career (Jamil, 2007; Sabharwal & Berman, 2013).

These reports are not the sole criteria for the evaluation of the officials. There are other ways to guide them. These included the official financial reports by the higher ups in black and white. The Sops for the officials are as clear as the light of the day. By law, they are bounded to follow the procedural guidelines. They have to ensure that everything is being done according to the law. They are wheels on

which the whole structure of the governance turns. In many cases through, the rules are not clear. The reason is the frequent interruptions in the democratic process. Many military rules are not clear. The reason is the frequent interruptions in the democratic process. Many military rulers would choose personal favorites for powerful posts in the civil service who would be there for years. This created stagnancies in the civil service that haunts the system till today (Normanton & Normanton, 1966).

All these factors have contributed to great confusion when it comes to the accountability of the officials. On the other hand, accountability is being performed in Bangladesh through other ways too. If someone files a complaint against an official, there they said official has to face an inquiry. This can sometimes lead to suspension or even serve punishments. For this purpose, the Government Servants Conduct Rules 1979 and the Government (Servants and Appeal) Rules 1985 assists (Sabharwal & Berman, 2013). But, in spite of all this, the system of accountability is far from perfection. The interference by the political parties generate the greatest obstacle while, frequent military intervening had a very negative effect overall system. This has led to creation of lobbies with the system. All this has led to a "Structure with in a structure" situation. There are many factors noted by many international observers and experts. These include political links, personal preferences and favors, loyalty and favors type corrections, wide spread corruption, disagreement among the power holders in the country lack of and standards, alienation and powerlessness of the masses and weak democracy (Jamil, 2007; McCartney, 2011).

To conclude, study examines that the civil service in Bangladesh is entitled towards its center of power. The club of the selected few is very powerful. Implementation of the rules and regulations is devoid of any logic. Therefore, malpractice and misconduct have been common in the civil service. However, de-politicization of bureaucracy can restore the actual theme of administration that would not only assist the country towards national growth but provide welfare-oriented environment to the public (Ahmed, 2016; Jamil, 2007).

Conclusion

During this research study, I put forward the claim that strengthening of extra-bureaucratic and accountability mechanisms in Bangladesh faced several bottlenecks which had and are still remain in one or another shape. Some of the factors that impede the internal bureaucratic accountability mechanisms and the extra-bureaucratic bodies to some extent, parliament has never been fully effective in the sense that there has never been any effective opposition in the legislature. However, it has encouraged debate that the setting government and opposition was neither on the same page nor they developed consensus on any major legislation. Parliament was either dominated by an overwhelming majority who did not let the proceeding accordingly and the also opposition boycotted by most of the session, which the main cause of the failure of proper legislation in that time.

While the prominent literature and the example of developed countries just owing to their democratic culture in which the level of confidence among political parties will be higher than any. Every country must tolerate and show their warm welcome from all stakeholders of their diverse opinions, suggestions, positive criticism and contributions, including members of the opposition as well in each and every decision and public affairs bills. Last but not the least, it is essential to restore all to national institutions in accordance with constitutional provisions.

Although, articles 22, 117, 133, 134 and 135 describe constitutional provisions regarding institutional accountability within the bureaucracy in Bangladesh but political misuse of government officials have destroyed the theme and purpose of respective constitutional provisions during 21st century.

Section VI of the Constitution of Bangladesh also authorizes judiciary to look after bureaucracy efficiency in the state. Courts are also obligatory to punish any public servant or a person holding public office if he/she violates rules and regulations, code of conduct or professionalism. However, politicization of judiciary (for the sake of fulfilling political interests) by the governments during different times in 21st century has also undermined the respective course of action. Civil society organizations have multiplied and are present in all geographic areas of the country, but their contribution remains limited. Their activities are usually based on specific questions, and they will be more effective if public space could be opened so that these organizations can participate in government process. They will be able to provide various perspectives based on their experience at local level. In addition, a dynamic network of print and electronic media has successfully identified liability issues and the need to resolve them.

Perhaps, the society and political leaders could work together to overcome the socio-economic and political problems, which resulted from an institutional disharmony paved the way numerous other impediments in the society. The rampant corruption and political disarray could be minimized through the implementation of a system where rewards and incentives along with a firm stand and full force of political will. Politicization can be expedited through establishing a rational and impartial framework of governing system in which all the citizens would have the opportunity to realize their potential and contribution in the country. Finally, accountability in political and administrative sectors would strengthen the legitimacy of governments. Similarly, fair accountability mechanism can only be implemented in all the public affairs management. This would be definitely indicated a wide political, electoral and administrative reforms throughout the country. Although, some progress had been made in the area of service reform, but they had neither bore fruits nor much effective, by dint of the inherited socio-political and electoral mechanism. Indeed, the approach of the governance need to be improved from the rigid, hierarchical, traditional and rule-based form to mature, flexible and pragmatic governance system, which compatible and applicable in the Bangladeshi society. Most importantly,

Bangladesh prerequisite true democratic and political culture, wherein, all the stakeholders on board.

The concept of responsibility is closely connected to the concept of openness and elected governmental structure and process. While interior bureaucracy - the mechanisms are comparatively less difficult and seem to be accessible to all organizational structure whatever the dominant culture and approach to governance, the mechanisms depend on the support of many actors in society.

Last but not the least, the values accompanying by democracy such as the rule of law, inclusiveness, human rights, free and fair electoral mechanism and a competitive political party system must be strengthened to develop an effective accountability system in Bangladesh.

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