

# **ROLE OF OPPOSITION IN BANGLADESH POLITICS SINCE 1991**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the award of the degree of*

**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

**BANESHWAR KUMAR SHARMA**



South Asian Studies Division  
Centre for South, Central, Southeast Asian  
and Southwest Pacific Studies  
School of International Studies  
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY  
New Delhi-110067  
2008



CENTRE FOR SOUTH, CENTRAL, SOUTHEAST ASIAN & SOUTH WEST PACIFIC STUDIES  
SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES  
**JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY**  
NEW DELHI - 110 067

Phone : 2670 4350  
Fax : 91-11-2674 1586  
91-11-2674 2580

Date: 28-07- 2008

**DECLARATION**

I declare that the dissertation entitled "ROLE OF OPPOSITION IN BANGLADESH POLITICS SINCE 1991" submitted by me for the award of the degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this or any other University.

*BK Sharma*

BANESHWAR KUMAR SHARMA

**CERTIFICATE**

We recommend that the dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

*Sahadevan*

Prof. P. Sahadevan  
(Chairperson)

*S. Bhardwaj*

Dr. Sanjay Bhardwaj  
(Supervisor)

Centre for South, Central, Southeast Asian and South West Pacific Studies  
School of International Studies  
Jawaharlal Nehru University  
New Delhi-110067

SUPERVISOR  
Centre for South, Central, South East  
Asian and South West Pacific Studies  
School of International Studies  
Jawaharlal Nehru University  
New Delhi-110067

*Dedicated*

*To*

*MY Papa and Maaji*

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## *Acknowledgements*

*The accomplishment of this research work includes the guidance and encouragement of a number of individuals and institutions. Their altruistic contributions deserves to be recalled.*

*First, I would like to acknowledge my Supervisor, Dr. Sanjay Bhardwaj, whose motivations, valuable suggestions and guidance inspired me in this endeavour. He has also given me emotional support at every moment of this work.*

*I am very thankful to all honourable faculties, who have extended the worthy training during the course work, specially Prof. I.N. Mukherjee, Prof. M. P. Lama and Prof. P. Sahadevan.*

*I am thankful to the staffs of my School's Reading Hall, Central Library, Exim-Bank Library, South Asia Foundation Documentation and Information Centre (SAFDIC), SAARC Documentation Centre, Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis (IDSA) and United Service Institution of India (USII).*

*I extend my thanks and regards to all my classmates. I am also very thankful to my hostel mates and friends, specially Mr. Abhilash T. , Mr. Amit Ranjan, Mr. Anil Singh, Mr. Anjan Sahoo, Mr. Bhoopathy, Mr. Biswajit, Mr. Botovi Chisi, Mr. Chirantan, Mr. Divya Prakash, Mr. Jitendra, Mr. Linfesh, Mr. Manjinder, Mr. Manoj, Mr. Maqsud, Mr. Munde, Mr. Praful, Mr. Rosi, Mr. Shailendra, Mr. Surendra, Mr. Uttam and Mr. Vinod.*

*My brother Shri Bikramendra K. Sharma, bhabhi Smt. Reeta Sharma and kids have always been with me in completion of this work.*

*Bksharma.*

*164/Periyar Hostel, JNU, New Delhi.  
27<sup>th</sup> July 2008*

*(Baneshwar Kumar Sharma)*

## **List of Abbreviations**

BAKD	Bangladesh Adarsha Krishak Dal (Bangladesh Idea Peasant Party)
BAKSAL	Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League
BAL/AL	Bangladesh Awami (People's) League
BALPP	Bangladesh Parliamentary Party
BBP	Bangladesh Bastuhara Party
BCL	Bangladesh Chattra (Student) League
BCP	Bangladesh Communist Party
BDP	Bangladesh Democratic Party
BF	Bhashani Front
BFL	Bangladesh Freedom League
BGA	Bangladesh Ganotantrik Andolan (Bangladesh Democratic Movement)
BGCD	Bangladesh Ganotantrik Chashi Dal (Bangladesh Democratic Peasants Party)
BGF	Bangladesh Gono (People's) Front
BHL	Bangladesh Hindu League
BHOF	Bangladesh Hindu Oikhya Front
BIA	Bangladesh Islamic Andolan (Movement)
BIF	Bangladesh Islamic Front
BJC	Bangladesh Jatiya Congress
BJF	Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Front
BJL	Bangladesh Jatiya League
BKA	Bangladesh Khilafat Andolan

BKP	Bangladesh Khilafat Party
BML	Bangladesh Muslim League (various factions)
BNPPP	BNP Parliamentary Party
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
BSD	Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal—two factions (Khaliquzzaman, and Mahbub)
BSD	Bangladesh Samyabadi Dal (Marxist-Leninist)
BWP	Bangladesh Workers Party
COP	Combined Opposition Party
CPB	Communist Party of Bangladesh
CPB-L	Communist Party of Bangladesh (Leninist)
IOJ	Islami Oikhya Jote
JIB	Jamaat-i-Islami Bangladesh
JP	Jatiya Party (various factions)
ML	Muslim League
NAP	National Awami Party
NAP-B	National Awami Party, Bhashani
NAP-M	National Awami Party, Muzaffar
NCG	Non-party Caretaker Government

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## PREFACE

Democracies not only allow freedom of expression, thought, speech and contract but also promote independence of political organizations and institutions as Lane and Erson have remarked. It has been commented that democracy implies government as well as opposition and thus democracy functions properly when there is enough room for cleavages to foster space for political differences and opposition. Indeed both the government and the opposition in a democratic polity operate on the foundation of concurrence that the party which obtains a majority in elections will be in power for a fixed term while the minority party which becomes the opposition will enjoy the right to disgrace the ruling party and uncover the fact that the government becomes incompetent to remain in office.

Earnest Barker opined that democracy liberates ‘opposition’ as anti-thesis and that the distinguished feature of democracy is the existence of opposition which may be in the electorate, in the legislature and even in the cabinet. He regarded opposition as a ‘safety valve’ of the political system and held the view that opposition cannot be utterly negative, entirely critical or totally obstructive; since in democracy, the function it performs is fundamentally positive: it strengthens the process with a ready provision for a consistent body of alternative leadership adequately prepared to offer an alternative guidance as soon as it is required.

The system of legitimately created and lawfully organized opposition political groups and parties along with the recognition of criticizing and ousting the party in power through elections has been a modern phenomenon, developed mostly in the western world. The presence of a constitutional and legal opposition was seen for the first time in Britain and has come to be known as ‘His/Her Majesty’s opposition’ since 1826. Its operation rests on its loyalty to the system and compliance with rules of political acts.

There has been emergence of constitutional opposition with the development and flourishing of democracy. According to many scholars and political scientists, democracy offers more opportunities for differences and presents greater scope for opposition activities compared to any other system of rule. Henry Mayo rightly opines (in *An Introduction to Democratic Theory*), “The existence of political opposition- by individuals and groups, by the press and above all by organised parties- is the litmus paper test of democracy.

Opposition is an intrinsic part of democracy. There can be no democracy without a vibrant opposition. Parliament is the heart of a parliamentary democracy. If parliament functions irregularly or ineffectively, parliamentary democracy becomes weak and ineffective. Bangladesh’s parliament has become a constant victim of a new, disturbing trend of politics of boycott for the last more than 15 years, since the beginning of the democratic process. Boycotting parliament and doing hartals are the two main tools used by the opposition in Bangladesh politics. Owing to such role being played by the opposition, the parliament of Bangladesh has become dysfunctional. The purpose of this research is to explore the causes of dysfunctional parliament of Bangladesh, i.e. opposition’s non-constructive role, after the restoration of democracy.

The objectives of the research are : to examine how far the Opposition parties have been able to uphold the cause of democracy in Bangladesh; to examine why the Opposition takes most of issues out of legislature, i.e. in the streets and among public places; to examine why Opposition parties hardly play the constructive role even after just relinquishing power.

In research work, descriptive and analytical methods have been used. The research is based on primary and secondary sources. For the former, the reports and survey conducted by the several national and

international organizations have been used; whereas for the latter, the existing literatures, published journals and newspapers have been used. Relevant materials from the internet and working papers of research institutes have also been used to succor the research.

The dissertation includes five chapters. First, “Parliamentary Opposition: A conceptual Framework”. This chapter is dealt with examination and analysis of the conceptual framework of opposition in parliamentary democracy. The chapter further makes a comparison of the opposition of the developing states specially Bangladesh, with the Western Liberal Democratic States.

Second Chapter, “Political Parties and Democracy in Bangladesh”. This chapter deals with defining of political party and its function in democracy. The chapter gives emphasis on the various political parties and their functions in Bangladesh since independence. It also explains the role of political parties after the restoration of democracy.

Third Chapter, “Opposition in Bangladesh: Evolution and Nature”. This chapter assesses, how the opposition has been evolved in Bangladesh politics, how it got numerical strength in parliament and further how it has played its role in the politics.

Fourth Chapter, “Role of Opposition in Bangladesh since 1991”. This chapter analyses the role of opposition after the restoration of democracy. This chapter explains in detail that how the opposition by using the tools of hartal and boycotting parliament, made the parliament dysfunctional.

Fifth Chapter, “conclusion”. It concludes the study by highlighting the findings of the research work. The chapter after making comparison of Opposition of Bangladesh with India and UK, suggests some measures to rectify the role of opposition, so that the parliament of Bangladesh may be strengthened.

# Political Map of Bangladesh



**CHAPTER - I**

**PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION : A  
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Many scholars and political scientists are of the opinion that democracy offers more opportunities for differences and presents greater scope of opposition activities compared to any other system of rule. According to Lave and Ersson, democracy not only allows freedom of expression, thought, speech and contract but also promote independence of political organizations and institutions. It has been commented that democracy implies governments as well as opposition and thus democracy functions properly when there is enough room for cleavages to foster space for political differences and oppositions. Indeed, both the government and opposition in a democratic polity operate on the foundation of concurrence that the party which obtains a majority in elections will be in power for fixed term while the minority party which becomes the opposition will enjoy the right to disgrace the ruling party and uncover the fact that the government becomes incompetent to remain in office. Earnest Barker opines that democracy librates opposition as 'anti-thesis' and that the distinguished feature of democracy is the existence of opposition which may be in the electorate in the legislature and even in the cabinet. According to him, opposition is regarded as 'safety valve' of the political system, he further hold the view that opposition cannot be utterly negative, entirely critical or totally obstructive since, in democracy, the function it performs is fundamentally positive. (Barker 1967:202-203)

Among democratic systems, there is agreement on the need for an opposition, essentially because in any real sense of the term, an election cannot be a choice, unless at least two positive possibilities are open to electors. In communist and other one-party systems, the elector can exercises a negative choice by abstaining from voting, but this is no more than a gesture. In such conditions, elections are 'a race with one horse'. If the choice is to be a real one, the opposition needs to be well organized, which leaves room for discussion on the kind of opposition that is most effective on what the functions of oppositions ought to be, and on whether there ought to be one opposition or several. The existence of political opposition constituted by individuals, groups, press and above all, by organized political parties is the 'Litmus Paper' for democracy as H.B. Mayo said in his "Introduction To Democratic Theory". The principle of legitimate political opposition belongs to most fundamental components of any liberal democracy, has long been acknowledged by democratic theory. According to Ian Shapiro, 'democracy is an

ideology of opposition as much as it is one of government'. Actually, the legitimately created and lawfully organized system of political groups and parties along with the recognition of criticizing and ousting the party in power through elections has been a recent phenomenon, developed mostly in the western world. The presence of a constitutional and legal opposition was seen for the first time in Britain and has come to be known as 'His/Her majesty's opposition' since 1826. Its operation rests on its loyalty to the system and compliance with rules of political act. Therefore, opposition agrees not to impede the activities of government, restricts its difference to pacific action rather than overt political activity and abstains from any kind of conspiracy against the ruling party. The British notion of responsible opposition developed since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is widely acclaimed as a great contribution to parliamentary democracy and art of governance.(Hasanuzzaman 1988:7-10)

According to K.C. wheare, the prime part of discharging the great duty or making the government behaves falls on the opposition. He further stressed that in parliamentary democracies it is the official opposition that does the job of criticizing and examining the governmental proposals or activities through the question to the ministers in the legislature, motions of censure, no confidence, and debates leading to the passing of the bills and approving financial legislation. (Wheare 1968:77). Such procedure is very essential to found accountable government and responsible opposition. Michael Curtis does agree that the crucial element in a parliamentary democracy is the presence of a legal opposition which is not only tolerated but also allowed sometimes to select the subjects for debates which has an impact on the governmental decisions.

According to Alfred Stephan, there are several multiple tasks of democratic oppositions against any authoritarianism such as:-

- Repelling integration into the government;
- Protecting belts of autonomy against it;
- Opposing the legitimacy of the regime;
- Opposing the costs of authoritarian rule; and
- Establishing a credible democratic substitute.

Stephan further assesses that the more the opposition is able to carry out the above tasks, the less space is left for the implementation of authoritarian institutions and agencies (Stepan 1990:42, 44-45).

Thus, the views expressed by the aforesaid scholars make it clear that there is a great significance of opposition in a democracy. It is indeed a crucial feature of a representative polity that the right of the existence of an organized option is guaranteed and it is allowed not only to criticize or scrutinize the government actions but also to replace the ruling party by earning electoral mandate of the majority voters.

### **1.1 Marxist views on opposition**

Karl Marx, Engels, Lenin and their followers criticized and challenged the ideas of western liberal theorists on constitutional opposition and democratic polities. According to them, the state in the so-called liberal democracy only acts as an instrument of oppression under the domineering influence of the major economic class which uses the same to uphold its own interests in the name of representative system. The capitalist state tries to project democratic structure in society and polity but within this very system, capital runs supreme and wage labour is exploited to the detriment of the working class. Marxists further held that in the capitalist state it is only the dominant class which can form the government through elections and perpetuate the process of exploitation. Orthodox Marxists are of the opinion that representative state under capitalism can hardly be taken over by a democratic movement but in order to seize power, a cadre of revolutionaries under the guidance of professional leaders, becomes instruments which can destroy to coercive structure of the state.

According to Marxists, it is said that bourgeois liberal representative system permits, among others; freedom of opinion, speech association and organized opposition political parties but in reality, such a system does not enable the working class to obtain benefits from the prevailing situation. The existence of bourgeois political parties both in the government and in opposition is of no use for the oppressed class. The process of election through which change of government takes place cannot be used by the working poor for their interests because in elections monetary power and influence of the rich play the most vital part. As such, the oppression of the working class is made within the



framework of the political superstructure of the bourgeoisie. The privilege of the working people to vote in periodic elections only endorses the representation of oppressing class inside the legislature just to continue exploitation over the majority poor. Marxists, however, agree that growth of class consciousness of the oppressed people is possible through the use of the institutions of liberal democracy to ultimately organize social revolution against the capitalist state. Such revolution will lead to real freedom of the working class first under socialism through the dictatorship of the proletariat and finally under communism through the withering away of the state itself. According to the Marxists only proletarian dictatorship can establish a true democratic order for the oppressed class. And since 'proletarian democracy' acts for the interests of the majority working class no organized opposition is required under this system.

However, the Marxist views on constitutional opposition and democratic polarities have been criticized mainly because the Marxists do not make any provision for establishing limited government. Any system which devises fundamental rights to all sections excepting the working class can not be truly democratic. Absence of opponents against the absolute rule of the government and lack of tolerance can only lead to totalitarianism. In communist countries like China, there has been the creation of single party government with the communist party as the only political party and all others declared unlawful.

According to Michael Curtis, however, the absence of opposition political parties in communist countries does not necessarily mean absolute monopoly of one group only. Here pluralistic pressures take a different shape compared to the liberal democratic systems. Such kind of pressures develop not only from non-party groups like the state apparatus, control commissions and military leaders, but also internally from competing factions within the party with their different personal loyalties. But it is widely believed that one party communist regime only rarely allow the luxury of free expression and different opinions.

Several scholars are of the view that such systems are incompatible with responsible government since they do not allow for creation of alternatives. Then the question is that what are the essential prerequisites for a one-party state that would make it a truly democratic one? In reply of this question Jack Lively says that the above type of

party needs to be comprehensive and structurally open with its membership free to all individuals and groups. Thus, for becoming democratic, eclectic existence of factions and groups with different candidates in extra-party elections would have to be permitted in that party organization.

However, the constitutional or organized opposition as alternative government is not compatible with the Marxian view yet it can not be denied that the writings of Karl Marx, Engels, Lenin, Mao Tse Tung and their followers contributed to new sets of ideas concerning democracy of the oppressed with the main thrust on total welfare and economic emancipation of the majority working poor.

After the disappearance of Marxist Leninist one party rule (in 1990s) in the former Soviet Union and the East European States, there has been introduction of a western type of liberal democracy in these countries along with the recognition of opposition parties in the political order. As S. P. Huntington has stated that occurrence of third wave transition of democracy and a number of societies which were under the control of authoritarian regimes have opted for democratic politics characterized by the presence of organized and legal opposition. (Huntington 1991:13-18)

## **1.2 The Functions of Opposition in Democracy**

Whether the forces of opposition are grouped in one main party or in several, the first essential requirement of a democratic opposition is that it should be generally regarded as an integral part of the political system. There should be sufficient toleration of rival groups, with different attitudes, to allow one to foresee if not with equanimity, at least without fundamental despair- their coming to power or otherwise influencing the governmental process. Without this 'toleration', or acceptance, there will not be the peaceful play of power- the adherence by the 'outs' to decisions made by 'ins' and the recognition by 'ins' of the rights of the 'outs'- that alone can make a stable democratic system possible. Opposition must be regarded as being no less legitimate than power.

The basis of opposition should, ideally, be a permanent party organization, whose aim is to achieve power, whose principles and policies can be presented to the electorate as future government policies, and which can therefore, carry on a permanent debate both within the legislature and within the country on how to complete the

government's achievements and remedy its shortcomings. This is not to deny the utility of all other forms of political oppositions, such as the press and pressure groups. But these are not directly aiming at power, at replacing the government. They are promoting sectional interests, and so are not subject to what more than anything else help to keep the feet of both government and oppositions on the ground.

To the extent to which different opposition parties have to concentrate their energies on outbidding each other for popular support, or to the extent they decide to concentrate their energies on theories or programmes unrelated to the circumstances in which they might come to power, they are likely to prove ineffective. But political circumstances do not always permit of this degree of compromise and agreement between opposition formations. Some multiparty opposition, notably in Scandinavia and Holland, have been effective over long periods. In British and America two party systems, both parties have had their periods of weak and ineffective opposition. French opposition parties have been consistently unable to combine sufficiently to make the debate between government and opposition either positive or permanent enough for the electorate to be presented with clear alternatives.

Whether responsible or not, the opposition must always be at some disadvantage, though this can sometimes be counter-balanced by the greater force of alteration of parties that are free to criticize or propose solutions to problems, without being obliged to pay attention to their consistency or practicability. In an ideal democracy, such policies ought not to pay dividends.

Since power provides the best tools for the job, the best training for effective opposition is to have held power and to have reasonable prospects of holding it again. Long periods of uninterrupted power exercised by one party or coalition can, however, be deleterious to both sides. Without adequate stimulus from critics, governments can become slack and complacent, or even corrupt, but without reasonable hope of power, oppositions tend to become disunited or unrealistic, and so fail more and more to provide effective criticism.

### **1.3 How much opposition?**

The British view that 'the duty of an opposition is to oppose' does not in itself offer much guidance on the crucial question, which is-- how much opposition is in general desirable? The practice of different democratic systems varies widely on this point. At on extreme, there is the Swiss system, in which there is no clear distinction between government and opposition. At the other extreme, there are multi-party oppositions, particularly in France and Italy, whose only real link at times has been their common hostility to the government, but which are not organized to act as an opposition, because they dislike each other more than each of them dislikes the government. There are those who believe that the American system could not have survived unless Republicans and Democrats, whose basic disagreement defies precise analysis, had more often than not provided the country with a President and a Congressional majority of the same party- that is, with a government and an opposition. There are those who believe that there is in Great Britain today a danger of too much consensus, with the result that the ordinary citizen seems to care less and less which side obtains a majority.

The essential requirement for an effective opposition is to have enough cohesion both to defeat a government and to replace it. This is a condition that not all democratic systems can yet be guaranteed to fulfill. It is sometimes impossible to create an effective opposition when it includes parties on the extreme right or the extreme left, whose opposition is not merely to the government but also to the regime. What can opposition parties do, if their only hope of defeating a government is with the help of elements with which they cannot possibly combine to form a government? This is a problem that confronted the opposition in Weimar Germany, and that eventually led to replacement of democratic government by Nazism. There were periods during the French Fourth Republic when governments were defeated by the combined votes of Gaullists and of a left-wing opposition in which the communists were the strongest party. Both French and Italian opposition parties have been faced since the war, with the permanent problem of how much opposition between communists and non-communists is either possible or desirable.

No democracy can be expected to go out of its way to assist those whose aim is to destroy it, or to provide opportunities for violence which may have that

consequence. But to suppress either small revolutionary movements, whether of left or right or even large movements, as long as they are not actively resorting to violence, could harm democracy more than its opponents. They often thrive on opportunities for protest, but democracy can hardly be expected to thrive or practicing intolerance while practicing toleration. In this situation, all democracies face a dilemma, on the one hand, they cannot offered to tolerate intolerance to the point at which those who wish to practice tolerance are themselves prevented from doing so. On the other hand, to turn a blind eye to small extremist movements that may never get beyond the stage of talk, or that do not in any case constitute a serious threat, while taking action against larger ones that do threaten successful revolt- that is, movements that have more support than the smaller ones- is clearly a solution based on expediency rather than on principle. Moreover, its is unsatisfactory as a rule of conduct, because it can give us guidance on how to recognize the precise point at which the line has to be drawn between that is and is not to be tolerated. All that can be said is that it is somewhere between the point at which further toleration or permissiveness risks being a recipe for democratic suicide and that at which lack of toleration unduly restricts the basic democratic right to oppose.

It is not surprising that democracies have drawn the line in different places. Some have been threatened by extremism more than others and either fear it more or have less confidence in their own capacity to contain it or to recognize danger points. Great Britain has never had a serious communist or fascist problem. France has often had to meet threats from either right or left, and sometimes from the two at once. Actually, France opinion is traditionally less conscious than British of the dangers of extending democratic toleration to communist organizations. The French left fears above all being over-severe towards a large communist organization that thrives on martyrdom. The United States, which has never experienced any serious communist or fascist threat, is far more apprehensive about communism than either Britain or France.

It would seem that, in general, the guiding principle on the problem of the toleration of intolerance has been a sense of obligation to impose only the minimum of restrictions on freedom of action compatible with the prevention of a major threat to the democratic way of life- to avoid, that is, all persecution and to recognize the rights of all types of movement to express their opinions, provided that they respect legality. So a

very large extent, French and British communist parties have recognized their obligation to respect legality. On their side, governments have clearly hesitated as long as possible before taking repressive measures. It was only after flagrant and dangerous infringements of legality and prolonged violence that the extremist groups that provided the student leaders of the 'May revolution' in France were banned. They had been in existence for some time and had been only preaching violence, but also practicing it, though on a much smaller scale.

The question of how much opposition is desirable in principle, when there are no complicating factors such as an opposition divided against it, is much easier to answer. Opposition for opposition's sake must, in the long run, diminish the quality of the democratic dialogue. The normal methods of party propaganda and debate inevitably produce some distortion of the facts, because it is the job of each side to present its own case in the most favourable light. The implications demanded by propaganda techniques and by parliamentary debating procedures produce something of the effect of counsel for the prosecution confronting counsel for the defense in a court of law. But whereas in a court of law the judge is there to guide the jury, the electorate- which is the jury in political life- has to sort out the merits of each case for itself, as best it can. To go beyond the point generally reconsider to be admissible in a fair fight, and seek deliberately to mislead the electorate, risks discrediting the whole system by leading to an escalation of misrepresentation.

Opposition ought also to be constructive, if it is to teach the electorate how to choose between rival policies. In the normal course of events, government and opposition parties will have held power and hope to hold power, and so it is in the long-term interests of both sides to maintain a high standard of debate, and not to make unrealistic promises. Where an opposition is condemned to long periods without hope of power, there is nevertheless a steadily increasing temptation to indulge in irresponsible criticisms and promises. (Pickles 1970:159-164).

## **1.4 Opposition's role in the legislature**

Opposition, through different legislative techniques tries its label best to influence the government. The role of opposition in the legislature is rather formal. There are various legislative devices which are used by opposition, such as-

### **1.4 (a) Debate and Speech**

These represent intrinsic quality of legislative activity and are effectively used by opposition to express its opinion and views different from that of the party in power. In course of parliamentary transactions through debates, opposition tries to advance its arguments and presses for their acceptance by the House. Forceful speeches and constructive debates of the opposition certainly have influence on the ruling party in good governance.

### **1.4(b) Interpellations and questions**

These have been regarded as vital legislative tools for moving readjustments and corrections in executive decisions and are carefully used to perplex and embarrass the ruling party. Opposition tries to make their questions attractive and catchy for newspaper and media coverage which may in turn lead to prompt governmental response. Interpellations and asking of questions are greatly useful in obtaining information from the ministers. These expose faults and serves as an indirect means of criticizing the policies or programmes of the government. If the answer of a question from the Treasury bench does not satisfy the legislator, there are provisions in parliamentary systems where supplementary questions can be asked which often transforms the question hour into a legislative game of the competing parties. Such questions, of course, strengthen the hands of opposition since these are useful to demand executive accountability and also to test the competence and knowledge of the concerned ministers. According to Carl J. Freidrich, when a minister is asked to look into a complaint of a constituent he becomes much more concerned for, the minister who has been careless in attending to such matters is likely to find himself embarrassed by a question in the parliament.

In addition to interpellations and questions, the opposition in the legislative may bring forward the devices of 'adjournment motion' and 'vote of censure' against the

ministers for their deeds and against any government policy. Adjournment motion is moved by the opposition to seek attention to a specific question or a matter of public importance and demand detailed discussion on the floor on that matter by adjourning the business before the House. Opposition also tries to raise 'cut motion;' to reject or reduce any proposal for financial approval of government bills. The opposition members sometime employ another tactic of 'walking out' of the house to demonstrate their protest against any indifferent attitude or stubbornness on the part of the government.

#### **1.4(c) Vote of No-confidence**

In parliamentary systems, the opposition has the right to bring this motion to challenge the party in power. Such a motion can be brought either against a single minister or against the whole ministry. The government faces the problem of quitting office if the motion of no-confidence is accepted by the House. One of the effective mechanisms to maintain governmental responsibility is the vote of no-confidence or any threat to use it by the opposition.

#### **1.4(d) Committee system**

One important innovation in the working of the representative assemblies of the democratic polities has been the committee system. In order to save valuable parliamentary time and to fruitfully utilize the capacities of the people's representatives, legislators belonging to both the government and the opposition are divided into several committees and sub-committees for performing specific function as referred to them by the House from time to time. In order to make their actions more meaningful and criticism against the government, more effective; legislatures require some independent means through the legislative committees. Cummings and wise mentioned that committees serve as forums for legislative compromise and political bargaining and act as arenas where both the government and opposition resolve their differences on various issues. (Cummings and Wise 1981: 457)

The opposition in fact makes every use of the committees as effective instrument to ensure responsible behaviour of the executive. In the developed parliamentary systems like UK, among the legislative committees, the Committee of Public Accounts has a



special significance. Headed by an opposition member this committee inquires into public expenditure as sanctioned by the parliament and because of its investigation, this committee is known as a 'watchdog of the legislature' to make the government responsible. In the United States of America, the Congress performs most of its functions in the committees. Michael J. Remington noted that the Congressional Committee System is indeed the legislative workshop of the institution where policy options are debated, developed and translated into legislative action. In today's democracies, oppositions thus have a significant role in the Committee System and through investigation, hearing, and detailed scrutiny in the committees they demand transparency and accountability of the government.

### **1.5 Opposition's role out of the Legislature**

The prime function of opposition to criticize the party in office, scrutinize governmental activities and to offer itself as an alternative government is performed not only inside the legislature assembly but also outside the legislature.

Like the legislators of the government party, opposition parliamentarians also have a role of maintaining unreserved communication with their constituents. A member of parliament whether from government or opposition would try his utmost to maintain the confidence and support of his constituents. In Britain, every legislator often visits his constituency and retains close touch with his supporters through social meetings. This important task is to pursue the interests of his/her own electoral area. In the American system, the congressmen have their own offices in their constituencies and they are assisted by experienced staffs who try to answer every question posed by the constituents. Opposition members are especially concerned to ventilate grievances of their own constituencies in order to make them acceptable to the voters in the future elections.

Opposition parties in order to extend their bases of support against the government, aggregate the interests, demands and claims which have been articulated by the interest groups and such aggregation is accompanied by means of preparing or formulating general policies in which interests are accommodated and combined. (Almond and Coleman 1971: 34-35)

One very important role of the opposition in democratic polities has been to create public opinion in favour of its alternative policies or programmes and, in doing so, opposition remains ever active in informing the citizens regarding state affairs and the major problems of the country. Opposition also exploits every opportunities of pinpointing the failures of the government to keep election pledges and public commitments. The citizens become aware of political issues and are enlightened on the game of politics by means of the activities of organized opposition parties and obviously the educative value of opposition can hardly be overemphasized.

In order to alter or modify government policies and to create pressure upon the ruling party to accept certain popular demands, opposition adopts various strategies and tactics. Most common tactics include: using political platform, press and media, organizing processions; demonstrations, public rallies and political movements; calling strikes, protesting through blockage, and in extreme cases, adopting the strategy of total non-cooperation with the government. However, the tactics of organizing agitational politics and using students as foot soldiers by the opposition is a phenomenon more common in less developed polities.

Opposition has the most significant role to play on the eve of popular elections. By formulating well prepared election manifesto, opposition makes vigorous campaign for it and tries to attract the electorate and mobilize the voters to vote for its candidates. Opposition also does its best to attract the uncommitted voters who could be convinced by propaganda, programmes and personality of the contesting candidates. Since this type of voter often becomes instrumental in determining the victory, opinion employees all efforts to capture the minds and win over the floating voters. (Gupta 1979: 149-151)

Hence, it is needless to mention that in a democratic system, in order to keep the government within the bounds of constitutional limitations, strong and responsible opposition is greatly required both within and outside the legislature. As such ruling party becomes responsive to public grievances, respectful to the views expressed by the opposition members, and democratic in its attitudes and actions.

## **1.6 The Five Key Models of Institutionalizing Political Opposition at the Constitutional Level**

There are five key models of institutionalising political opposition at the constitutional level. For each of these models a 'prototype' may be found among the consolidated liberal democracies. The five models and their respective prototypes, includes:

- a) Parliament-Centered Opposition with no vote and/or co-governing powers for the minority parties.
- b) Parliament –Centered Opposition with strong veto and /or co-governing powers for the minority parties.
- c) A Parliamentary Presidential Model of Political Opposition.
- d) A Separation- of- Powers Model of Political Opposition, and
- e) A Direct –Democratic Model of Opposition.

The aforesaid five models have been explained below separately.

### **1.6(a) Parliament-Centered Opposition with no veto and/ or co-governing powers for the minority parties.**

No other institutional model of political opposition has acquired a similarly famous status worldwide as the British model, which too many continues to represent the most genuine form of institutionalized political opposition. The key features of the British model include the 'parliament-Centredness' of the constitutionally provided devices of political opposition and the highly specific character of opposition instruments within the parliamentary arena. Parliament-centredness in this context means the absence of direct democratic devices of political opposition.

The most important and well-known feature of the British model of political opposition is to be seen in the highly specific concept of an opposition with a capital 'O'- understood to be the largest opposition party in the House of Commons. The political preconditions of this concept are to be found at the level of the British two-party system. The concept itself rests, however, on a whole set of sophisticated rules and conventions designed to sharpen the organizational profile of 'Her Majesty's Official Opposition'. This includes in particular the provisions of a public salary for the leader of the

opposition and the existence of a 'shadow cabinet', which since the 1950s has in fact turned into a full scale 'shadow government'.

The major and minor opposition parties in British House of Commons are distinguished from their counterparts, in most of other parliamentary democracies, in their notable lack of any major veto or co-governing devices. From parliamentary agenda-setting to the staffing of the standing committees and the majority requirements for passing bills, the whole legislative process in Britain is very much 'government-managed'. In contrast to the situation in most other parliamentary systems, the British understanding of parliamentary opposition does not include the expectation that opposition parties launch independent legislative initiatives or struggle to improve the legislative programme of the government (even if only to prevent the worst of its feared negative outcomes). Rather, there is the conviction that it is better to give the government enough rope to hang itself with, and opposition hope that an extravagant administration will be punished by loss popularity with the electors.

Apart from more specific issues of criticism, the party system is easily identified as a potential 'Achilles heel' of the British model of political opposition. The existence of a workable two party system, understood to include two parties that are able to form a single party majority government on alternative terms- marks a *sine qua non* for the model to work properly.

#### **1.6(b) Parliament-Centered Opposition with strong veto and/or co-governing powers for the minority parties.**

Germany's constitutional arrangements may be considered to represent a second basic model of institutionalising the oppositional principle. Similar to the British model, the German's is characterized by a notable 'parliament-centredness' of institutional devices of political opposition. Whereas there is a large arsenal of direct democratic instruments at sub-national level in Germany, no such device can be found at the national level. In stark contrast to the British case, this emphasis on representative democracy has been combined, however, with very strong co-determinative powers for the parliamentary opposition and their supporters throughout the political system.

To begin with, there are powerful co-governing devices in the parliamentary arena itself, which include in particular a close involvement of the minority parties in the parliamentary agenda-setting process through the Bundestag's *Altestenrat* ('elderly council'); the assignment of a significant proportion of chairs in the Bundestag's standing committees and a strong veto-potential of the opposition parties at parliamentary divisions, as any constitutional amendments (which are quite numerous in Germany) require a two-thirds majority in order to be passed by the Bundestag.

Then, there is what many observers consider to be the single most important 'weapon' in the hands of opposition parties: the very powerful role of the Bundesrat, the Federal Republic's 'second chamber'. The Bundesrat, basically represents the state governments, rather than a given state's population. Its members are not elected, but appointed by the state government, and are in effect the delegates of the latter. The number of seats a state may have in the Bundesrat varies according to demographics, but each state has to cast its vote as a bloc vote. The Bundesrat may veto any bill that has been passed by the Bundestag, but only some bills (so called *Zustimmungsgesetze* or 'approval bills') require the explicit approval of the Bundesrat. At present, almost 60 percent of all bills count as approval bills. Vetoes on other bills may be overruled by the Bundestag. However, if the Bundesrat blocks a decision by a two-thirds majority, the Bundestag has to overturn this veto with an equivalent majority, even if a bill does not fall into the category of approval bills. Moreover, bills including changes to the constitution invariably require the support of a two-thirds majority of the Bundesrat.

Finally, a group of at least one third of the members of the German Bundestag may challenge any law that they think may conflict with the Basic Law before the constitutional court. This procedure is called 'abstract norm control'. In practice, most cases within this category are initiated by the opposition parties. Needless to say, this extra-parliamentary opposition instrument has a strong impact on the parliamentary decision making process. It clearly provides the opposition parties in parliament with another important and institutional resource. In fact, the mere threat of blocking a bill in the Bundesrat or invoking the Constitutional Court usually increase the willingness of governments to seriously consider the opposition's stance on a given legislative project.

One of the most remarkable achievements of the German model of opposition is the notably high amount of political and social integration of the opposition forces, which has been effectively secured even during extended terms of the same parties in office. A significant proportion of legislative 'key decisions' in the past decades emerged from intense negotiations between government and opposition, and included key components of both major parties' programmatic agenda.

There is ample evidence that the strong veto-powers of the opposition may very seriously limit the government's capacity to act-in fact to a degree which makes the government the hostage of the opposition.

### **1.6(C) A Parliamentary-Presidential Model of Political Opposition.**

The Parliamentary-Presidential model of opposition, a peculiar character, springs directly from the institutional structure of the so called 'semi-presidential system' of government. Semi-presidential systems are marked by a combination of the principle of parliamentary responsibility of the government (which characterizes the parliamentary democracies) and a directly elected president enjoying significant powers of office. If there is a prototype of semi-presidential democracy among the contemporary advanced democracies it is certainly France, if only because the creator of the term, Maurice Duverger, developed his conception of semi-presidential in the French context.

The complex institutional structure of semi-presidential systems leaves much room for competing conceptions of political opposition, especially during times of split party control of parliament and the government on the one hand and the office of president on the other (which the French call *cohabitation*). As Alain Peyrefitte has pointed out, the only interpretation of cohabitation acceptable to the founder of the Fifth French Republic and its first President, General Charles de Gaulle, was a '*cohabitation americaine*', in which a coherent executive (including the President, and the Prime Minister and his cabinet) would face a largely independent and potentially opposing National Assembly.

However, neither constitutional theory nor constitutional practice in France has built on this idea. There is now an unchallenged consensus that the minority parties in the National Assembly, rather than the legislature as a whole, represent the key opposition

actor. What distinguishes the parliamentary-presidential model of opposition from the British or the German model is the fact that during times of split party control of parliament, government and the presidency- the opposition function is performed by the parliamentary minority and the president. This notwithstanding, the basic logic of parliamentary government remains in force both during periods of 'unified government' and *cohabitation*. The latter feature distinguishes the semi-presidential type of government from the American separation of power system.

The French type of *parlementarisme rationalize* even minimizes the room for manoeuvre of the parliamentary majority towards 'its' government, it leaves precious little room for an influential parliamentary opposition. There is neither a permanent involvement of the opposition parties in the parliamentary agenda setting process, such as in Germany, nor any kind of compensation in the form of 'opposition days', as in Britain. Very much like in the British House of Commons, the members of the minority parties even lack the right to initiate most types of legislation. There are also few serious qualified majority requirements to pass particular important bills, which would provide strong parliamentary minorities in the National Assembly with a veto or co-governing potential. Also the veto power of the French senate has more in common with that one of the British House of Lords than with that of the German Bundesrat.

As to the constitutional veto-powers of the President, the following devices could be highlighted. First, the President's right to dissolve the National Assembly (which can be, however, applied only once a year). Secondly, the President can require that a bill he considers to be unconstitutional be scrutinized by the *conseil constitutionnel*. Thirdly, the President may, refuse to promulgate any bill and may instead send it back to parliament for further deliberation.

Although the opposition function is formally strengthened during periods or *cohabitation*, as then the parliamentary minority and the president represent the opposition, serious problems do persist.

#### **1.6(d) A Separation-of- Powers Model of Political Opposition.**

There are particular problem in discussing the phenomenon of legitimate political opposition in the United States. According to Nelson Polsby, political opposition in the

American political system is in fact 'ubiquitous'. From a strictly constitutional perspective the President, rather than Congress, would appear to be the 'nature' veto actor in the American political system. However, it is common to consider congress as the most important actor of institutionalised political opposition in the contemporary American political system.

The President may veto a bill for any reason. A presidential veto, which has to be applied within the days from the presentation of a bill, may be overridden by a two-third majority (of members being present) in both the Senate and the House. In contrast to very early holders of the presidency, all modern Presidents have considered the veto a legitimate weapon in the political confrontation with Congress. Another important difference to the early history of the presidential veto relates to the reactions of Congress. In contrast to late nineteenth century, it is now a rare occurrence that Congress overturns a presidential veto.

Actually, the dominant constitutionalized forms of political opposition in the American political system have, however, been on Congressional opposition to the presidency, rather than on manifestations of presidential opposition to Congress. There are various weapons of Congress to oppose towards the President and his administration, which include its strong powers in the legislative arena, the overview function of its powerful Committees as well as the Senate's important security function in the field of presidential nominations. Even the impeachment of the president, although constitutionally designed as a judicial instrument, has been judged as 'a legitimate expression of political opposition'.

According to K.C. Wheare, in the USA vis-à-vis the government there is numerous oppositions. With a two party system in the USA one party takes the presidency and the other party presents itself as an alternative. Both parties are united in reverence for the constitution yet there is no leader of Opposition. But in its place, there is plenty of opposition in the Congress to what the government proposes and does. Unlike Britain, Congressmen of both parties in the United States are free to vote against the presidential proposals and oppose his actions. Because of fundamental differences with the British system, existence of an official leader of opposition is constitutionally impossible in the USA.



The separation of powers system in USA has long been hailed both for its safeguards against autocratic and undemocratic leadership and its capacity for facilitating compromise.

#### **1.6(e) A Direct-Democratic Model of Opposition.**

The Swiss direct democratic model of opposition has managed to transform the bulk of social conflicts, which otherwise would become 'loud' opposition into an integrated or 'built-in' form of opposition.

Direct democratic instruments- which have to date rarely been identified as genuine devices of political opposition- are at the very centre of the Swiss political system, which combines individual aspects of parliamentary and presidential government into a highly specific collegial form of constitutional government. There is a long list of different direct democratic devices in Switzerland, in fact one of the most extensive ones to be found in the western world. The key instrument of direct democratic opposition in Switzerland could be seen in the optional referendum, which enables the Swiss citizens to prevent any bill passed by parliament from becoming law (introduced in 1874). To initiate a referendum, 50,000 signatures or the support of eight cantons (states), to be collected within 90 days, are required. A bill will only be enforced if it secures the support of a majority of the citizens taking part in the vote.

Historically, referendums were the institutional driving force behind the gradual co-optation of the major opposition parties into a dramatically oversized coalition government, which has become as much a hallmark of Swiss democracy as the direct democratic instruments themselves. Group that had the proven capacity to thwart the government aims by mobilizing public opposition against a projected measures were invited to join the federal council (the Swiss federal executive). Since 1959 the same four parties have controlled the executive and in fact not even the number of seats held by each party in the Federal Council, has ever changed since.

The formal integration of potential veto players that has marked the Swiss government-building process has been accompanied by more informal efforts to collude as many potential opposition forces as possible into an ad hoc coalition to carry a given measures. It is a well-established practice not only among the numerous smaller Swiss

Opposition parties, but also and even more so among the governing parties, to use the referendum threat as a strategic device to achieve their policy goals.

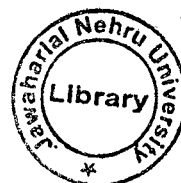
The correlation between the size of a parliamentary majority supporting a given bill and the likelihood that a referendum will be launched is quite strong. If parliamentary support for a given bill exceeds a two thirds majority, the probability that a referendum will be launched drops to below 50 percent. According to some scholars, there is a 'consistency deficit' at the level of the political elites. After a referendum has been called, the painstakingly negotiated elite compromise usually falls apart- a process to be facilitated by the lengthy two tier process of launching a referendum. In the run-up to a referendum the battle lines between the four governing parties and the many minor opposition parties usually get blurred (Helms 2004:22-54).

### **1.7 Opposition in Developing Societies**

A quite different, and somewhat opposite (from western liberal democratic system ) picture is observed in developing countries with regard to practicing democracy as well as the role of constitutional opposition in the politico – governmental process. Various developing countries did adopt the path of their colonial rulers in establishing their liberal democratic set up after their independence. The political establishment and institutional arrangements of the Western colonial powers became an ideal for these countries to achieve speedy modernization, stability, integration and development. On contrary, many of these countries have encountered a great many difficulties in practicing the western liberal democratic set up in a dissimilar environment.

Bangladesh, due to legacy of 200 years of British colonialism and 24 years of internal colonial rule of Pakistan , it is characterized by repression and absence of democratic politics. Bangladesh political parties are accustomed to indulging in extra – constitutional activities and often resort to agitational and destructive politics. These deviating tendencies have assisted in generating suspicion, mistrust, crookedness, negative criticism, and lack of efficacy among the politicians and parties of this country. Hence, the party in power hardly tolerate any opposition and the opposition employ its total energy to unseat the government and engages in those actions which can not be termed as constructive criticism against the ruling party.

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According to the political scientists, the political institutions of a country are inter-connected with the political culture it possesses. A political culture embedded with fundamental trustworthiness contributes to organizational strength and system stability. In Bangladesh the said factors constitute the root cause of the existence of a culture of hostility leading to fragile political institution building and lack of institutionalization and integrity in the polity. The charismatic leadership in this country could not rise also in overcoming the limiting factors or in strengthening the existing institutions for the practice of democratic politics. Personalization of power on the part of the leader severely weakened organizational capability and damaged the spoil system that is an incentive to win office. Thus the political parties in Bangladesh, lack significantly the qualities of adaptability, complexity, autonomy and coherence which are regarded by Huntington, as the most important prerequisites of institutionalization of a political party. (Huntington 1968: 408).

Owing to an overall weakness in the country's political institutions, the status of the bureaucratic apparatus gradually enhanced over time and was consolidated after the army's take over of state power, thus leaving no room for political parties to manage the state affairs. The highly ambitious soldier-turned-politicians succeeded in using the weakly organized and fragmented political parties as vehicles for civilianizing the army's authoritarian rule and recruiting support for the military leaders. In such an arrangement, politicians were relegated to the background, and the military and civil bureaucrats emerged as the governing elite and key elements in the political system.

Bangladesh, after its independence, started with Westminster type of parliamentary democracy. But like other developing countries, the practice of democracy faced various constraining factors and the country was thrown under army rule and depredation of authoritarianism. However, ultimately the anti-autocratic movement led by the opposition parties and mass upsurge of 1990 paved the way for reestablishing parliamentary democratic set up in the country in 1991. In post 1991 period, the Jatiya Sangsad (parliament) of Bangladesh has been in dysfunctional position, mainly because of the negative role played by the 'opposition parties'. The opposition parties are having two characteristic roles – hartals and boycotting parliament. The partial role of the

Speaker of parliament, in the favour of the Treasury bench is also responsible for the such role of the opposition parties. So, the role of opposition parties and the speaker is completely inconsistent with democratic parliamentary practice.

**CHAPTER II**

**POLITICAL PARTIES AND DEMOCRACY IN  
BANGLADESH**

Political party has been defined by Neumann as the articulate organization of society's active political agents, those who are concerned with the control of governmental power and who compete for popular support with another group or groups holding divergent views. As such, it is the great intermediary which links social forces and ideologies to official governmental institutions and relates them to political action within the larger political community. What is common to all political parties is, therefore, partnership of individuals in a particular organization, taking part in electoral contests and participation in the decision-making process, or at best the attempt at, and a chance for, such a mobilization of action. This ever-present readiness alone, Neumann argues, makes them political in a genuine sense, for only in their fight for control and in their conscious influence on political forces, do parties gain meaning and importance. Thus, only political parties openly claim to link the general public to political power by placing representatives of their organizations in positions where they may exercise that power on behalf of that public.

Alternative formulations which follow Neumann's orientation are provided by Lawson who defines the party as an agency 'for forging links between citizens and policy makers', and Eldersveld who defines it as a 'structural system seeking to translate or convert or to be converted by social and economic interests into political power directly'. According to Eldersveld, power is characterized by a 'reciprocal deference structure' due to the party's need to 'cope with widely varying local milli of opinion, tradition and social structure... (that) encourages the recognition and acceptance of local leadership, local strategy, and local power'. Hence, the political party in this sense exists as an intermediary group representing multiple social interests for the achievements of direct control over government (Maor 1995:5-16).

## **2.1 Meaning and Nature of a Political Party: Liberal versus Marxist Interpretations**

There is a difference of approach to political party between Liberal and Marxist view, which can be elaborated separately as below:

### *2.1(a) Liberal View*

The meaning, nature and role of the political party are still a matter of serious debate. While the liberals appreciate the existence and role of political parties as the agencies of organized public opinion with the help of which a political system operates. On the other hand, the Marxists examine it within the framework of class antagonism. Not only this, divergence of opinion may be discovered even within the camp of the liberals. While the English, French and Italian writers lay emphasis on the factors of 'principles' on which a political party is organized and functions, the typical American view is to treat a political party just like a machine or a platform for taking part in the struggle for power on democratic lines.

According to Edmund Burke (typical English view), a political party, "is a body of men United for promoting the national interest on some particular principles in which they are all agreed". Reiterating the same idea, Disraeli described political party as "a group of men banded together to pursue certain principles". Like wise, Benjamin constant said that a party "is a group of men professing the same political doctrine". However, this view is not shared by a majority of the leading American writers who deliberately avoid reference to the sanctity of 'principles' and treat political party as an 'instrument' for taking part in the struggle for power. For instance, a leading writer like Schattschneider ridicules the English notion as symbolized by Burke. He uses a new phraseology by observing that a political party "is first of all an organized attempt to get power, but it is equally just to say that parties are held together by the cohesive power or public plunder".

American notion of a political party is regarded as a vote catching machine or an agency to mobilize people's support for a candidate at the polls, or an instrument for the aggregation of interests that demand their vociferous articulation. Such a notion of a political party makes it hardly distinguishable from a pressure or interest group. A 'specific' interest may constitute the foundation of a political party. Hence, the difference between or among political parties may be sought on the basis of different specific interests. This is why, Dean and Schuman observe that political parties have become

essentially political instructions 'to implement the objectives of interest groups'. Crothy has interpreted in similar way as- a political party is a formally organized group that performs the functions of educating the public- that recruits and promotes individuals for public office, and that provides a comprehensive linkage function between the public and governmental decision-makers. It is distinguished from other groups by its dedication to influencing policy making on a broad scale, preferably by controlling government and by its acceptance of institutionalized rules of electoral conduct more specifically capturing public office through peaceful means. As political parties play a very crucial role in the working of a democratic system a workable definition of the term finds its succinct manifestation in its past in the struggle for power through the battle of the ballot box. As Epstein treats political party as 'any group seeking votes under a recognized label'. Similarly Riggs also takes a structural view of the role of a political party and then identifies it with 'any organization which nominates candidates for elections to an elected assembly'.

The whole notion of a political party, as conceived and developed mainly by the American political theorists is based on the classical affirmation of Schumpeter that a party is not a group of men who intend to promote public welfare upon some principles on which they are all agreed (as said by Burke), rather it 'is a group whose members propose to act in concert in the competitive struggle for political power'(La Palombara and Weiner 1969:3-21).

From the aforesaid discussion, following essential features of a political party may be earmarked so as to offer a comprehensive meaning of this term:

- A political party is not a loosely knit organization of some persons. It is required that the members of a political party must be organized on some specific principles or interests in a tight manner so that the party may be distinguished from any oligarchic entity.
- There must be close and intimate relationship among all members of a party. An intermittent relationship between the 'lords' and the 'vassals' does not constitute a party in this sense.



- There must be a clear line of distinction between ‘principles’ and ‘personalities’. Despite the weighty influences of the personalities of a few leaders, the life of the party must not depend upon the life of its members.
- The leaders of a party must endeavour and struggle for maximizing their base of popular support and legitimizing the circle of the decision-makers.
- In the end, a party must adopt constitutional means for the seizure of power so as to implement its policies and programmes, or to protect and promote some specific interests.

### **2.1(b) Marxist View**

The Marxist view of a political party and its role is quite different from the above liberal view. The liberal emphasis on party as a ‘doctrine’ has been replaced by the idea of a party as a ‘class’ that will fight for inaugurating a new era culminating in the phase of ‘communism’.

Lenin in course of making Marxism update opines that the proletariat has no weapon in the struggle for power except organization. constantly pushed down to the depths of complete poverty, the proletariat can and will inevitably become an unconquerable force only as a result of this: that its ideological union by means of the principles of Marxism is strengthened by the material union of an organization, holding together millions of toilers in the army of the working class’.

If Marx said that the fact of exploitation at the hands of bourgeoisie would force the working class to develop the necessary ‘consciousness’ that would act at the force to take them to the path of a revolution, Lenin modified the idea by adding that an organization of the proletariat would play a crucial part in arousing class consciousness and thereby crating a revolution. In this way, the communist party “becomes a staff organization in the struggle of the proletarian class for power and Marxism is the creed that holds it together, the guide of its action, and the subject-matter by which it extends the circle of class-consciousness. Ideal union through the principles of Marxism and

material union through rigid organization and discipline were the two foundation stones on which, from the beginning of his career, Lenin proposed to build a revolutionary movement”.

Communist Party, according to Lenin is the ‘vanguard of the revolution’ for the working class. According to the congress of communist international (in 1920), “The Communist Party is created by means of the selection of the best, most class-conscious, most self-sacrificing and far-sighted workers... The communist party is the lever of political organization, with the help of which the more progressive part of the working class directs on the right path the whole mass of the proletariat and the semi-proletariat along the right road”.

Thus, a political party is an instrument whereby the working class develops class consciousness so as to overthrow the bourgeois order. Actually the theory of party, according to Lenin, has more formidable characteristics. The party is not only the ‘vanguard’ of the working class, it alone is the custodian of all power and any opposition to it is for this reason, visited by several punishments. The communist party stands on the principle of ‘democratic centralism’, which means two things. First, the party is a hierarchy in which members of the higher ranks are elected by those of the lower ranks. Moreover, all units have inter-party democracy whereby the members may discuss and debate matters at their organizational level and also elect and remove their office bearers. Second, the lower organs are bound to follow the decrees given by the higher unit with the result that power is centered at the top. A very small band of the arch-leader and his most trusted followers constitute a clique that holds unlimited and absolute power. However, it is criticized that the communist type organization is, in fact, a structure of vertical centralism. Its secret is to sever horizontal communication lines, and especially descending ones. No democratic party has been able, or shown as yet the desire, to go that far.

According to Lenin, the emphasis is not only on the leader or his most trusted followers; it also covers the position of the ‘militants’. Hence, an ‘inner circle’ becomes

everything what can be identified with the elite of communist party. To create a 'class of professional revolutionaries' is equivalent to creating a 'class of professional leaders of revolutionary parties', an inner circle which stirs up the masses and which is founded upon the official duties performed within the party, it is equivalent to creating a bureaucracy, which is to say an oligarchy. If the posts for party's permanent officials were strictly elective, bureaucracy could coincide with democracy. But this is not so and cannot be so: the militants who are capable of filling a permanent position and willing to do so are not very numerous; the leaders of the party are anxious to keep close control of them so as to be certain of their technical ability and of their political trust worthiness; the leadership is largely made up of permanent officials already in office. So, there is born an authentic oligarchy which exercises power, retains it, and transmits it by means of co-option. (Sartori 1976:96-108)

## **2.2 Functions of Political Party in Democracy**

There is an intimate relationship of political parties with democracy. The formation of free and competitive political parties is an integral part of the process of democratization in modern times. The emergence of effectively operating political parties and the role they play in the overall process of government in modern society may be understood as a major feature of the consolidation and operation of democracy. Though the electoral process the party system determines the possibility and level of citizen participation; parties in electoral and legislative arenas exercise a major influence on the nature and stability of political leadership and the dynamics of the party system can have an important impact on the prospects for subsequent control of social turmoil and political violence. Not so much replacing or appearing to substitute for the institutions of civil society, political parties, may more concretely be seen as belonging neither to civil society nor to the state. They are rather the essential link between the two, playing the role of holding the major components of the body politics together.

The actual functions performed by political parties, the role they play in relation to civil society, and the concrete nature of their contribution to the democratic

order remain somewhat uncertain. The notion of function itself is quite indistinct. Therefore, while many observers seem to experience few difficulties in itemizing the diverse aspects of the role which parties perform in a political system, it is by no means always clear if specific parties actually live up to these expectations in any particular situation.

It is not difficult, however, to formulate a broad view of party activities and functions they perform in a democracy, yet the same view is by no means shared by every observer. As according to Alan Ball, one of the most important functions of parties is that of “uniting, simplifying and establishing the political process. Political parties tend to provide the highest common denominator. They bring together sectional interests, overcome geographical interests, and provide coherence to sometimes diverse government structures (Ball 1977:75).

On the basis of King’s description, a comprehension list of functions of political parties can be drawn as following:

- Structure the vote in a modern democracy and often carryout the process of broader opinion structuring;
- Integrate citizens into the broader community and mobilize the masses for participation in the political process- from the simple activity of voting to more complex and dedicated forms of behaviour;
- Facilitate the recruitment of political leaders;
- Organize government;
- Form public policy, primarily by influencing the content of public thought and discussion, by formulating programmes which party leaders then feel constrained to implement once elected to office, or by brining pressure on the incumbent government and
- Aggregate interest – a somewhat uncertain process- they may range from activity which simply takes note of social interests to that of restructuring behaviour designed to achieve the objectives they give rise to. (King 1974:302-03).

Whereas, S. Neumann ascribes a somewhat more active role to political parties. According to him, in less developed countries and particularly in fluid conditions of the post-communists societies, the party play an important role in managing the “chaotic public will”, transforming the private citizen into a ‘political animal’, developing links between government and public opinion, and electing political leaders (Neuman 1969:71-73).

### **2.3 Political Parties in Bangladesh**

In Bangladesh, multiparty system exists, where the number of political parties is in hundreds. However, in Bangladesh all political parties have not been built up in a similar way. Some of them have emerged from the freedom movement of the nation, some from the military regimes, some with the motive of the social concern and where as some to protect particular ideology.

The main characteristic of Bangladesh politics has been the drive towards the concentration of power in a single party headed by a strong executive, which was started just after the independence of the nation by the first government formed by Awami League (AL) led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and this party was considered as a party which brought independence to the nation. In 1975, however, when the Awami League despite having huge mandate of people failed to govern the nation, which led to form a monolithic party by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, known as Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (BAKSAL). Thereafter, military ruler General Zia-ur-Rahman came and he consolidated his military dictatorship and formed Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Further, General Ershad, again a military ruler, followed the party of previous military ruler in forming political party and formed Jatiya Party (JP). Apart from these major political parties several others parties contribute in the nation’s politics. In 1996, it was estimated, according to the Election Commission of Bangladesh that there were 119 different political parties and their alliances available there. All these political parties may be grouped in Islamic, leftist, workers, student wings, etc.

The oldest among Islamic parties is Muslim League, which was established in 1906 as All India Muslim League, which reemerged during 1980s. Another important Islamic party is Jamaat-e-Islami, the largest and most influential Islamic party. The several other Islamic parties are –Islamic Oikyo Jote, Central National Mohammedan Association, Mohammedan Literary Society, Bangladesh Khilafat Andolan etc. The left parties in Bangladesh has remained numerically small and faced internal dissension. However, Awami League’s socialist policies of early 1970s brought the small Bangladesh Communist Party, with its pro-Soviet tendencies. Another, left party Jatiyo Samajtantrik Dal, emerged in the late 1980s. Apart from these, other left parties in Bangladesh are-- Jatiyo Samajtantrik Dal (Siraj) and Jatiyo Samajtantrik Dal (INU), (which were factions of Jatiyo Samajtantrik Dal); Sramik Krishak Samajwadi Dal; Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal, and Workers Party etc. In the late 1980s Sramik Karmachari Oikya Parishad, an organisation of sixteen workers federations was the most important political organ among Bangladeshi workers, which represented almost the entire labour front. There are also student wings of several political parties like- Bangladesh Nationalist Party’s Chhatro Dal, Jatiya Party’s Jatiya Chhatro Samaj and Jatiyo Samajtantrik Dal (Inu)’s students’ league etc.

At present the main political parties in Bangladesh are- Awami League (AL) of Sheikh Hasina; Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) of Khaleda Zia; Bangladesh Communist Party led by Saifuddin Ahmed Manik; the Islamic Oikya Jote of Mufit Fazlul Haq Amini; the Jammata-e-Islami led by Motiur Rahman Nizami; the Jatiyo Party (Ershad faction) with Hussain Mohammad Ershad as leader and the Jatiyo Party (Manzur faction) led by Naziur Rahman Manzur.

#### **2.4 Political Parties and their Principles**

A general trend is founding party politics of Bangladesh, that all parties despite adopting their policies according to their base of support, size and strength, they follow only one rule i.e., if they are in the opposition, they keep opposing the policies

enacted by the ruling party whether they are good or bad; and if they are in power, they adopt same policies which they were opposing earlier.

However, the political parties in Bangladesh are based upon some principles which are shown by them in their election manifestos. The two major political parties AL and BNP having their fundamental principles as below:

AL has following fundamental principles-

- ❖ Bengali Nationalism,
- ❖ Socialism,
- ❖ Secularism and
- ❖ Democracy.

The party later has had an economic policy shift and now supports free market economy. Whereas BNP has following fundamental principles for guiding its course-

- ❖ A society based on justice and freedom from exploitation;
- ❖ Multi-party democracy,
- ❖ Production oriented politics,
- ❖ People as source of power,
- ❖ Sovereignty,
- ❖ Bangladeshi Nationalism,
- ❖ Independent foreign policy,
- ❖ Self-reliance.

Besides the above two parties, there is another important party which is Jamaat-e-islami; an ideological party that advocates for greater role of Islam in public life. The main objective of Jamaat is the establishment of Deen or Islamic social order through ethical, peaceful, constructive, democratic and constitutional means.

## **2.5 Role of Political Parties in Bangladesh**

In Bengal initial attempts at political mobilization passed through the phases of popular clubs, philosophical societies something like the famous tottobodhini sabhas of 1840s and 1850s, associated groups based on economic interests (associations of zamindars, for instance), leading eventually to the formation of 'political party'. The latter found its first expression in the founding of Indian National Congress in 1885, and then the creation of Indian Muslim League in 1906. In both these cases, Bengalese leaders played a prominent organizing role. Of course people of Bangladesh have come a long way since 1885 or 1906, having gone first through the tumultuous experience of the partition of the Indian sub-continent in 1947 and then of the war of liberation in 1971.

On the first occasion, Muslim League played the lead role as a party delivering "the Pakistan Dream" to the Bengalese peasants (predominantly of Muslim origin) who wanted to be free from the oppression of a sentier class of upper caste Hindus. Conflict of economic interests between the Hindus and the Muslim counterparts of the emerging class of Bengali bhadraloks, which evolved around the issue of access to government jobs and business, also played an important role in the campaign for Pakistan. On the second occasion, it was Awami League who spearheaded the struggle for the rule of autonomy the key objective of which was to safeguard the cultural, economic and political rights of the Bengalese people (this time defined, irrespective of religious and caste status) within the framework of United Pakistan. The dream of 'golden Bengal' was the left-motif of the struggle for autonomy which eventually climaxed in a nine month long bloody war of independence waged against the military establishment of Pakistan. (Padgaonkar 1997:61)

The role of several political parties in Bangladesh since independence to the present phase can be assessed into following three periods of times-

- a) Political Parties during 1971-75;
- b) Political Parties during 1975-90; and
- c) Political Parties after 1990.



Each period can be elaborated separately as follows:-

### **2.5 (a) Political Parties during 1971-75**

After the birth of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the main leader of the liberation movement, issued a provisional constitutional order for changing the political system into parliamentary form and then became Prime Minister. Provincial and national assemblies were amalgamated into one body called the constituent assembly. Freedom of press and speech and other fundamental rights were reinstated, but the right wing parties- Jammāt-e-Islami, the several factions of Muslim league, the Pakistan democratic party, the Nizam-e-Islam and the Jamiat-e-Ulama-e-Islam- which had collaboration with Pakistan army during the liberation war, were banned. However, the leftist group and parties, which were all united for a single cause during the liberation war, started pursuing their own ideological line after 1971. The pro-Moscow National Awami Party (NAP-M) toed the ruling AL line, but the pro-Chinese National Awami Party (NAP-B) and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) challenged the AL for its suppression of the oppositions.

The other underground leftist parties, manifesting differences in their ideological beliefs, agreed that the war of independence left the revolution unfinished. The AL's clasp on the Bangladeshi political system was increasing day by day, where leftist parties did not only refused to accept the AL's rule but looked upon it as a puppet to government of India. Leftist revolutionary activities increased at an alarming rate after liberation. Secret political killings, smuggling, armed robberies, looting of banks and shops and attacks on police stations became frequent during 1973-74, especially before and during the 1973 parliamentary elections (Akhtar 2001:523-53). On the other hand, the JSD claimed that AL activists killed about 60,000 and arrested about 86,000 of its political workers in the two years following independence.

The ruling party AL, NAP-M and the communist party of Bangladesh jointly formed Gono Oikko Jote to publicize the four state principles and to launch a united movement against the activists of 'anti-socials'. The committees of this alliance, which

were formed at the national and district levels, organized seminars to mobilize public opinion against the revolutionary activities, but were not totally successful as the mass of the public were dissatisfied with the performance of the regime because of the high price of the basic commodities as well as the regime's failure to control law and order, smuggling and widespread corruption. However, by December 1974, the extent of corruption, smuggling, anti-social activities and political violence together was such that Mujib had no option, other than declaring a state of emergency.

The ruling party (AL) fully exploited the weakness of the opposition in parliament and successfully established the tyranny of the majority. In the Jatiya Sangsad creating one party rule by Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (BAKSAL), this banned all political parties. This step proved itself as the final nail of the coffin and propelled a group of young military officers collaborating with some right wing AL leaders to take over power in a bloody coup in 15<sup>th</sup> August 1975. On November 3, 1975 a counter coup occurred and four days later another counter coup took place which brought Major Gen. Zia-ur-Rahman as the military ruler of the country.

The several political parties which took part in Jatiya Sangsad Election, 1973 are:

**Table: 2.1**

**I Jatiya Sangsad Election, 1973**

<b>Political Party*</b>	<b>Seats Won</b>
BAL	293
JSD	1
BJL	1
Independents	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>

Source: <http://elive.matamat.com/sangsad.php>

(\*Parties which contested elections but did not receive any seats are not included in the list of the table.)

**2.5(b) Political Parties during 1975-90**

In Bangladesh, this period of almost 15 years, was ruled by the two military rulers- Zia-ur-Rahman and H.M. Ershad, they ruled for 1975-81 and 1982-90

respectively. These two military rulers did follow a similar strategy in civilization their regimes and used referenda, presidential and parliamentary elections in the process of legitimizing their rule, as well as establishing their own political parties. However, all the seven elections held under these two military regimes were characterized by electoral fraud.

Military Gen. Zia-ur-Rahman took his presidency from A.S.M.Sayem by undemocratic means, but he did have the remarkable talent of feeling the pulse of the people. He replaced Mujib's one party system by multiparty political framework. However, Zia after strengthening his own party (BNP) allowed the re-activation of other parties, while on the other hand Ershad was unwilling to lift restrictions upon party activities because of the lack of a support base for his own party (Jatiya Party). Zia did comparatively better than the Ershad in using elections as a tool to legitimize their rules and was successful in making the opposition participation in these elections. His village based politics and rural mobilization politics helped his party gain support at the local level. Zia's tactics in using the military and bureaucracy and splitting opposition parties and the exploitation of pro-Islamic and anti-Indian sentiments of the people served his political purpose very effectively (Akhtar 2001:137-38). His rule thus got legitimacy.

On the other hand, Gen. Ershad was unable to achieve the same degree of legitimacy, although his party (JP) ruled the country for almost nine years. The opposition parties and alliances decided not to participate in elections under his martial law regime. The elections became an absolute farce and a game of capturing election booths by the musclemen of the ruling party, who had no trouble in establishing their dominance in the absence of the two major alliances. The status of elections as a crucial democratic institution was badly damaged by Ershad. The opposition could not campaign freely. The Upzila (local council) ensured administrative support for the regime that helped him to continue in power. The degree of violence and intimidation were moderate in elections organized by the Zia (BNP) regime but it was high in elections under Ershad (JP).

However, the bureaucracy contributed towards easy victories for the ruling parties in both the regimes. Use of physical force and violence became so common that honest and peace-loving people absented themselves from political activities. Hence, the

opposition's political parties had not enough space to play a significant role during military rule, where the ruling parties acted as almighty body in the same period.

The following tables show the election results during both the military regimes. The ruling party (i.e., military) has always won with such a huge difference, which is not seen generally in a normal democracy, as it is shown in the tables below,

**Table 2.2**

**II. Jatiya Sangsad Election, 1979**

<b>Political Party</b>	<b>Seats Won</b>
BNP	207
BAL (Malek)	39
BAL (Mijan)	2
BML-IDL (alliance)	20
JSD	8
NAP (Muzaffar)	1
BGF	2
BSD	1
BJL	2
BGA	1
JEP	1
Independents	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>

Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bangladeshi\\_general\\_election%2c\\_1979](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bangladeshi_general_election%2c_1979)

**Table 2.3****III Jatiya Sangsad Elections, 1986**

Political Parties	Seats won
JP	153
BAL (Hasina)	76
JIB	10
BML	4
CPB	5
NAP (M)	2
NAP (B)	5
BAKSAL	3
BWP	3
JSD(Siraj)	3
Independents	32
<b>Total</b>	<b>296</b>

Source: [http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/BANGLADESH\\_1986\\_E.PDF](http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/BANGLADESH_1986_E.PDF)

(A major party—the BNP did not take part in this election)

**Table: 2.4****IV Jatiya Sangsad Elections, 1988**

Political Parties	Number of seats won
JP	251
COP	19
J S D(Siraj)	3
Freedom Party	2
Independents	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>

Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bangladeshi\\_general\\_election%2c\\_1988](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bangladeshi_general_election%2c_1988)

(Two major parties- AL and BNP boycotted this election)

### 2.5(c) Political Parties after 1990

After the restoration of democracy in Bangladesh, three parliamentary elections have been held there in 1991, 1996, and in 2001. the performance of different political parties in these parliamentary elections can be seen in following tables.

Table: 2.5

#### V Jatiya Sangsad Elections, 1991

Political Parties	Number of seats won
BNP	140
AL	88
JP	35
JIB	18
CPB	5
BAKSAL	5
NAP(Muzzafar)	1
GP (GP)	1
BWP	1
JSD(Siraj)	1
IOJ	1
NDP	1
Independents	3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>300</b>

Source: [http://www.ipu.org/parline\\_e/reports/arc/2003\\_91.htm](http://www.ipu.org/parline_e/reports/arc/2003_91.htm)

**Table: 2.6**

**VI Jatiya Sangsad Election, February 1996**

<b>Political Parties</b>	<b>Seats won</b>
BNP	289
Freedom Party	1
Independents	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>

Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bangladeshi\\_general\\_election%2c\\_February\\_1996](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bangladeshi_general_election%2c_February_1996)

(All the major opposition parties including the AL, JP, and JIB boycotted this election on the issue of Care Taker Government)

**Table: 2.7**

**VII Jatiya Sangsad Election, June 1996**

<b>Political Parties</b>	<b>Seats won</b>
BAL	146
BNP	116
JP	32
JIB	3
JSD (Rab)	1
IOJ	1
Independents	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>

Source: <http://204.200.210.114/index.php?id=1996Election>

**Table: 2.8**

**VIII Jatiya Sangsad Election, 2001**

<b>Political Parties</b>	<b>Number of seats won</b>
BNP	193
AL	62
Jama'at	17
IOJF	14
Independents	6
JP(N)	4
IOJ	2
JP (M)	1
KSJL	1
Total	300

Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bangladesh\\_general\\_election%2c\\_2001](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bangladesh_general_election%2c_2001)

**2.6 Role of Political Parties after restoration of Democracy**

The political parties in Bangladesh after the parliamentary elections of 1991 have been changing their role in the new political climate, which can be analysed as follows.

**2.6(a) End of the Presidential System**

In 1991 parliamentary elections BNP government formed led by Begum Khalida Zia. While Begum Zia's regime was making a good progress in the economic front with an efficient finance minister at the helm, her mentors in the political front were making mistakes one after another. It was mainly due to the BNP's lack of experience on parliamentary practices since the party was close to the presidential form of government during General Zia's regime. The BNP in 1991 was not only ill equipped for the newly found parliamentary system in Bangladesh but also refused to adapt quickly to such a system. Although Begum Zia was a Prime Minister, she followed closely a presidential



style of governance. This attitude was prevailing in the BNP at large until the party was unseated in 1996 parliamentary election (Hossain, 2001:63-64)

#### **2.6(b) Confrontational Politics between Ruling Party and the Opposition Parties**

In post 1991, the political milieu has not been very much democracy friendly. The basic cause is the opposition's non-cooperating attitude. The absenteeism of opposition has created a record in the history of parliamentary democracy. The Treasury bench has been frustrated in its attempt to draw the opposition in parliament. However, the opposition lawmakers are keeping their membership alive by making token presence in every 90 days while the parliament was in session. Though BNP had started this trend, now a day it has become a common strategy used by opposition parties. There have been a few instances where opposition has cooperated with the ruling party.

#### **2.6(c) Street Politics and Hartalotics**

A serious deficiency in the development of parliamentary democracy in Bangladesh is that the top agenda of the opposition party is simply to unseat the government without any well explained issue or policy. The opposition party would prefer not bringing vote of confidence motion against the government on the floor of the parliament but bringing out demonstrations on streets. Much of the political protests take there the shape of hartals, bandhs, traffic blockades and even organized violence against political opponents and vulnerable sections of the population. The removal of Ershad in 1990 and annulment of Begum Khaleda's electoral farce in 1996 through 'street power' enhanced the extra- parliamentary protest actions (Dutta 2004:32&52).

The politics of calling strikes (hartalotics) has become a regular strategy of opposition parties. The calling of a strike called by the opposition political parties aim at paralyzing not only the functioning of the administrative machinery of the government but also the disruption of the commercial activities of the private sector and non-attendance of the educational institutions.

#### **2.6(d) Unfair Elections with Violence and Corruption**

Among the political parties, violence and corruption have become the tools. The Magura II constituency by election in March 1994 is an example of this tendency. According to the report, both the ruling party and opposition parties were engaged in violent action in this election. During the 1996 parliamentary election opposition boycotted the elections under ruling BNP's government and demanded for election under NCG (Non-party Caretaker Government). BNP rejected this demand and consequently the election, despite all precautions was held amid widespread violence. During the campaign, anti-election violence spread all over the country. Bomb blasts, violent street demonstrations, clashes between pro and anti election activists and strikes became almost an everyday event.

#### **2.6(e) Less Issue Based Politics**

In Bangladesh a very bad tendency evolved as issueless politics. Both the ruling and opposition parties prefer not to work for some issue but to simply oppose each other without any issue or policy. Instead of this they use the tactics of mudslinging on each other. One exception of it, is AKM Babrudoja defeated from BNP, who led a third front for issue based politics.

#### **2.6(f) Islamic Politics**

As Mujib made tentative moves in this direction shortly before his assassination, islamisation started support and momentum in Bangladesh. While nationalism, formed the core of the BNP, a later day version of the Muslim League, the country's gradual shift towards religious nationalism, compelled even secular Awami League to mellow down its position vis-à-vis religious influence upon politics. (Dutta 2004:167)

In 1976 the BNP abolished secularism which was a coordinate feature of 1972 constitution. And in 1988 the JP formally introduced Islam as a state religion. It is the AL which has traveled a great distance away from the original secular spirit of the constitution.

To enhance its appeal, it virtually stopped referring to secularism and preferred instead to speak about 'non-communalism'. It has also made a more and more extensive use of Islamic symbols and idioms in its public utterances. (Padgoankar 1997:64-65) A

weak opposition often had taken shelter under unholy alliance. The BNP during 1996-2001, when it was in opposition formed an alliance with a fundamentalist group like Islamic Oikkyo Jote (IOJ). The islamisation of the three major parties served to stall the growth of Jamaat and the extremist 'fundamentalist' forces. For the benefit of political gains political parties are using Islam as the trump card and even the divisive line separating those who supported liberation and those who collaborated with the Pakistani army is also blurring day by day.

#### **2.6(g) Politics of Minority**

As Bangladesh is an Islamic country and Islamic fundamentalism has spread during the last two decades. (Sengupta eds. 2003:125). In this country non-Muslim population is being treated as secondary citizens. In recent years, systematic violence was perpetrated against the minorities after the October 2001 elections as they were taken as supporters of Awami League. (Kumar 2003; 85). The widespread barbaric acts of violence against religious minorities, which started before the October 2001 election in Bangladesh had gained unprecedented momentum immediately after the BNP led four party coalitions, still continue unabated. Though it is supposed to be the pro-minorities party, now a day it is also playing safe in this regard. The minorities, though still owing allegiance to the AL in overwhelming numbers, have begun continuously to support the other formations as well. But minorities could nevertheless be more and more on the defensive if the islamisation process continues unchecked.

#### **2.6(h) Politics over Foreign Policy towards India**

AL as the freedom movement party has always been pro-Indian, where BNP is supposed to be not so much India friendly. BNP has always been opposing renewal of the treaty of friendship, cooperation and peace with India which was conducted in 1972 during AL government.

#### **2.6(i) Stabilizing the Political System**

In post 1990 era a stability in the political system of Bangladesh could be seen. The credit definitely goes to the political parties. Even in a situation like 1996, where it was seeming that the constitutional continuity is about to break, as the opposition was

boycotting the parliamentary elections in support of their demand for election under NCG. But the ruling BNP however conducted the election without them which was not accepted by opposition parties. Then the government had only one option of passing the required constitutional amendment bill in new parliament with two third majority. The government through the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment of the constitution made the necessary constitutional changes for an NCG to oversee all future parliamentary elections, which have been an appropriate example of democratic system.

In concluding observation it can be said that the political parties in Bangladesh are moving towards the path of democracy, but still there are the loopholes in the road map which seeks to be repaired. Major political parties are lacking internal democracy. The three major political parties AL, BNP and JP draw their substance from the individuals who head them, their all activities stem from the cult of the leader. So the 'iron law of oligarchy' can be clearly seen in the political system of Bangladesh, due to the major political parties.

Hartal politics is not only expensive political strategy which the country just can not afford, but also a cruelty to the average citizens. There are also some other problems with the political parties, i.e., the military as an institution is a determinant factor in Bangladesh politics. Though there is democracy in the country, but mindset of the people is yet to be changed. The ruling party expects the bureaucrats to serve its interests at the cost of the interest of the country. Though media is free, there are instances which show manipulations of media by the ruling party. The less issue-based politics, Islamic politics, confrontational politics and others are some problems with the political parties.

Well, now the political parties must realize that the core issues like good governance, transparency and accountability of the authorities, corruption free society, population control, poverty elimination and environment degradation should be handled at first. The party in power must ensure that to establish a healthy opposition, it must provide a fair share to the opposition parties in the media. If it is implemented, the political parties will not take recourse to calling hartals.

It is good sign that the people participation in elections has been increased with every election. The political parties still need to increase their interactions with people and civil society. Within the political parties, the internal democracy is also required. Violence, corruption and use of unfair means in elections by political parties must be stopped, as these are the obstacle in the path of democracy.

## CHAPTER III

### OPPOSITION IN BANGLADESH : EVOLUTION AND NATURE

Since beginning of Pakistan rule till the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971, all political movements organized by the people of East Pakistan had a democratic connotation. Movements like language movement of 1952, which was organized to established fundamental democratic rights of the people over their own language, culture and tradition. As a result the United Front, formed by the vernacular elites of East Bengal in 1954 against the ruling Muslim league, became victorious with its popular 21- point election manifestos which presaged latter political movements in this country. Out of the 21- points, 7 -points dealt directly with the working of parliamentary democracy in East Bengal (Ahamed 1992:1). later the six point movement of 1966 was organized with greater vigour to install democratic set up in the country.

Ultimately, this movement was transformed into a national movement of the people of this land. Further, this six point programme was increased to an eleven point demand in order to make it more mass oriented and attract the workers and peasants in general subsequently it became the focus of the popular demand in the then East Pakistan and inspired the people for more outrageous movements. The magnitude and multitude of people's uprising toppled the autocratic rule and resulted in the downfall of field Marshal Ayub Khan in 1969. As a champion of rights and interests of the Bengalis the major Bengalis opposition party in Pakistan, the Awami League, contested the general election of 1970 with the pledge of regional autonomy and democracy. The outstanding consensus of the Bengalis and their strong determination to achieve their demands proved irresistible, as in 1970 election the Awami League won a land slide victory in East Pakistan. The West Pakistani rulers rejected the people's verdict expressed in 1970 elections through military action followed the massacre and genocide in East Pakistan, which led to the disintegration of United Pakistan and the birth of sovereign and independent Bangladesh on December 16,1971.

After the independence of Bangladesh and till the framing of the constitution in December 1972, the proclamation of independence, as adopted on April 10,1971, remained the source of all authority and the legal basis of all actions of the government. In order to be workable in a typical situation, the proclamation provisionally made the

governmental system presidential with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the all powerful president and his absence, the government -in- exile led by the Vice-President was authorized to manage the affairs. A parliamentary system of government replaced the revolutionary government immediately after the triumphant return of sheikh Mujib from prison of Pakistan on January 10,1972. Accordingly, sheikh Mujib stepped down from the presidency and became the Prime Minister of the Republic and Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury was selected as the country's President.

In order to facilitate the framing of democratic constitution for Bangladesh, sheikh Mujib took prompt steps and promulgated, the presidential order on March 23, 1972. This order provided for the establishment of a Constituent Assembly comprising the members elected in 1970 from East Pakistan's National Assembly and East Pakistan's Provincial Assembly. The Constituent Assembly was given the task of framing the long cherished democratic constitution of a sovereign state. On November 4, 1972, the Constituent Assembly adopted a constitution for the country which came into effect from December 16, 1972. The high ideals of nationalism, socialism, democracy and secularism were included in the preamble of the constitution as the fundamental principles of the state.

### **3.1 Evolution of opposition**

Just after independence in Bangladesh, the ventilation of opposing views and political controversy were not uncommon there. Controversy arise with regard to the formation of the constituent assembly which was composed of the members elected for national assembly and provincial assembly of the United Pakistan. The opposing forces opined that with the creation of independent Bangladesh, the election became 'infructuos' and similarly the elected represented were turned into 'functus officio' and thus under the changed perspectives it would be imperative to frame a constitution for the nation by a new constituent assembly. Similarly, arguments were also raised regarding the legality of the actions of Awami league during the liberation war, and its formation of government in the post independence period.



Thus after the emergence of sovereign Bangladesh the Awami League government not only faced the gigantic task of reconstructing the war ravaged country but also encountered challenges from the opposition groups and parties about the legitimacy of its actions. The demand of the opposition for the creation of a national government and a constitutional assembly through fresh election gradually gained momentum. The more the law and order situation deteriorated in the new country, the more heightened was the political demand. The opposition also criticized the government on economic grounds and demanded quick remedy of the people's miseries. Of all the opposing politicians Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani of the National Awami Party (NAP) was the most vocal and effective in putting forward the above demands through his public meetings and rallies where establishment of an all-party government and resignation of the ruling party were demanded.

However, despite the above opposing stand there was hardly any viable opposition in the true sense of the term during the initial years of the Awami League government. The rightist pro-Islamic political parties were not allowed to function in independent Bangladesh because of their alleged association with the Pakistani forces. The pro-liberation left wing parties were given permission to function but extreme left armed opposition which the Awami League government termed as terrorists, were banned. In order to wipe out the armed opposition, the Prime Minister made a number of forceful statements where he branded both the ultra left and ultra rights sections and armed extremists as the adversaries of the Bengali nation. In spite of the governmental attempts, the possibility of potential opposition could not be eliminated.(Ahamed 1983:90&140).

### **3.1 (a) Creation of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD)**

One of the major sources of opposition against the government in the initial years, was the dissent within the ruling party. During the movement for autonomy in the 1960s, Awami League came under pressure from some of the radical members of its student front to adopt a much tougher stand against West Pakistan regime. However, further there had been split of the student front into two groups with different slogans of Mujibism and scientific socialism took an official shape in late July 1972. This split in the student's

league was followed by a chain of reactions and more divisions germinated. There were consequent parting in the Labour Front and Association of Freedom Fighters which were affiliated to Awami League. The break away faction thus formed its separate peasant and Freedom Fighter's Fronts.

Ultimately, in late October 1972, all preparations to float a new political organization were complete, with this a new potential opposition political party in Bangladesh's political scene was created, which called Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD). JSD considered Awami League regime as an agent of the bourgeois class and in its party Ghoshona Patra, stated that Awami League represented only 8% of the people but possessed 85% of the total national wealth of Bangladesh. (Maniruzzaman 1988:167) JSD constantly opposed the Awami League and organized violent movement against the ruling regime.(Sen 1986:291).

### **3.2 I Jatiya Sangsad and Opposition**

The opposition's demand for the foundation of a national government and new constitutional assembly were rejected by the Awami League regime. According to them, they had initiated the National Liberation Movement of Bangladesh and still enjoyed total confidence of the people and so; any fresh and costly election was unnecessary and could only delay the process of constitution making.

The Constituent Assembly which prepared the draft constitution was severely criticized by the anti-governerment political parties. Bhashani, in a press conference, rejected the constitution since he believed that Awami had no authority to draft a constitution. The communist party of Bangla, led by Abul Bashar, criticized the draft constitution as not being socialist and far from democratic. Although socialism was adopted as an important state policy, it did not ensure the availability of fundamental needs of the ordinary people and because of the recognition of private property, it would not establish socialist society. JSD remarked that the draft constitution had no real meaning in the sense that it failed to meet the desires and ambition of the masses. The sramik Krishak Samajbadi Dal (SKSD) rejected the socialism as proposed in the draft constitution and opined that the existence of private property would legalize the rise of

capitalists and the system would lead to exploitation of the poor and oppression by the bourgeoisie.

However, despite these above criticisms, the little efforts were made by these anti-government political organizations either to convince the masses against it or to organize political movement for an alternative constitution. After the framing of the constitution and its formal adoption, the constituent Assembly ceased to function and was dissolved.

The general elections which held on March 7, 1973 was the time when Awami League was popular among the masses and hence no any opposition political party was able to come up as an alternative government, seemingly, the opposition remained critical and active against the government and the general election of 1973 took place not without challenge.(Jahan 1980:79)

Although the opposition parties like NAP(Bhashani) and JSD were demanding resignation of the government, with the announcement of election schedule, these parties expressed their willingness to content the general election and posed a challenge to the regime. Further, the opposition parties employed all efforts to discredit the ruling party and raised the various allegations like-failure to establish law and order in society and to curb the rise of price of essentials, inability to stop huge smuggling along the borders, hoarding, black marketeering and other socio-economic ills, mismanagement in administrative system, autocratic measures to deal with the opposition, involvement in widespread corruption and favoritism, and making this country a client state of India through signing of the so-called Friendship Treaty with India in March 1972.

To counter the opposition parties, the Awami League government branded opposition parties as agents of US-Chinese imperialists conspiring to undermine the integrity and sovereignty of the new state.

Owing to immense organizational strength of Awami League and charismatic popularity of its leader Sheikh Mujib, the Awami League got over whelming victory by receiving 73.2% of the vote cast and got 282 seats. On the other hand, the

opposition including independent candidates, secured only 7 seats. The opposition suffered very badly in the election. After their defeat the opposition protested and their allegations included election rigging and election manipulation by the ruling party. The opposition's scanty representation in the legislature raised grave apprehension on the effectiveness of opposition scrutiny of the Treasury actions and building a responsible executive in a one-party dominated parliamentary system.

### **3.2 (a) Opposition's role in the Legislature**

In election of 1973, there were 300 directly elected MPs and 15 additional women members elected by the MPs for the reserved seats. AL's dominance in the House meant that all the indirectly elected reserved women seats would be automatically captured by the ruling AL. owing to the very marginal strength of the opposition, AL leader asserted that the opposition could not be declared an official opposition in the Jatiya Sangsad. (Ziring 1992: 96). This kind of attitude did not corroborate democratic ideals.

Despite the opposition's marginal presence in the legislature, one of the very few opposition members Aatur Rahman Khan chief of Bangladesh Jatiya League, pronounced his willingness to organize an opposition in the House. In fact, he was the unofficial leader of the opposition in the legislature. The lone MP of JSD, Abdus Sattar and some independent members joined forces with Aatur Rahman Khan (Umar, 1980:18). These few opposition members resolved to common devices and mechanisms of the parliament for placing their alternative viewpoints in the House. Although this vacillating opposition was not officially recognized, in several instances these members raised various issues, questions and objections through parliamentary devices under the rules of procedure of the Jatiya Sangsad.

In all the eight sessions of the first Jatiya Sangsad, the question hour activity commenced from the second session and became lively all because of the participation of the opposition members. During the parliamentary sessions, the House received 7,576 notices of Starred questions and accepted 5,413. Out of these accepted notices, 1,504 were however, lapsed. In order to assess opposition performance, the budget session and the third session of the first Sangsad were randomly selected. It was

observed that during these two sessions, out of the 1,670 Starred questions, as many as 200 were raised by the opposition and independent MPs. Although most of the questions did not directly deal with the policies of national concern, they surely reflected sincere attempts of the opposition MPs to represent their own constituencies. Ministers were categorically questioned by these members regarding their actions and policies which affected the public. During the budget session of 1973, the significant questions and supplementary questions of the opposition were raised mostly by the vocal member, Aatur Rahman Khan. Some interesting questions from independent MP Abdullah Sarkar also acted s spirit stirring moves in the house.

Regarding Adjournment Motion in the first parliament it was noticed that during its 8 sessions, of the 14 notices received 12 were raised by the opposition and independent MPs. But the notices bought by them were not entertained by the House. On the discussion on matters of urgent public importance for short duration (Rule 68) there were a total of 15 notices received of these, 5 were from the opposition but only 2 were discussed in the House.

With regard to Calling Attention to matters of urgent public importance (Rule 71) in all the 8 sessions of the First Parliament, 229 notices were received from the legislators including 58 from the opposition of the 52 notices which were accepted for discussion only 9 were from the opposition. There was however, no Half an Hour Discussion in the first legislature although 4 notices, including 1 from the opposition, were received in the 5<sup>th</sup> session but all those notices were not allowed for discussion on the floor.

The influence of the first parliament gradually declined with the assumption of arbitrary powers by the executive. Intolerant attitude in dealing with the opposition both inside and outside the parliament contributed to this process. The presence of the opposition members in the House was noticed only through their participation in the question hour, which was, however, not noticed in the eighth and final session of the first Jatiya Sangsad. The overwhelming presence of the ruling party, provision of strict party discipline, promulgation of ordinances in by passing the House, and above all, the

successive amendments of the 1972 constitution, significantly reduced the power of the legislature. The parliament which attained the verdict of the people, gradually became the 'yesmen' of the executive and was used only as a 'rubber stamp' to approve the executive actions. Consequently, effective check on the government by the parliament was greatly lacking during Mujib regime. Under these circumstances, a very weak and 'unofficial opposition could play nothing but an insignificant role in the legislature.(Choudhury 1995:120)

Without systematic debate and proper discussion in the legislature, various crucial ordinances were approved in only a few hours time. The opposition members who were participating in the business of the House, had no option but to stage walk-outs in protest of passing the more controversial bills. Further, the curtailment of the power and status of the first parliament became obvious with the passing of the second constitutional amendment bill, 1973; which allegedly introduced to legitimize the government's repressive measures against the non-conformists. These introductions of the provisions were thus politically motivated and would be kept by the government to repress the political opposition.

The decline of the first Jatiya Sangsad was complete when the fourth Amendment to the constitution was brought before the House in the form of constitution (Fourth Amendment) bill, 1975; which contained characteristics like- switch over to presidential form from parliamentary system; introduction of single party rule, an all powerful President; absence of independence of judiciary and suspension of the fundamental rights of the citizens. Through this amendment the democratic principles which were highly valued by people and were incorporated in the 1972 constitution, were altered and replaced by a totalitarian semblance. The way this amendment was passed within 30 minutes and without proper debate or discussion, was objected to by the opposition members and they staged a walkout in protest. The main hindrance to oppositional expressions was that in the first parliament the existence of any constitutional opposition was not recognized or tolerated by the ruling party. So whatever views were expressed by a few opposition and independent MPs were never taken seriously. The domination of parliament by a single party due to absolute majority and

lack of an effective opposition in the House, created unhindered opportunities for the regime to follow arbitrary practices opposed to the norms and conventions of the parliamentary form of government.(Hakim and Huque 1974:77)

### **3.2 (b) Opposition's role out of legislature**

Although the opposition suffered badly in the general election, within less than a year their agitative upheaval against the regime became more pronounced. Intensification of activities by NAP (B) and JSD was continuously visible during this period., Bhashani tried to exploit public sentiment mainly on the issues of Indo-Bangladesh relations and signing of the alleged controversial friendship treaty between two countries. With large gatherings in its political meetings JSD appeared as a strong opposition and challenger of the regime. One forceful and violent political action of JSD in March 1974 was launching of a gherao (meaning confinement) of the offices and residences of cabinet members and several policy formulating and implementing organizations of the government which were termed by JSD as the tools of continual corruption and exploitation.

In the beginning of 1974 as a result of an understanding of six political parties namely NAP(B), BJL, Jatiya Ganamukti Union, Bangladesh Jatiya League of oli Ahad, Bangladesh Sramik Krishak Samajbadi Dal and Bangladesh Communist Party (Leninbadi), an All Party United Front, under the leadership of Maulana Bhashani was created. In its move against the government, this front raised a number of demands including release of all political prisoners, establishing security of life, curbing price hikes, introducing rural rational system, and abandoning all lopsided treaties or pacts with foreign countries. All attempts of this front to organize a serious anti-government movement could not, however, be successful as there was a lack of wide public sympathy for its demands.(Ahmed 1983:7)

Actually, the lack of necessary strength and unity among the opposition political parties did not allow them either to consolidate their position or to establish themselves as a counter force against the organizationally strong Awami League. They not only remained ineffective but were also distant from the people most due to their indulging in extra constitutional activities. The viability of opposition parties gradually

reduced as they could not properly cultivate people's anti-government sentiment in their favour. Without enough public support and mass endorsement, the political programmes and agitations of the opposition did not have much effect on the government. Such a condition helped the ruling regime to freely employ its newly acquired excessive powers which were made legal through constitutional amendments and legislative approvals. Thus when the opposition failed to mobilize people, Awami League, despite all its shortcomings became omnipresent in Bangladesh politics.

The actual threat, however, came from the left radical opposition parties for which the AL government was especially concerned and was greatly disturbed. These underground revolutionary parties posed a real challenge to the country's social and political order. Among such parties the more active were the Purbo Bangla Sarbonare Party led by Siraj Sikder, the Purbo Banglar Sammobadi Dal (Marxist Leninist) led by Mohammad Toaha, East Pakistan communist party (Marxist-Leninist) led by Shukhendu Dastidar and Purbo Bangla Communist Party (Marxist Leninist) led by Abul Bashar and Deben Sikdar. These parties had tactical and ideological differences. Nevertheless they had a common opinion that the revolution of Bangladesh organized in 1971 was unfinished and incomplete. (Maniruzzaman 1982:130-132)

These parties believed that only they were capable of transforming this country into a real socialist state of the majority oppressed people. These parties developed their own political armed cadres through training and started violent actions at various places by adopting guerrilla tactics. The Awami League's strategy was to employ all possible efforts to root out the opposition forces both from extreme left and rightist groups.

In order to cope with the worsening condition in the country resulting from the armed threat of the radical opposition deteriorating law and order and economic situation, pervasive factionalism in politics and administration and crisis in the ruling party, the regime declared on December 28, 1974 a state of emergency all over Bangladesh. Later on, the constitution was amended to replace parliamentary system with



a one-party presidential rule, with the formation of the single legitimate national party called the Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (BAKSAL) by Sheikh Mujib, all other parties were invalidated. Thus the concept of opposition was non-existent in the new political framework.

With the overthrow of AL government through a violent bloody coup by some alienated junior officers of the Bangladesh Army, the regime came to an end on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1975. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib was killed and the political order created by him was also renounced. Thereafter, political activities and parties were banned by the new regime for more than one year. Towards the end of the one year period the army regime first permitted parlour politics and later allowed activities of political parties within the framework of multi-party system.

### **3.2 (c) Opposition in Zia Regime**

The Bangladesh Army imbrued its hands with blood and when all obstacles were removed, in November 1975, General Ziaur Rahman was reinstated as army chief who consolidated his position as the Deputy Chief Martial Law Administrator and emerged as the de-facto leader of the new regime.

It appeared that JSD played a very instrumental role in the soldiers' uprising of November 7, 1975. The JSD was active in establishing people's liberation Army like Chinese pattern in the Bangladesh Armed Forces and for this purpose, it was well linked through its cells with various ranks of the army. The soldiers belonging to the JSD military front played a crucial part in organizing the soldiers uprising and thereafter freeing General Zia from custody to assume the leadership of the new regime.

Initially General Zia declared his regime as interim in nature with its prime objective of returning political power to the elected representatives of the people and restore democratic order. With this end in view, the target of holding general elections was scheduled for February, 1977. In the meantime, parliament was dissolved through a presidential proclamation on November 8, 1975. Simultaneously, restrictions on free politics were imposed and martial law continued in order to establish the desired

peace and order. Henceforth, as part of preparing the ground for free political activities and holding elections, the regime adopted a measure of allowing limited party activity from July 1976. Thereafter, the government passed the Political Parties Regulation (PPR) to permit parlour politics from 30 July, 1976. Under the PPR, political parties had to submit their constitutions, political programmes and manifestations for security in order to obtain necessary government permission to do indoor politics. By the end of 1976, about sixty political groups applied for permission and duly submitted their constitutions and twenty one of them including Awami League were given government approval to operate as political parties under PPR. However, latter on under continuous pressure from the political parties, the Zia regime withdraw the PPR in November 1978. This created a situation for free play of party building and massive increase in the number of political parties in the country. It was noticed that more than a hundred political parties were operating at that time.(Khan 1984:144)

For consolidating power and to prepare grounds for his political objectives, Zia's crucial strategy had been to gain support form political groups and civilianize his military regime. There were different types of political forces which joined his political mission. At that time the opposition was mainly represented by Awamy League.

Controversy arose amongst politicians over the holding of proposed elections. Pro-regime politicians like Maulana Bhashani, Khandker Mushtaque Ahmed and the pro-Chinese left parties led by Sammobadi Dal, Bangladesh Communist Party (ML), and United People's Party were in favour of postponement of the proposed elections in February, 1977. unwillingness of the regime to hand over power to faction prone parties was evidenced by the postponement of the parliamentary elections by President Sayem on 21 November, 1976. The postponement of election was opposed by personalities like General (retd.) M.A.G. Osamni and parties like Democratic League, Islamic Democratic League and Muslim League. The strategy of remain quite, as taken by Awami Legacy and the pro-Moscow parties on the election controversy, indicated their obvious opposition stand on this issue.

In order to materialize his political objectives, Zia's decision was to further concentrate state power and consolidate his position. He therefore took the charge of chief martial law administrator in November 1976 and assumed the presidency on 21 April, 1977, replacing justice Saymen on health grounds.

As per plan, attempts were made by General Zia to recruit support from the right, liberal and centrist forces but to expedite the process he moved to amend the constitution and incorporated Islamic principle in place of secularism, socio-economic justice in place of socialism and he articulated Bangladeshi nationalism in place of Bengali nationalism. Besides the amendment, development programmes were initiated and highly propagated in order to attract the general public. In order to test public confidence about Zia's various moves, a national referendum was held on 30 May, 1977 in which 98.99 percent support were obtained from the electorate. The pragmatic nineteen point programme which included development plans of all sorts and aspirations for all sectors was used by Zia as his election manifesto in the referendum as well as in subsequent elections. Although smaller opposition's forces like pro-moscow NAP were not against the referendum, the main opposition party Awami League remained silent on the issue. The JSD stood up as the only opposition party to resist the referendum of General Zia. In the absence of the imprisoned leadership, JSD's young cadres in their political posters criticized the referendum as nothing but a 'political bluff' of the regime. (Maniruzzaman 1988:216)

### **3.2 (d) Opposition and Presidential Elections**

Actually, Zia wanted a victory in presidential election participated by opposition parties to silence the critics of the referendum. Since after the first military coup on 15 August 1975, the opposition parties visualized the first genuine chance to involve in free political activities. The opposition parties began assembling themselves on one platform to nominate their common candidate for the presidential election of June 1978.

The opposition forces representing the diverse groups formed Ganatantrik Oikko Jote or Democratic United Front consisting of Awami League, and Bangladesh People's League. Opposition alliance nominated Janata Party Chief General (Retd.)

Osmani as their candidate, to contest against Zia. Although there were several political parties in both the above electoral alliances, the battle was seen by the observers as a fight between the ruling regime and the major opposition, Awami League. The election manifesto of opposition's Gana Oikka Jote (GOJ) included: return to parliamentary democracy; reestablishment of 4 state principles embodied in the 1972 constitution; upholding the values of the liberation war; establishment of rule of law in the country; containment of bureaucratic pathology; proper use of national resources for the betterment of the common masses; and maintaining of foreign relations based on Non-Alignment.

On the eve of the presidential election and during election campaign, the opposition faced severe obstructions from the regime. In order to have sufficient preparation for the election, the opposition appealed to defer the said election for a few months but to their utter disappointment, the government did not pay any favourable consideration to it. As it was expected, the election results saw General Zia victorious while the opposition candidate Osmani received about 22 percent of the total votes cast.

In the post presidential election period, preparations were all set for the holding of the promised parliamentary election. The opposition political parties demanded for quick restoration of democracy in the country. The opposition parties including Awami League, JSD, United People's party, Jatiya Janata Party, Ganatantrik Andolon, GAL, KSP, SKSD and five party fronts of Aaur Rahman Khan, jointly decided to boycott the election unless their demands, including withdrawal of martial law and emergency powers of the government, introduction of parliamentary democracy by repealing 4<sup>th</sup> amendment, Zia's retirement before doing active politics, release of all political prisoners and restoration of freedom of press, were met by the regime. (Chakravarty;1988:10) Although different opposition parties made identical demands against the regime, a single platform could not be established by them.

However, being unable to obtain confidence of the opposition, the regime decided to modify its stand. It amended some provisions of the 4<sup>th</sup> Amendment through a proclamation and incorporated the following: the Prime Minister would be a member of

the Jatiya Sangsad and would enjoy the confidence of the majority MPs; upto one tenth of the cabinet members would comprise non-MPs; the President would not have veto power over the bills passed by the Sangsad; and referendum would be required for any constitutional change and method of the presidential election. (Khan and Zafarullah 1980:223)

The above proclamation of Gen. Zia proved unsuccessful to soften the attitude of the boycotting opposition parties which came up with bitter criticisms regarding the above amendment to the constitution. In facing the opposition's tough stand, Zia followed a policy of appeasement and further concessions were announced by the regime in December, 1978. Thus the dates of election and submission of nomination papers were extended, some political prisoners were released, restriction on press and publication was withdrawn and martial law provisions on political actions were suspended. Side by side, government attempts for negotiation continued and the opposition leaders were invited to have discussion with Gen. Zia. Several rounds of talks with the opposition led the regime to again shift the date of parliamentary election and accept the following opposition demands: Prime Minister would be the leader of the majority party in the parliament; Jatiya Sangsad would make the council of Ministers accountable to it; and political prisoners would be released in phases. After discussion among themselves, five opposition parties- BJL, UPP, JSD, SKSD and BGA balanced in favour of participating in the elections. The Awami League (MU) at first remained adamant in its earlier rigid stand, but latter on decided to withdraw the boycott and to participate in election. With this decision of Awami League, all doubts about holding of the country's second parliamentary election disappeared.

### **3.3 II Jatiya Sangsad and Opposition**

After the declaration of the election schedule (for second parliamentary election, 1979) by the Election Commission, more than 50 political parties applied for election symbols but only 29 political parties were honoured. Among 2,125 contesting candidates for 300 seats in parliament, Zia's BNP placed the largest number of candidates. Among the opposition political parties, four namely Awami League (MU),

Awami League (M), Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), and the Muslim League- Islamic Democratic League (ML-IDL); emerged as an alliance with their 985 candidates.

The principal opposition party, Awami League, did not join the polarization of political forces and opted for contesting the election alone to organize movement for democracy both inside and outside the parliament. However, the prevailing restrictions under martial law regulations and election boycott movement made it difficult for the opposition to prepare for the election, which was even harder, within a short period of time. Complaints were thus made by the opposition that they were not given enough time and freedom for effective campaigning. One of the major campaign issues put forward by the opposition was to restore a true democratic order under parliamentary framework and get rid of martial law and dictatorial regime led by Gen. Zia.

The opposition developed a sharp criticism of the rule and policies of Gen. Zia through election campaigns. They vehemently opposed the military autocratic system in general and brought specific charges against his regime, e.g, imprisonment of a great many opposition political workers, limitations imposed on fundamental political and legal right and press censorship. Opposition rebutted Zia's major political weapons of economic development by stating that his economic policies resulted in excessive dependence on foreign aid, inflationary situation, economic disparity leading to rich-poor gap and price hike of the essentials which crossed the limit of people's tolerance.

In the second parliamentary election, out of the 39 million registered voters, only about fifty percent of them exercised their voting rights to elect. The government sponsored BNP won greatly in the elections with 207 seats out of 300 general seats in the House. However this election also witnessed the representation of a considerable number of opposition candidates in the legislature.

The parliamentary elections returned Awami League as the second biggest political party and largest opposition in the country. The NL-IDL alliance emerged as the third biggest force followed by JSD which was able to improve its position in the

parliament compared to the elections of 1973. The return of more than seventy opposition candidates and 16 independent members to the parliament and the presence of some experienced opposition MPs, within the House, led the political observers to expect that the second Jatiya Sang sad would not be turned into a one party affair. Side by side, frustrations were piling up because of the diminishing status of the legislature under Zia's new political order. Zia's Presidential system, which neither followed full fledged American type nor the French pattern, established a typical parliament with its very existence depending on the pleasure of the President. Under this system, the appointment and dismissal of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet depended on the President's wish without making any provision for their responsibility to the elected JS. Under a new article 92A, provisions were made to curtail the powers of the legislature in matters of finance. Moreover, control of the parliament was assured by three clauses of 'second proclamation' which provided : (i) that the President could appoint upto one fifth of his cabinet from among the people who were not MPs, (ii) that the president might enter into treaties with foreign governments without informing parliament if he considered such action in the national interest; and (iii) that the President might without assent from any bill passed by the parliament in which case he could be made to assent only if a national referendum on the issue was organized and passed.(Franda 1982:223) It was therefore a matter of speculation to which extent the opposition members of parliament would be able to exercise their ability and thus play an effective role. All expectations to ventilate grievances and people's demands in the parliament were about to evaporate because of the diminishing status of the parliament itself and lopsided executive legislature relations.

### **3.3 (a) Opposition in the legislature**

Unlike the first parliament, the second parliament officially recognized the existence of constitutional opposition and as such, Asaduzzaman and Mohiuddin Ahmed of Awami League became the leader and deputy leader of opposition in the House. As the practice of the UK parliamentary system, the opposition leader in second parliament was accorded by the government with a special status including the privileges and rank of a cabinet minister.

The second parliament had 206 days, which included eight sessions where considerable legislative activities were transacted with the participation of opposition members of parliament. All the opposition MPs collectively staged a walkout and protested a derogatory remark of the deputy speaker regarding opposition MPs' privileges on 31 May, 1979. Again in December, 1980, the entire opposition staged a walkout to protest the passing of Disturbed Area Bill enabling the regime to exercise excessive powers in areas with deteriorating law and order situation. The opposition expressed its apprehension that the Bill would be subject to misuse throughout the country.

One well known parliamentary weapon in the hands of opposition has been the Adjournment Motion which is moved for the purpose of discussing a definite matter of urgent public importance. In second parliament a total of 52 adjournment motions were moved by the opposition out of which 31 were discussed. Opposition members of the 2<sup>nd</sup> parliament were also found active in using the device of Calling Attention to Matter of Urgent Public Importance as per rule 71 of the rules of procedure. The opposition members in this parliament also tried to raise issues of urgent public importance and discuss them for short duration as per rule 6. The opposition MPs also as per the rule 60, came forward to participate in Half an Hour Discussion on a matter of public importance subject to recent starred or Unstarred questions.(Haque 1980:220)

In the second parliament, a good number of legislative committees, including more than 30 Departmental Committees were formed to develop committee system. But all the Departmental Committees were chaired by the ministers and were greatly dominated by the Treasury Bench, the opposition members of parliament in the above legislative committees had only a limited role in the whole committee system.

### **3.3 (b) Opposition's role out of legislature**

The opposition could not produce the desired result within the legislature, which provoked them to spin the wheel and look for alternative measures. The opposition political parties shifted the political scene, as they recast their actions outside the legislature, on the streets and strengthened their anti-government movements there. In



order to get rid of the controlled democracy imposed by Zia, their target was to dislodge the regime from power. The opposition shuffled the cards of its political strategies at this critical hour. It planned to invigorate and become forceful against the government. Thenceforth it revamped with new political alliances, and organized violent political programmes including hartals, street agitations and the like. For establishing unity in the opposition front a ten party political alliance was established in early 1980 comprising AL (MU), JSD, AL (M), NAP(M), JEP, NAP (Harun), CPB, Workers Party, Gana Azadi League, and Sramik Krishak Samajbadi Dal (SKSD). However, the alliance had disagreement within itself but despite that the opposition continued their anti-government movement and vehemently criticized the regime on several grounds. Further, the opposition alleged that Zia's system was neither parliamentary nor presidential nor an amalgam of both, but rather an authoritarian one, in the Ayub Style, under the grab of presidential democracy.

The disagreement within the opposition alliance led to fragmentation, the largest party of the alliance Awami League (MU), fragmented into two factions, one led by anti-BAKSAL Tofael group and the other led by pro-Moscow Razzaque group resulting in postponement of the Awami League's council session. Intense factionalism in the JSD led to its formal breakup and the formation of Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (BSD) in April, 1981. splits also occurred in the Muslim League(Haque 1981:196).

Factionalism created burrows in the body of the opposition where mutual differences, jealousies and confusions dwelt and made the opposition weak from within. It is therefore clear that why opposition's collective or independent call for hartals, demonstrations or street agitations could not become effective either to successfully challenge the Zia regime or to generate public support for its cause.

Well, the rise of rebellions and aspirants in the ranks of the armed force ultimately led to the brutal killings of General Zia on May 30, 1981. He was succeeded temporary by Justice Abdus Sattar, the Vice-President of the BNP government, who declared state of emergency.

The opposition parties started demanding restoration of constitutional politics in the country. Opposition was therefore skeptical about the possibility of holding a free and fair election since the constitutional provisions kept necessary avenues and scopes for the ruling party to manipulate the poll in its own favour, hence the opposition parties extended some demands. The government accepted some important demands, and the date of presidential election was fixed on November 15, 1981 and emergency was lifted which paved the way for opposition's participation in the polls. But because of hopeless division among the most of formidable opponents, the major opposition parties and alliances failed to put up a single candidate against the government nominee, Justice Sattar. And in the election Sattar got landslide victory with an attainment of 66 percent of the votes cast.

Latter on, President Sattar faced with increased pressure from the impatient army led by Lt. Gen. H.M. Ershad for their 'constitutional role'. He was ultimately forced to hand over power to Lt. Gen. Ershad, who on 24 March, 1982 declared Martial Law all over the country, dissolved the Jatiya Sangsad through a proclamation and suspended the constitution and political activities of the opposition.

### **3.3(c) Opposition during Ershad Regime**

As all political activities were banned in the country since martial law was declared by Ershad, all sections of the people did not remain silent. The first political opposition against the regime was voiced by the student community in February, 1983. latter on Gen. Ershad allowed indoor politics of political parties from April, 1, 1983; and the opposition party leaders were invited to have a dialogue on the country's socio-political and constitutional issues. (Rahman 1984:241)

With the granting of parlour politics, demands were increasingly raised by the major opposition parties to restore democratic politics in the country. During Ershad rule, two main political parties, namely Awami league led by Sheikh Mujib's daughter Sheikh Hasina and the BNP led by the widow of late Gen. Ziaur Rahman, Khaleda zia, were reckoned the most formidable opposition.

Organization of anti-government movement called for the formation of alliances by the opposition political parties. Eventually two major political alliances, eminent in the political scene of the country played vital role and led the anti-Ershad movement. Of the two, one was centrist leftist 15 party alliance led by Awami League. The other important force was the 7 party alliance led by BNP, which included both rightist and leftist political parties. Although both the above alliances took an anti-regime stand and were struggling to restore democracy in the country, yet mutual differences between the two prevented them from building a common political platform. While the 15 party alliance led by AL demanded parliamentary democracy as introduced by the original 1972 constitution, on the other hand the 7 party alliance led by BNP favored presidential multi-party democracy. Keeping their mutual opposition stands, the two political alliances came to understand to work together for projecting a resemblance of unity. Accordingly in August 1983, both the alliances decided to launch the anti-Ershad movement together and formulated a common five point demand, which included-

- withdrawing martial law immediately and permitting open political activities;
- restoring fundamental rights;
- freeing political prisoners;
- holding parliamentary election before any other elections; and
- punishing the individuals involved in the killing of students in mid-February, 1983.

Pressed by the demands of opposition alliances the regime declared its willingness to hold both the parliamentary and the presidential elections simultaneously on 27 May 1984. But this decision too could not satisfy the opposition alliances. Further as a conciliatory move towards opposition, Gen. Ershad announced his acceptance of holding the parliamentary elections before the presidential one. But the opposition till not satisfied as according to them, there was not any sort of neutrality possible as long as Gen. Ershad and his cabinet members occupied their official positions. The huge rallies were organized by the 15 party and 7 party alliances and Jamat-i-Islami on October 14, 1984 where they rejected the parliamentary polls proposed by the regime.

Both the two major opposition alliances were not agree to participate in election offered by the regime unless their conditions were duly met. To demonstrate their views the opposition observed a general strike on December 8, 1984. A further 48 hours strike from December 22-24, 1984; took a violent turn and led the regime to reschedule the parliamentary polls on April 6, 1985. With this declaration, the date of the Jatiya Sangsad polls was change by the regime for the four time since 1983. (Bertocci, 1986:227)

The opposition ultimately decided to boycott the legislative elections scheduled in April. The regime retaliated by imposing the provision of martial law withdrawn earlier with greater vigour. Opposition leaders, including he chiefs of the AL and the BNP, were put to house arrest and all political operations of the opposition were declared unlawful. The election schedule for the parliamentary polls was again postponed by the regime on March 1, 1985. However, in late May 1985 the regime released its rigid stand and released the two top opposition leaders from house arrest, although the earlier ban on political activities of the opposition continued.

Gen. Ershad was not so sure about the success of his National Front and such feeling led him to form a new political party- 'Jatiya Party' on January 15, 1986. On the verge of fresh opposition movement, Gen. Ershad announced on March, 2, 1986 his decision to hold parliamentary elections in late April of the same year and offered some concessions in exchange for cooperation from the mainstream opposition. This time the concessions including; resignation of ministers who might take part in proposed election; nullifying the army courts and abolishing the posts of regional martial law administrations; and barring government facilities and support for the purpose of election. Immediately after Ershad's announcement the new date for parliamentary polls was fixed on April 26, 1986 by the election commission.

### **3.4 III Jatiya Sangsad and Opposition**

The concessions and fresh announcement of the parliamentary elections were rejected by the major opposition alliances which visualized a great difference between their demands and the proposals of the ruling regime. Surprisingly the unity between the two proved fragile as one major opposition party-- Awami League, after the speech of

ultimatum by Ershad, suddenly made its crucial decision on 12 March to participate in the polls. Following this decision of Awami League, the regime rescheduled the polling date on 7 May, 1986 to enable that party to prepare for the electoral fight. The other parties of the 15 party alliance which had opposing views and differed with the pro-election decision of Awami League, formally left the alliance and formed the 5 party alliance. Now the 15 party alliance remained an 8 party alliance led by Awami League. On the other hand, the 7 party alliance led by the BNP remained adamant in its earlier decision of boycotting the polls. (Kabir, 1988:179) on the eve of parliamentary elections, accusations and counter accusations and mudslinging between the two major opposition political parties Awami League and BNP, placed autocratic Ershad in an advantageous position in the game of politics.

As was expected, the election results saw the Jatiya Party victorious with 153 seats. The Awami League came up as the major parliamentary opposition with 76 seats, followed by Jamat-e-Islami with 10 seats. Because of indirect election, all the 30 reserved women seats were captured by the Jatiya Party.

#### **3.4(a) Opposition in legislature:**

The third parliament continued upto July 13, 1987 and held only four sessions and enacted 38 laws during its tenure of 75 days. In the absence of the major opposition, the first session was indeed dull and life less. The second session was summoned to pass the 7<sup>th</sup> amendment to the constitution for validating the proclamation of martial law and all other actions taken since March 24, 1982. This session continued only for five hours and again, without the presence of the main parliamentary opposition, Awami League. After the passing of the 7<sup>th</sup> amendment, however, Gen. Ershad withdraw Martial Law and revived the constitution. During the third and fourth session, the opposition parties remained active in using the common legislative devices and duly participated in the parliamentary transactions. In the process, they were critical of the party in the power and vocal on nationally important issues and problems faced by the people. The opposition moved 'adjournment motion' to draw attention of the House to matters of urgent public importance. The opposition also used device of 'calling attention to matters of urgent

public importance' in this parliament as per rule 71 of the rule of procedure. In the third parliament, the opposition had hardly any role in the committee system.

### **3.4 (b) Gen. Ershad's Re-election and Opposition**

Gen. Ershad in his quest for legitimacy arranged presidential election on October 15, 1986 for that Ershad earlier joined the government's Jatiya Party in August, 1986 and gave up his position as the army chief. The AL and other opposition parties boycotted the election.

As anticipated, Gen. Ershad won massively in the presidential election with about 84% of the votes cast. As being unable to effectively force the Ershad regime to establish democratic politics and credible electoral process, the mainstream opposition launched a fresh movement in the late 1987 with a call to throw out the General from power and resolve democracy. The opposition paralysed the administration through a series of protests, demonstration, hartals and rallies. Latter on the third parliament was dissolved on 6 Dec. 1987 and the date of forth parliamentary election was fixed on March 3, 1988. (Islam 1987:168)

### **3.5 IV Jatiya Sangsad and Opposition**

Election of the fourth parliament was held on March 3, 1988 as scheduled without the participation of the mainstream opposition. The combined opposition party (COP), consisting of 76 insignificant organizations, led by JSD leader A.S.M. Abdur Rab was brought into take part in the polls. JSD (Siraj), Freedom Party and a few other smaller parties also put up their own candidates.

In this elections a semblance of contest was put up by insignificant parties led by the COP which the critics termed as 'loyal opposition' of the Ershad government. As it was expected, the ruling party won an overwhelming victory with 251 seats out of 300 general seats. The COP got just 19 seats followed by JSD (S) and Freedom Party obtaining 3 and 2 seats respectively. The independent candidates bagged 25 seats. And

because of the expiry of the stipulated time period, the fourth parliament of 1988 had no reserved seats for women. (Rahman 1989:218)

However, both the 8- party alliance led by sheikh Hasina and 7 party alliance led by Begum Zia criticized the elections as a farce and fraud. So a united movement against the autocratic regime was fermented.

### **3.5 (a) Fourth parliament and 'loyal' opposition**

The life span of this parliament was 168 days and during its tenure, it held seven sessions and enacted 142 laws. Although this parliament lacked legitimacy in the eyes of the main-stream opposition and could not obtain the peoples sympathy, they were unable to stop it from functioning

In this parliament 5,812 Starred, 931 Unstarred and 9 Short Notice Questions were accepted and answered in the House. This parliament also received 337 notices of adjournment motions of which only 5 were accepted for discussion. The loyal opposition members tabled three motions, two by COP and one by JSD(S). with regard to calling attention to matters of urgent public importance, the House received a total of 1,459 notices but accepted only 151. of the accepted notices, 67(44.37%) were raised by the so-called opposition. Eagerness was also noticed among the opposition members to participate in the discussion on matters of urgent public importance for short duration. Of the 238 such notices, 51(100%) were accepted by the house for discussion and 26(50.98%) were raised by the loyal opposition members. Of these notices, 19 were tabled by the COP and the rest by the JSD (Siraj). For the 'half-an-hour discussion', the House received 56 notices and accepted 9 (100%). Out the accepted notices, 4(44.44%) were raised by the opposition members belonging to COP. The opposition members also uses to question privilege in the House which received 66 notices but accepted 10 (100%). Among these questions, 3(30%) were raised by the opposition members from the COP and JSD (Siraj). This parliament did try to activate its committee system which was a better performance compared to the committees of the pervious parliaments.(Aminuzzaman 1993:52-56)

As the main concert of the mainstream opposition parties was to strengthen their anti-government movement and forge more unity among themselves. But such ambition was hampered due to persistence of factionalism in the major opposition forces. The overcoming of differences between AL and BNP remained a far cry because of a deep rooted mistrust and rivalry between them. However, despite opposition movement, General Ershad's effort to remain in power continued unabated. As, on July 6, 1989, the regime introduced the 9<sup>th</sup> amendment bill, allowing ' two terms of five years each for the president and an elected vice president '. The passing of this bill made it very clear that Gen. Ershad wanted to remain in presidency to continue his autocratic rule. As obvious, the mainstream opposition became highly critical of the bill.

### **3.6 Transition to Democracy**

Since his assumption of state power on 24 March, 1982 General Ershad faced continuous, and sometimes severe, movements which had been organized by the opposition parties and alliances. But because of lack of unity and mutual mistrust in the opposition camp, he managed to stay in power and continued his own efforts to legitimize his regime. After the passing of the 9<sup>th</sup> amendment to the constitution, Ershad expressed his willingness to go for a second term for the presidency with his running mate Moudud Ahmed and started taking preparations for the probable presidential election in 1991. The major opposition took a negative stand again and continued their agitations. In the year 1989, the opposition observed nation-wide hartals and blockade for more than 60 days. (Baxter 1991:148-49)

In their anti-Ershad movement, the opposition chalked out various programmes and arranged a sit in strike in front of the secretariat on October 10, 1990. This was followed by an unexpected collision between Awami League and BNP, chanting different slogans and provoking each other; despite this the 22 rival student organizations on their own came forward and formed the All Party Student Union (APSU), which provided symbol of unity in the opposition front. Further, Awami League leader Sheikh Hasina and BNP leader Begum Zia, acceded to dissolve their personal hatred, at least for time being. When unity was reassured in opposition alliances, they on November 19, 1990 signed a joint declaration highlighting the process of democratic transition. This joint



declaration added an unprecedented strength to opposition's anti-autocracy movement. The regime, retaliated, (as following the 1987 style) with oppressive measures and declared a state of emergency on November 27. But the situation was turbulent and many sections of the population were already enraged. People were infected with a cry to oust autocratic Ershad government and establish democracy. Being faced with an astounding outburst, ultimately Ershad resigned. On Dec. 6, 1990 the parliament was dissolved and Ershad handed over power to a nominee of the combined opposition alliances, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed. (Ziring 1992:214)

Thus this victory of the opposition and the people paved the way for restoring democratic political order in Bangladesh.

### **3.7 Opposition after the restoration of democracy**

Since 1991; V, VII and VIII Jatiya Sangsad elections have been held for period of 1991-95, 1996-2001 and 2001-2006 respectively. In these periods opposition did play their role. In the V Jatiya Sangsad AL was in opposition, where as in the VII, BNP and in the VIII again AL was again in opposition.

In the V JS election, BNP emerged as the single largest party with 140 seats, whereas AL remained the second largest party with 88 seats. The result came as a great surprise to the AL who was expecting a victory based on their organizational superiority over others. Ultimately, the AL chief sheikh Harish said that AL would accept the results and perform the role of opposition within parliament. The other parties- Jatiya party and Jamate-i-Islami got 35 and 18 seats respectively.

Unlike the last parliaments, the V one had a strong organized opposition. In the previous four JS, the Treasury bench had the upper hand because of their sheer majority, but in this parliament the strength of opposition was 158 out of 330 MPs. The opposition demanded for the establishment of parliamentary system of government in the very first session of the parliament. This demand was also put forward simultaneously outside the legislature by AL along with various civil associations, students organizations and professional. AL, with Jamat-i-Islami and the parties belonging to 5-

party alliance pressed hard to achieve their vital demand. Ultimately Begum Zia decided for a parliamentary form of government. The main opposition since the 13<sup>th</sup> session, had been boycotting the parliament on the demand of holding free and fair elections under a 'Neutral caretaker government' (NCG) and on December, 28, 1994 submitted their en masse resignation (Maniruzzaman 1994:159).

In this parliament, however the opposition did use the various parliamentary devices like- No- Confidence Motion, Question Hour, Motion for an Adjournment and Calling Attention to Matters of Urgent Public Importance. To revive the Committee System, is one of the significant characteristic of this parliament. This parliament had 49 Standing Committees and 63 Sub-Committees. The main opposition AL remained very vocal on the streets and started anti-government agitation politics for realizing the various demands- Like banning the politics of fundamentalist Jamat and Shibir, establishing the four fundamental state principles as laid down in its original 1972 constitution and implementing the verdict of the gana adalat (people's court) on Jamate leader, Golam Azam (Choudhury 1995:80).

In the VII JS election, AL emerged as a majority party in the House with 146 seats , whereas BNP remained the second largest party with 116 seats, the others parties like Jatiya party had 32 seats, Jamaat Islami had 3 seats, Jatiya Semijantik Dal (JSD) and others had one each.

Abstentions and repeated walkouts by BNP from the very first session of this parliament and the intolerant attitude of the ruling party made it clear that the major opposition had no alternative but to divert its anti- government role to the streets. BNP followed the footsteps of the previous oppositions and adopted the strategy of waging agitational movement against the ruling party. It capitalized the government's anti-Indian stance and highly criticized the government for signing all allegedly lopsided water sharing accord with India. The other opposition party Jatiya Party termed the BNP as 'fascists' and opposed its repeated hartal programmes. But latter on, in a policy shift, the Jatiya Party declared its party solidarity with the main opposition BNP. The BNP – alliance which called hartals on more than 50 days in the last one year has apparently

reached on a consensus for the first time not to go for hartal on petty issues (in September, 1999). After going to jail, of JP chief Ershed; Khaleda Zia remained the lone attraction for the whole opposition alliance, consequently BNP as its leader, in effect, became the natural rallying point for the whole opposition alliance. (POT,1999:1066-68).

In the VIII JS election, BNP alone got 185 seats; whereas AL got 62 seats, the Jamaat Islami, 16 seats and the JP of Ershad, 14 seats. The main opposition party –AL chief sheikh Hasina rejected the results of this election and demanded repolling. The AL boycotted the swearing-in ceremony of the BNP-led four party alliance government headed by Begum Khaleda Zia. The AL lawmakers made their maiden appearance in the parliament on June 24, 2002 breaking long boycott after the October 1, 2001 parliamentary election. The AL lawmakers staged a walkout when the sitting Speaker declined a point of order. However barely three days after their maiden appearance in the parliament, they decided not to continue, 'for having been deprived of their rightful time for the budgetary discussion'. The other opposition parties rather prefer to opt for issue-based movement at the moment. They also cautiously did like to maintain equidistance from both the government and main opposition in order to emerge as the third force projecting themselves as alternatives to both the BNP and the AL.

The main opposition-AL started its afresh role in the parliament, after over 20 months of dilly-dallying and frequent session boycott, with its parliamentary wing decided to return to parliament from June 15, 2004, to play its part effectively, AL managed the 'cross-country human wall' to express no confidence in the government on December 11, 2004. The main opposition-AL went for another prolonged boycott on January 31, 2005 and returned to the parliament on February 12, 2006, to place electoral reforms proposals of the opposition combine. The opposition parties were available in the concluding 23<sup>rd</sup> session of this parliament, which was a significant development in the history of Bangladesh politics, because before this no parliament was concluded with the presence of opposition.

Thus after the restoration of democracy in Bangladesh i.e. since 1991, the opposition parties have two basic characteristic roles – Hartal and Boycotting parliament.

The basic reason of these role of opposition parties are animosity and; lack of trust, compassion and accommodation between two arch rivals and the largest political parties – AL and BNP. Hence, the party in opposition have not since enough time to talk in the House by the Treasury bench, which ultimately lead for walkout, boycott or hartals. Apart from this, the partition role of the Speaker in favour of the Treasury bench also been responsible for the above behaviour of the opposition parties.

CHAPTER IV

ROLE OF OPPOSITION IN BANGLADESH  
SINCE 1991

Bangladesh, after more than three decades of its birth, is at the crossroads and is preoccupied with a number of challenges rooted in its political culture. The authoritarian tendency of its founder leader Mjuibur Rahman eventually led to military rule that lasted until 1991. Prolonged public protests, mounting domestic unrest and dwindling political legitimacy compelled Gen. Ershad to relinquish office in favour of a neutral non-political administration to conduct elections to the Jatiya Sangsad (JS).

The Care Taker Government led by the Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed did all necessary preparation to move towards democracy. The main responsibility of the Care Taker Government was to carry forward the state-business by non-controversial means, which had the endorsement of the mainstream opposition to arrange within a period of three months, a free and fair parliamentary election. The Election Commission was invigorated with necessary powers to deal with election infringements. The date of parliamentary elections was fixed and subsequently the election was held on February 27, 1991. In this election, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) became victorious and Awami league (AL) remained in opposition. Latter on, in the seventh and eight JS; BNP and AL respectively remained in opposition. The role of opposition after the restoration of democracy i.e. in the fifth, seventh and eighth JS can be assessed as follows.

#### **4.1 V Jatiya Sangsad and Opposition**

The elections of this JS were held on February 27, 1991 with spontaneous participation by the genuine voters. In the polls, more than 55% of the voters cast their votes and the polling was regarded as free and fair by the foreign observation teams coming from UK, Japan and SAARC countries. The results came as a great surprise to the Awami Leaguers who were expecting a victory based on their organisational superiority over others. BNP emerged as a single largest party with 140 seats, followed by Awami League with 88 seats. Jatiya Party and Jamati Islamic got 35 and 18 seats respectively.

It was indeed psychologically difficult for Awami league to accept defeat. Ultimately, AL Chief, Sheikh Hasina expressed that for the sake of democracy, AL

would accept the election results and perform the role of opposition within the parliament.

Although, BNP emerged as the single largest party, yet it was still not in a position to form the cabinet requiring 151 seats out of 300. BNP came to an understanding with Jamet-i-Islami, and then commanded a clear majority. On March 20, 1991 Begum Khaleda Zia became the Prime Minister and appointed her eleven member cabinet along with a number of state ministers. In exchange for Jamat-i-Islami's support in forming the government, BNP kept two reserved seats for Jamat's women candidates. Thus, by obtaining 28 unopposed reserved women's seats, BNP's total strength in the parliament went up to 168. On April 8, 1991, Awami League was declared as the largest opposition party in the JS and its chief, Sheikh Hasina was officially announced as the opposition leader of the House.

Unlike previous parliaments, this fifth parliament had a strong organized opposition. In the previous four parliaments, the Treasury Bench had the upper hand because of their sheer majority, but in this fifth parliament, the strength of opposition was 158 out of 330 MPs. This parliament held a total of 22 sessions and like the previous four parliaments failed to complete its full term.

The first session of this parliament commenced with the election of the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the House. Though the main opposition was committed to parliamentary system, the tradition of uncontested election of the above posts was not maintained. The parliamentary tradition was tarnished as being the minority party, Awami League emphatically pressed on putting its own candidates. Quite obviously, they were defeated in the House. Since the Awami league did not obtain support for its candidates from outside the party, the unity in the opposition camp was considerably eroded. Awami league's above move, however, emanated from its objection to the nomination of such a person for the post of Speaker who allegedly had a controversial role in the liberation war of Bangladesh.

#### **4.1. 1 Oppositions demand for Parliamentary System**

The opposition demanded for the establishment of parliamentary system of government in the very first session of the parliament. Inspired by the speech of the Acting President in the parliament to translate the agreement of the joint declaration of the three Alliances, the opposition parties led by Awami league strongly pleaded for a switch over to parliamentary system and establishing sovereign JS. This demand was also put forward simultaneously outside the legislature by Awami league along with various civil associations, student organizations, and professionals.

The opposition in this regard, argued that under the existing constitution 'all powerful' President was not at all answerable to the people and the cabinet was nothing but an advisory body and such a system only inspired the elected president to behave like an autocrat and establish his whimsical domination over the whole nation.(Maniruzzaman;1994:159). Therefore, in order to prevent future autocratic rule in the country, the parliamentary opposition parties including Awami league, Jamat-i-Islami, and the parties belonging to 5-party alliance; pressed hard to achieve their vital demand. Yielding to demands of the opposition and government back benchers, the leader of the House, Begum Zia, ultimately decided for a 'parliamentary form of government'. Begum Zia also meticulously considered other factors including slim possibilities of winning the presidential polls due to powerful opposition, sentiment of the Ulema Group, and reckoning Ershad still as a force in Bangladesh politics (Choudhury; 1995:80).

In the next session, the opposition raised objections particularly to the provisions relating to the inclusion of non-MPs in the cabinet, the power of the President to dissolve the House, the method of presidential election, and limitations on floor-crossing. There were minute discussions and debates in the House on both the bill proposed by the Treasury Bench and the Opposition. For detailed examination of the bills and for resolving the differences of the competing sides, they were referred to a select committee comprising 15 members from government and opposition parties. Further, in order to have public endorsement for the change of the governmental system through the twelfth



Amendment, a nation wide referendum was held in Sept. 1991. The electorate voted favorably although voter turnout was little over 35 per cent. With this public approval, Bangladesh returned to the parliamentary democracy.

#### **4.1.2 Opposition in the Presidential Election**

The presidential election was held on October 8, 1991. Earlier in August, the opposition vehemently opposed the government attempted to hold election of the president by an open ballot. Despite opposition demand for holding presidential election through secret ballot, the Treasury Bench went ahead with its own bill and passed it on 14 August 1991, in the midst of a walkout by the opposition parties.

However, in the election, initially Awami League supported the nomination of Justice Badrul Haider Choudhary and Makbul Hossain as presidential candidates latter on, with the withdrawal of Makbul Hossain's nomination, Justice Choudhary became the AL-backed presidential candidate, whom the AL tried to project as the common candidate of the combined opposition, but which could not be successful because of lack of support from Jatiya Party and Jamat-i-Islami. Whereas, the ruling party mobilized its own MPs for their necessary support in favour of Abdur Rahamn Biswas. In the election, BNP's Abdur Rahman Biswas came out successful with 172 votes while 92 votes went in favour of Justice Choudhary. Other opposition parties – Jatiya Party, Jamat-i-Islami, NAP, CPB, JSD (Siraj), NDP, workers party and Islamic oikko Jote did not participate in voting. The all parliamentary opposition parties, however, boycotted the oath taking function of newly elected President, Abdur Rahman Biswas. The passage of the eleventh and Twelfth amendments to the constitution brought the opposition and the party in power to a single platform but the compromise and cooperation were soon marred by their mutual disagreements on other important national issues.

#### **4.1.3 Opposition using the Parliamentary Devices**

The commencement of the legislative transaction and the participation of the opposition in this parliament ushered in a new hope of democratic development in the country. The parliamentary opposition parties during their presence in the House, tried to

use important parliamentary mechanism for demanding accountability from the government and putting forward opposition's points and issues.

The 'no-confidence motion' brought by the parliamentary opposition parties against the government was unprecedented in the country's political history. The opposition MPs did extensively use the 'question hour' in this parliament. Besides these other tools used by opposition members were – 'motion for an adjournment' and 'calling attention to matters of urgent public importance'. (*The Bangladesh Observer*, August 13, 1992).

#### **4.1.4 Standing Committees**

The Committee System has been regarded as a very effective instrument of the opposition to demand transparency of the government and accountability from the executive. Committee System performs a very significant function of division of labour and specialization in the assemblies for detailed examination of legislation.

To activate its committee system is one of the significant characteristics of the Fifty JS. Hence, it was expected that a good deal of legislative business was to be transacted through the parliamentary committees. This JS had 49 Standing Committees, 63 Sub-Committees.

Unlike the developed parliamentary systems e.g., Britain and Australia, all the Standing and Financial Committees of this JS were headed by ministers which hampered the process of demanding accountability from the executive. Moreover, some important Committees became moribund due to lack of consensus between the Treasury Bench and the Opposition (Hasanuzzaman 1994:31-40). The Opposition MPs opined that the neutrality of the committees had been greatly impeded with the Speaker and the ministers occupying the chairmanships of all the Standing Committees. Their suggestion was that MPs belonging to the Opposition bench should be co-opted as Committee Chairs, especially in Finance and Audit Committees like in the UK, to ensure legislative vigil over the executive. In a workshop, some MPs made recommendations for amending Article 76 (2) (a) of the constitution and Rule 246 (a) of the Rules of procedure of

parliament to enable the standing committees to examine the bills before their placement in the House.

#### 4.1.5 Opposition Outside the Legislature

The main Opposition, Awami league remained very vocal on the streets and started anti-government agitational politics for realizing the various demands, like establishing the four fundamental state principles as laid down in its original 1972 constitution; banning the politics of fundamentalist Jamat and Shibir; and implementing the verdict of the Gana Adalat (people's court) on Jamat leader, Golam Azam. It also called upon the people to resist the anti-liberation forces and rise against terrorism. Awami league greatly resorted to street agitations in order to pressurize the government for repealing the indemnity ordinance and passing the Repeal Bill which was moved in the House by the opposition Chief Whip Md. Nasim. The Awami league, while announcing its fortnight agitational programme, entwined the indemnity and Golam Azam issues with the programmes of the Nirmul Committee led by Jahanara Imam.<sup>1</sup> Awami League simultaneously organised a grater movement against the proclamation of the anti-terrorist ordinance. The opposition leader, Sheikh Hassina, termed the ordinance as an anti-opposition more promulgated only to harass the opponents of the regime. (*Dhaka Courier* ; November20,1992 )

The opposition's anti-government agitations outside the parliament were explained by political observers as attempts of non-cooperation and dislodging the party in power. The AL Chief's letter to foreign diplomats in Dhaka in November, 1991, which contained criticisms of BNP rule and sought the foreign missions' 'influence' on the ruling regime to accomplish political demands, was similarly regarded as inconsistent with democratic practice (CraigBaxter 1991:135). Hence, the observers linked the above activities of Awami League with Sheikh Hasina's earlier comment that opposition would not allow the government 'to stay in peace'.

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<sup>1</sup> Jahanara Imam was called the 'Mother of the Martyar' by her followers.

The political atmosphere of Bangladesh was increasingly getting warm, when all the three major opposition parties, AL, JP and Jamat intensified their United movement to achieve their demand for holding free and fair elections under a neutral Care Taker Government. Further, the opposition announced its ultimatum to the government to accept the demand for Care Taker Government by December 27, 1994 and threatened that otherwise, the Opposition would resign en masse on December 28, 1994. The opposition organized its anti-government movement with greater vigour on the streets through observance of frequent hartals and seizures programmes. With the approach of the final date of the opposition's ultimatum, the Speaker on his own initiative, tried to mediate between the opposition and the ruling party but was unsuccessful. The mainstream opposition thus resigned en masse on December 28, 1994 keeping their parliament boycott for 300 days creating an unprecedented example in the world's parliamentary history. Later, on July 28, 1995, when the opposition seats in the parliament were declared vacant by the Speaker on the ground of unauthorized absence for 90 consecutive days, the question of holding by-election came up. But, in order to reach a political solution, the BNP leader decided not to hold any by-election and balanced in favour of dissolving the sangsad and arranging fresh elections, which was discarded by the main opposition with their declaration that they would not only stay away from any election under BNP but would unitedly resist such moves. Later the 5<sup>th</sup> JS was dissolved and was regarded by opposition as a triumph of the people and declared that the caretaker issue had become a national demand. Further, new expectations were generated among the disgruntled masses as there was an exchange of three letters and short telephonic conversations between the Prime Minister and the opposition leader regarding solution of the ongoing political crisis, which was not fruitful as both sides remained adamant in their respective stands. And, the mainstream opposition continued their agitation on the streets and the government instructed the Election Commission to hold the next general election, as the next election within 90 days became obligatory. (*The Daily Star*, March 12, 1996.) The election for 6<sup>th</sup> JS was held on February 15, 1996 the combined opposition resisted it tremendously as they vigorously campaigned against the election and observed general strike before the day of the election and imposed people's curfew on the day of the polls. However, the credibility of the polls was greatly reduced because

of only 5-10 per cent voter turnouts (Mannan 1996 : 67-83) The opposition accused that any election under BNP could not be free and fair, they denounced the 6<sup>th</sup> legislature which had been the product of a controversial and disputable election.

Further, the opposition advanced with an all-out protest and raised the various demands like – release of opposition stalwarts and activists, and withdrawal of false cases; cancellation of election results; resignation of the BNP government; formation of a non-party Care Taker Government; and completion of general election by May 1996. Owing to the government's negative attitude towards the said demands, the opposition, from March 9, 1996 started a non-cooperation programme in the form of general strike for an indefinite period. Latter on, in March as quite a number of senior members of the civil bureaucracy in their demand for a caretaker government, started abstaining from their official functions and a handful of them expressed solidarity with the opposition. Under such deteriorating circumstances and massive opposition pressures, the BNP government decided to quite which led to the dissolution of the 6<sup>th</sup> JS on March 30, 1996. With the unavoidable yielding to opposition demands and the dramatic exit from state power by BNP and subsequent formation of a Care Taker Government led by former Chief Justice, Justice Muhammad Habibur Rahman, the two-year long opposition movement and political deadlock ended.

#### **4.2 VII Jatiya Sangsad and Opposition**

The seventh JS was formed following the general election on June 12, 1996 in which AL emerged as a majority party in the House. The JS had its first sitting on July 14, 1996; and completes its full 5- year term on July 13, 2001- sitting which was its 23<sup>rd</sup> session. Except the seventh no other JS in the past could achieve the credit of completing full five-year term. All the six JS were dissolved either by the military junta or forced to be dissolved due to political upheavals before completing terms.

This JS comprising 330 members including 30 reserved seats for women. The party wise break up of members in the parliament was Bangladesh Awami League – 182, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) – 108, Jatiya Party-31, Jamaat-i-Islami -3, Jatiya

Samajtantrik Dal (JSP) –1, six seats remained vacant including three in Rangpur, two in kishorganj and one in Bhola.

One of the significant achievements of this parliament was formation of the Parliamentary Standing Committees on different ministries headed by parliament members instead of ministers. The seventh parliament introduced for the first time a '30-minute question-answer session' for the Prime Minister on every Tuesday of the working day of parliament. All proceedings of the house were regularly broadcasted by radio and television.

During the term of this parliament, the infamous indemnity ordinance was scrapped paving the way for trial of the killers of Father of Nation- Bangabandhu Shiekh Mujibur Rahman and his family members. This parliament passed 189 bills besides passing six budgets during its 383 working days through 23 sessions. The important laws passed by the parliament include special security bill for the daughters of the Father of the Nation, permanent law commission, vested property Return Bill, Upazila Amendment ordinance Bill, District Council Bill, Bill for the Autonomy of Radio and Television and Bangladesh Artistes welfare Bill.

#### **4.2.1 Opposition's Role**

Earlier, the opposition leader Begum Khaleda Zia, rejected the government party's offer to join Sheikh Hassina's 'government of national consensus' and termed it as an evil design of Awami league with a view to reviving the ill famed single party BAKSAL rule as introduced in 1975.

Immediately, after the first session started functioning, strains were greatly visible. Despite the promises of the Treasury Bench and the major opposition regarding their responsible roles, the very first day was marked by commotion and excitement along with the major opposition's walkout even before the election of the new Speaker. The MPs of both benches were seen to behave in an indecent manner and failing to keep parliamentary norms. However, despite the unscrupulous debates and walkouts, the House went on with following legislative activities participated by the opposition. During

the first session, a total of 758 starred and 550 unstarred questions were accepted and answered in the House. During the Question-hour, the opposition MPs brought forward a number of matters relating to their respective constituencies and asked for government action. They also used the device of calling attention to urgent public importance as per Rule 71 and placed their notices.

However, on November 11, BNP MPs staged a walkout in protest of the Speaker's partisan role and intolerant attitude of the Treasury Bench which prevented them from placing their views. Their abstention took place at a time when the Indemnity Repeal Bill was placed before the House.

BNP parliamentary party then decided to boycott the House and prepared a 10-point charter of demands and handed it over to the Speaker. It was further decided that BNP would not return to the House unless the ruling party met its demands. BNP simultaneously arranged street agitation for realizing these demands. The opposition leaders also apprised the president of their demands and asked for his meditation. In response to Treasury's call for a negotiation, the opposition insisted on creating a congenial condition for dialogue which could be possible once the harassment of BNP workers and leaders was stopped and the Speaker presided over the House impartially. As this crisis could not resolve and the session was prorogued.

Like the past three sessions, the fourth session also witnessed a walkout by the BNP legislators. When BNP MPs' demand for discussion on law and order situation was not entertained by the Speaker, hue and cry did occur. The major opposition staged a walkout and protested the Speaker's biased behaviour in retaliation. In the next session the opposition BNP members staged three walkouts and raised their protest against the structure of the proposed parliamentary committees and the passing of the budget which they termed as 'anti-people'.

The eighth session began in midst of BNP's prolonged parliamentary boycott for six months. Latter, the boycott was withdrawn after a Speaker sponsored successful dialogue between the two sides through the signing of an agreement.

Abstentions and repeated walkouts by BNP from the very first session and the intolerant attitude of the ruling party made it clear that the major opposition had no alternative but to divert its anti-government role to the streets. BNP followed the footsteps of the previous oppositions and adopted the strategy of waging agitational movements against the ruling party. It capitalized its anti-Indian stance and highly criticized the government for signing allegedly lopsided water sharing accord with India on December 12, 1996.

Further, BNP called a nation-wide hartal for eight hours, in order to strengthen its ongoing movement. Through this agitational programme BNP raised vehement protest against forming proposed sub-regional cooperation, offering consider and transit facilities of India, and procuring electricity from neighbouring Indian states. The government responded the hartal and arrested four senior BNP leaders on the charges of their involvement in sabotage and terrorism. Such a repressive move only added momentum to opposition's anti-government agitations. With the aim of organizing a greater movement, a four-day conference called the 'National Solidarity Conference' was arranged by BNP in early April, 1997 which was also attended by other parties like Muslim League, Jamat-i-Islami, Jatiya Ganatrantik Andolon, Krishek Samajbadi Party (KSP) and Progotishil Nationalist Party (PNP). All the papers presented in the conference criticized and highlighted the negative aspects of the Ganges water accord, sub-regional grouping, transit to India and problems in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT).

For countering the opposition's agitations and threats, the ruling party also arranged a public meeting in Dhaka where the Prime Minister talked about the conspiracy theory and warned the nation of the opposition plan to disrupt the country's economy. She thus urged for greater unity and resistance against the opposition. In order to deal with possible entente in the opposition camp, the AL leader also endeavoured to unit the component parties of the former 15- Party Alliance formed during Ershad rule.

The above oppositions and ruling party's moves demonstrated their preparation for political confrontation outside the parliament, which led to the widening of gaps and gross lack of consensus on making the JS the nucleus of resolving conflict or dealing



with pressing problems of the nation. In organising anti-government street movements, the major opposition made constant efforts to exploit and capitalize on the political issues. When the formal agreement on CHT was concluded on December 2, 1997, BNP and like minded parties<sup>2</sup> immediately rejected the accord and moved forward to resist its implementation through observing hartals and organizing violent agitations. It is noteworthy that BNP have gained politically, vis-à-vis the AL government, had it obtained support from the second largest opposition, ideologically similar Jatiya Party (JP). But rapprochement with JP became difficult due to the following reasons - JP chief Gen. H.M. Ershad was all along detained in prison under various charges during BNP rule; Jatiya Party's anti-BNP role during 1991-96; JP's deal with Awami league in post-June 1996 election to join Sheikh Hasina's 'consensus government' in exchange for Ershad's release; Ershad's personal dislike of BNP leadership and the like. Although, JP joined the AL's 'consensus government', it was caught in a dilemma with regard to performing a role as effective opposition both inside and outside the parliament. JP's policy of playing both hot and cold, however, came under criticism within its rank and file, which further led to split in party itself.

Jamat-i-Islami, which is the third largest opposition, had a dismal performance in the seventh parliamentary election with only 3 seats in the Sangsad. In this parliament Jamat-i-Islami has been maintaining an anti-AL position and is in favour of organising movements against the ruling party. Compared to the previous opposition's falling back on the politics of hartal, the number of BNP's hartal was less impressive. In this parliament it is noteworthy that some of the important legislative devices like adjournment motion and half-an-hour discussion, which is often used for demanding executive accountability, remained non-existent.

The en masse boycott of parliament by all opposition parties including the AL during the previous government, Sheikh Hasina said that there was sufficient logic and ground behind that decision, "we were not allowed to discuss many important issues including that of Muslim annihilation in Hebron, Peoples right to vote was denied,

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<sup>2</sup> The smaller parties which supported BNP in collectively resisting the CHT treaty included Jamat-i-Islami, Zafar-Moazzem faction of Jatiya Party, S.A. Pradhan's JAGPA, Oil Ahad's Democratic league, A.S.M. Solaiman's NDA, and Shawkat Hossain Nilu's PNP.

democratic norms were undermined and massive vote rigging was in practice”, she pointed out and said that under such a backdrop, the opposition was forced to boycott parliament.” But during our time”, she said, “all elections were held peacefully, the people’s right to vote under a Care Taker Government had been established, and opposition was allowed to discuss all issues and matters in the House”. So, she said, “the agitation movements being launched by the BNP had no logic or reason whatsoever”.( *Bangladesh Observer* , December 18, 1997 )

The main Opposition BNP and its allies took the city streets and organised a series of rallies separately in different areas of the metropolis on December 17, 1997 to register their protest against the recent brutal killings in Khagrachhair district of the CHT region. Opposition led by Khaleda Zia, met President Shahabuddin Ahmed and urged him to convene a round-table conference between the ruling and the opposition parties to resolve the impasse triggered by the peace on CHT. Begum Zia, who earlier led a street procession of 97 BNP MPs and three Jamaat MPs, submitted a memorandum to the President on behalf of the opposition. Begum Zia led this procession on foot from her official residence in Dhaka, for the first time after the fall of the Ershad government. The MPs carried black flags, banners and placards with different demands written there. The MPs also shouted various slogans against the government and the CHT accord, saying that the accord violated the constitution and was against national interests (POT, 1998:14).

The winter session began on January 14, 1998 amidst boycott by main opposition BNP and its ally Jammat-i-Islami, both had demanded cancellation of the CHT peace accord as a precondition of attending parliament. PM Sheikh Hasina has renewed her call to the opposition to return to parliament and discuss all issues on the floor of the House in the greater interest of the nation. “We don’t know on what issue they have boycotted parliament. We have allowed opposition to talk on any issue inside parliament,” said the Leader of the House (POT, 1998:38).

JP whip Fazle Rabbi, speaking on a point of order, made a dig at the Prime Minister for her absence from the House on the reopening day of the winter session,

reminding her off-repeated statements that parliament was the first of all national activities. Turning to the vacant seats of the BNP lawmakers, Rabbi criticise the government for not giving JP its due. In the absence of the BNP, JP should be regarded as opposition in parliament, he added. Leaders of opposition BNP, Jamaat-i- Islami and the Islamic groups have called for a united agitation immediately to thwart, what they said, disintegration of a country under the CHT accord and to protect national independence.

Leader of the German parliamentary delegation wolfgang Krause, at the end of his four-day visit to Bangladesh on February 21, 1998 said, “we discussed the issues with the oppositoin MPs but the reasons they gave for boycotting the parliament session were not convincing”. (POT, 1998:216)

Worker and leaders of the opposition – BNP staged demonstrations near Deputy Commissioner (DC) Offices across the country on March 10, 1998 protesting price rise of essentials. They submitted memoranda to the DC offices, demanding the prices of rice, salt, onion and other essentials be brought down and gruel kitchens be opened. After four days of intense parlyes, the speaker – mediated dialogue between the ruling Awami League and main opposition BNP, the latter joined the parliament. Further, the opposition got severe jolt when two of its members joined the council of ministers in AL government. Jamat-i-Islami, which has three lawmakers in the House was not attending the proceeding from December, 1997, protesting the signing of the CHT accord, decided to join it from March. The Jatiya Party President E.M. Ershad has criticised the ruling AL and main opposition BNP for ‘quarraling’ in parliament. He said, “they (AL & BNP) are busy with conflict and violence in JS; instead of ensuring people’s welfare”.

BNP lawmakers, apart from walking out, lodged protests in some unique ways. They entered the House with burning candles in their hands to protest power failure in the Sangsad Bhavan on April 2, 1998; besides they showed their backs to the chairman for three minutes as they were barred from Speaker in the House after their misbehavior with Speaker. JP staged a walkout from parliament on June 29, 1998 protesting the chairman’s decision not to allow Ershad to speak on personal explanation. Ershad was not given the floor for replying to an allegation made against him by a minister. However, in

September, 1998 the leader of opposition Khaleda Zia, has offered unconditional cooperation to the government for overcoming the difficulties posed by the devastating floods across country. Then the ruling party and the opposition have reached an agreement to work unitedly to mitigate the sufferings of the flood affected people.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina declared that her party, the AL would never call hartal even if it returned to the opposition. The Prime Minister's unconditional announcement came on the needs of the main opposition BNP's 60 –hour hartal enforced across the country from November 9, 1998. Justifying the past hartals called by AL while in opposition, Hasina said those hartals were to establish people's rights, but there was no need to call hartal now. (*Daily Star* , November 16, 1998)

JP Chief Ershad has termed the BNP as 'fascist' and opposed its repeated hartal programme. Whereas, the BNP in its reply said that if the democratic rights of the people and the opposition parties were not obstructed, there would be no hartal. Other opposition parties too could not have faith in the words of the Prime Minister; to them AL is party of double-talkers. (*Bangladesh Observer*, November 15, 1998)

Latter on, in a policy shift, former President Ershad declared his party's solidarity with the main stream opposition's current movement against the government. All the BNP and Jamat Islami MPs and majority of the Jatiya party members were absent in the House when President Shahabuddin Ahmed delivered the New Year speech. Opposition leaders said, "we are boycotting the President's speech as it was decided and approved by the cabinet. It is no longer the President's speech but a statement by the government."

The opposition parties held a demonstration in Paris and handed over a memorandum to the donors as they began the Bangladesh aid consortium meeting there on April 19, 1999. About 2000 Bangladeshi residing in Paris, marched on the square outside the meeting venue in the morning and staged a protest rally against the government's measures back at home. (*Independent* April 20, 1999.)

The BNP-led alliance which called hartals on more than 50 days in the last one year has apparently reached a consensus for the first time not to go for hartals on petty

issues. Sources in the four-party combine said the Jamaat-i-Islami and the Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) this time opposed a move to call hartal from the joint public meeting at Mymensingh on September 25, 1999. They suggested that the alliance should continue mass contract programme as the parliamentary election is nearing. (POT, 1999:1066). In another development JP Chief Ershad was sent to jail, on conviction in a corruption case, on November 20, 1999 and hence Ershad lost his membership both in the parliament and in his Jatiya Party. This had an impact on the alliance politics of opposition, two of the original leaders in alliance were no longer there – first Golam Azam and other Ershad. Now, as far as personalities are concerned, Khaleda Zia became the lone attraction for the whole opposition alliance. In some odd way this may act as a boon for BNP as its leader, in effect, became the natural rallying point for the whole opposition and as such became able to strengthen the inner bond of the opposition.

#### **4.3 VIII Jatiya Sangsad and Opposition**

The BNP – led four party alliance won a massive victory in the VIII JS elections held in October 2001. The BNP alone obtained 185 seats against the nearest rival the AL that won 62 seats (AL won 146 seats in last 1996 general election). BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia won all the five seats she vied for, while AL Chief Sheikh Hasina won four out of five seats she contested in this election. The Jamaat-i-Islami, a partner of BNP in the 4- party alliance, emerged as the third major party with 16 seats, while the Jatiya Party of Ershad bagged 14 seats and holds the fourth position. Two other factions of the Jatiya Party led by Anwar Hossain Monju and Naziur Rahman Monjur got one seat each and Kader Siddiqui of Krishak Janata league secured his only seat in parliament. Three independent candidates have also won the poll.

However, Awami League president, Shiekh Hasina rejected the results of this general election, and told a crowded press conference in Dhaka on October 2, 2001; “The people have rejected the results of the October 1 poll and there is no question of accepting the election results by Awami League.” Whereas the former US President Jimmy Carter has urged the AL to “act responsibly and accept the results of the elections

in order to strengthen Bangladesh's democratic institutions in the long-term".  
(*Independen* october10, 2001)

A number of teachers, journalists, retired bureaucrats, and social workers have called upon those pursuing politics for the welfare of the people; to refrain from street movement. They observed that boycotting parliament would not be a means to protect the interest of the people and said that the elected representatives should discharge their responsibility of reserving the people through participating in the JS. Besides this, business leaders of the country have expressed grave concern over the non-cooperation movement announced by the main opposition party, AL; following the rejection of election results. Hence, the demand from AL for repolling did not clearly met with a favourable response from any quarter (POT, 2001:1159-60).

AL president and former prime minister Sheikh Hasina, and MPs and leaders of her party, boycotted the swearing-in ceremony of the BNP- led four-party alliance government headed by Begum Khaleda Zia at Bangabhaban on October10, 2001 in protest against what it called crude rigging in the poll and manipulation of poll results. In the similar fashion, new Prime Minister Khaldea Zia along with her party MPs and leaders had stayed away from the swearing-in ceremony of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her cabinet at same venue on June 23,1996; raising the allegation of poll rigging. After some procrastination, AL MPs-elect led by the party chief Sheikh Hasina finally took oath on October 24, 2001; two weeks after members of the ruling party and others were sworn-in.

The JS began its first session on October 28, 2001 amid boycott by major opposition AL. The House session began with the Speaker of the seventh parliament Abdul Hamid, in the Chair. Except those of the AL members, the other opposition parties – the Jatiya Party (Ershad), the Jatiya Party (Manju), the Krishak Sramik league of Kader Siddiqui and independent MPs were present at the inaugural session of the parliament.

In responding to the Opposition, the ruling party said that after 1991, the BNP did not want the election under a Care Taker Government; it did not want to hand over power to a non-elected government. But, the then opposition party AL staged movement for

caretaker government in 1996 for holding the general election. And now the AL is opposing the concept of caretaker government under which an unprecedented free and fair election was held on October 1, 2001. The AL described the caretaker government as very good, but after its massive defeat in the election it was contradicting the concept of Care Taker Government (POT, 2001:1308-12).

The Opposition party, AL in a statement on December 20, 2001, strongly condemned the distortion of the history of glorious liberation war by the BNP government. The Opposition party said that “the special supplement published by the Information Ministry in different national dailies on the occasion of the victory day did not mention the name of Father of the Nation ‘Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’ , not to speak of his contribution in the country’s war of liberation. It also made no mention of Bangladesh Awami League which contributed a lot of the long history of democratic movement before the independence struggle. (*Bangladesh Observer* December21, 2001.)

Regarding the observing hartal, AL chief Sheikh Hasina said her party does not want to announce such programmes to create sufferings for the people, but it demands hartal when ‘torture’ crosses the limit.

Referring to the demand, Hasina said when as a Prime Minister, she had declared that her party would not observed hartal, the then Opposition leader announced that she would call hartal day after day. “And now if we say that we will observe hartal day after day, then what will she says”, Sheikh Hasina asked the delegation. Hasina also said, “her party does not want to go far hartal but being tormented by the present government the AL is bound to call strike”. (*Bangladesh Observer* April10,2002.)

AL MPs staged a demonstration and brought out a procession inside the parliament building on March 21, 2002; in protest against the passage of the “Repeal of Presentation and Display of the Portrait of Father of Nation Bill 2002” in the House. Wearing black badges and carrying black flags in their hands 35 AL MPs also chanted slogans against the bill and in favor of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman during the

demonstration and procession. Latter they came out of the parliament building in a procession.

The Opposition party – AL, which had been boycotting parliament for last two sessions, set two preconditions for joining the parliament, the two preconditions were – ‘withdrawal of cases filed against leaders and activists of the party, stop attacks and political harassment of the opposition leaders and activists’ and ‘sending ruling party parliamentary teams in different areas of the country where Mr. Amid visited taking parliamentary teams of his party to see the situation in those areas’ .The first budget session of the parliament began on June 4, 2002 amid boycott by major opposition AL and walkout by JP (Ershad).

AL made their maiden appearance in the parliament on June24, 2002 breaking long boycott after the October 1 parliament election (70 working days). The AL however, staged a walkout when the sitting speaker declined a point of order. However, barely three days after their maiden appearance in the parliament, the AL Lawmakers decided on June 27 not to continue attending the house, for ‘having been deprived of their rightful time for the budgetary discussion’. Sheikh Hasina ,demanding half of the total time for budgetary discussion, said, “we must be given the right proposition of time allocated for the opposition for a meaningful discussion on the budget”. “In the last two parliaments, the fifth and the seventh – the opposition was given over 50 percent of total time for budgetary debates”, she added. From July14, 2002 the opposition party- AL again started boycotting the session for protesting the arrest of its senior parliamentarian Col (retd) Shawkat Ali. However Shawkat Ali was released on June 29. (*Bangladesh Observer* June28,2002).

The AL called a down-to-dusk hartal on September1, 2002, to ‘protest attack on Sheikh Hasina’s motorcade’ amid charges that it was designed to foil celebration of founding anniversary of BNP. Barely four days before the fifth session of the parliament is due to begin AL MPs on November10, 2002 staged a sit-in in front of the office of the Speaker in Jatiya Sangsad bhaban demanding release of MPs from jail before the forthcoming session. Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina in November14, 2002 said her



party would be forced to take a 'final decision' on whether to continue in the parliament or to boycott it if the opposition lawmakers were not allowed to speak on important national issues in the House. Earlier her party staged a brief walkout from the House on the very first day of the fifth session, after the Speaker switched off Hasina's microphone.

The main opposition AL on November 26, 2002 decided to boycott the rest of the sessions. It came in protest at the government's refusal to withdraw a bill, which seeks to drop Bangabandhu's name from an annual National Agriculture Award. The AL lawmakers also skipped parliamentary proceedings on the same day after a stormy walkout after the decision taken to boycott. The House of November 27 passed Bangabandhu Award Fund (Amendment) Bill replacing the word 'Bangabandhu' by 'National Agriculture'. Both the factions of the Jatiya Party refused to join the AL-initiated united movement protesting the fuel hike in January 2003. Ershad said that his party did not believe in politics of hartal. The main opposition AL on February 3, 2003 blamed BNP – led alliance government of running the JS in accordance with the 'whims and dictates' of Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, ignoring the rules of procedures of the parliament. However, the Prime Minister Khaleda Zia on March 21, 2003 asked political parties to discard hartal saying that development should be the priority of politics. 'Hartal should be detected from the political analogue', she said urging national unity for advancing that nation towards progress. (POT, 2003:366).

The government did not offer the opposition to chair any of the 34 Parliamentary Standing Committees; the view of the ruling party was, "when we (the BNP) were in the opposition in the last parliament with a 116-member strength, they (the then ruling party) did not make from amongst us chairman of even a single standing committee." The opposition party – AL demanded chairmanship on 10 out of 50 Standing Committees. The main opposition party AL joined the parliament on June 16, 2003, which has been abstaining since the first day of the last session, held in May 2003 to protest the switching-off of the mike of the leader of the opposition in parliament. Again, AL lawmakers stormed out of the House on June 24, 2003, condemning the Speaker for switching-off their microphones to bar them from speaking on the appointment of the Chief Justice, allegedly by superseding two senior judges. (*Daily Star* June 25, 2003)

The country's political front again changed with heat as major opposition AL publicly announced its go-ahead with the boycott of parliament, if its three-point demand is not met. The AL called down-to-dusk hartal on June 28, 2003 in protest against 'anti-people budget'. Their three-point demand includes tendering of apology by state minister for Housing Alamgir Kabir for his remarks about leader of the opposition in the House, expunging of his comments from the proceedings of the House and strict adherence to the constitution and the Rules of procedures. The AL stayed out of parliament on June 12, 2003 when the national budget for the current fiscal was placed and again AL did so when it was passed on June 30, 2003. Lawmakers of the party went to the House on nine working days and staged six walkouts. AL presidium has alleged that terrorist activities have spread in the country like cancer due to the alliance government's policy of protecting towards the armed extremists. The resolution added that government was not only patronizing and protecting the extremists but also trying to divert the conspiracy hatched by the extremists against the country and the nation.

The bid of AL to forge unity of the opposition parties with a view to launching a countrywide mass movement to unseat the government and force mid-term polls did fail to make headway due to poor response from other opposition parties. The other opposition parties rather prefer to opt for issue-based movement at the moment. They also cautiously did like to maintain equidistance from both the government and main opposition in order to emerge as the third force projecting themselves as alternative to both BNP and AL. In December, 2003 most of the stalwarts belonging to the opposition parties including AL have warmly welcomed Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman's proposal for allotment of parliamentary seats to political parties proportionate to the percentage of votes they secure in a general election. However, ministers of the BNP-led coalition government have refused to make any comment on it, just terming his proposal "merely his personal comment or observation" (POT, 2003:1090-95).

The AL and other opposition party on January 14, 2004 criticized the government move to expand number of seats in parliament to 450 including 50 reserved for women from 300 in the line with the rising population. The opposition AL, JP (Ershad) as well as women organizations have been campaigning for direct elections to women seats.

Actually, 'politics of mutual convenience' has prompted partners of the ruling BNP led four-party alliance to decide to increase the number of seats in the JS, the other important consideration which prompted the alliance leader to take the decision was 'ensuring the consecutive defeat of AL', their main political opponent. The eleventh session began amid boycott of the main opposition AL lawmakers who had been staying away from the House since June 25, 2003. However, lawmakers of JP (Ershad) returned on February 19, 2003 in the wake of the government's announcement in parliament of fulfillment of their demands.

The government on March 17, 2004 introduced the 14<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment bill seeking to introduce a provision of 45 reserved seats for women in parliament. With the passage of the bill, the provision would make effective for the residual period of the present parliament increasing its strength to 345 from the existing 300 members. The bill sought to amend Article 4, 59, 82, 65, 148 and the fourth schedule of the constitution. Earlier there were 30 reserved seats for women, but the relevant constitutional provision expired with the dissolution of last parliament in July 2001. (*News Today*, April 26, 2004)

The BNP-alliance government, however, invited the AL to return to parliament and make their suggestions about the bill. AL joined the parliament on May 12, 2004 for one day in obituary reference of the assassination of AL lawmaker Ahsanullah Master. But leader of the opposition Sheikh Hassina and several other AL lawmakers did not join the session. The 14<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment bill with eight provisions including introduction of 45 reserved seats for women and rise in the retirement age of Supreme Court Judges was passed on May 16, 2004 amid protests by the opposition. The main opposition AL which strongly opposes the bill terming the judges' retirement age provision as 'politically-motivated' would not attend the parliament in protest. A total of 226 lawmakers – 211 from the BNP – led four – party alliance, 12 from the JP and three from independence – voted for the above bill.

The main Opposition AL started its afresh role in the parliament, after over 20 months of dilly-dallying and frequent session boycott, with its parliamentary wing decided to return to the House from June 15, 2004, to play its part 'effectively'. However,

on July 8, main opposition AL walked out of parliament protesting Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's doubt over death threat to leader of the opposition sheikh Hasina and demanded immediate withdrawal of her 'irresponsible remarks'. Though after September 15, 2004 denial of adjournment motion on the August 21, 2004 grenade tragedy AL felt dissatisfaction and assumed no use of continuing in parliament.

The majority of the people surveyed country wide think that the demand raised by the main opposition political party for immediate resignation of the government is not justified, rather they want government remains in power for its full term. The National Democratic Foundation (NDF) revealed the survey report at a press conference at National Press club in Dhaka. The survey was conducted among 2925 persons in six divisional cities from September 5 to October 4, 2004 (POT, 2004:1648).

The main opposition AL returned to parliament in its fourteenth session on October 28, 2004. The opposition led by AL arranged the 'cross country human wall' to express no-confidence in the government on December 11, 2004. On December 13, 2004 they staged demonstrations across country, including hartal in Bogra and Gaibandha, in protest against 'attacks' by police and ruling alliance men during December 11 human wall programme. The opposition AL went for another prolonged boycott on January 31, 2005 and returned to the parliament on February 12, 2006 to place electoral reforms proposals of the opposition combined led by the AL.

The opposition Jatiya party led by former president Ershad faced another split as its 'rebel' presidium member Shafiul Alam Prodhan on January 2006 announced floating of a new party. Ershad's former wife Bidisha and a number of JP leaders who had resigned recently from the party lead the new party styled 'Jatiya Party Gonotantik Dhara'.

The parliament passed the national budget for the fiscal year 2006-07 on June 29, 2006 in the absence of the main opposition AL. The final session of the Jatiya Sangsad ended earlier on October 4, 2006 after holding 23 sessions in 373 working days in five year. The completion of full five years term of the eighth JS is indeed a significant development in the political history of Bangladesh. As this was the first time since the

nation's independence in 1971 that a parliament held its concluding session with the opposition presence in the House. The opposition party AL, which did not attend the sessions for a long time, submitted 152 notices for discussion on various issues including price increase of essential commodities, frequent power outages, Islamist militancy, grenade attack on Sheikh Hasina, killing of former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria and others in the 23<sup>rd</sup> session. All the notices came as adjournment motions, but the Speaker rejected all of them.

#### **4.4 Critical Analysis**

After assessing the role of opposition in the V, VII and VIII JS it can be observed that boycott and hartals (strikes), the traditional political strategies adopted by the major political parties during the colonial periods, are still followed by the opposition parties in Bangladesh even in parliamentary democratic system. The major tools of opposition – Hartals (a major source of anarchy) and Boycott (threat to parliamentary democracy) can be analysed as below.

##### **4.4.1 Hartals**

Hartals is such a programme that stops the wheel of production. People cannot move freely and often they become victims of political violence. Many lost their lives in the past when hartalists set buses and other vehicles on fire, threw petrol bombs in auto rickshws etc. Patients can not move to hospital even in extreme situation. The day-labourers are the worst affected people in hartals. Besides, economy suffers most due to disruption in movement of goods and services. Bangladesh's export suffers most due to hartal and port congestion increases when hartal is imposed. (*News Today*, March 2, 2006 )

In 1998, Shah A.M.S. Kibria, then finance minister, stated that the country courts 3.8 billion taka (approximately US \$ 26.2 million) in loses for every hartal the opposition undertakes (Islam 2003) A UNDP study report reveals that the hartal culture results in a 3 to 4 per cent GDP loss, annually (Bandladesh Sangbad Sangstha 2005) under the UNDP study on hartal culture, more than 3000 people from all walks of life were srueveyed.

Ninety-five per cent of the people surveyed believed that hartals damage the economy and society by hampering business activities, through lack of access to health and educational facilities, damage to property and public buildings and loss of income. Nearly fifty five percent of those interviewed also felt that the strikes failed to have any impact on policy, while seventy percent thought constructive alternatives to hartals did exist (Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha 2005). Hence, it is not an exaggeration to say that hartal politics is completely against the will and interest of the people. Koji Nojima, Chairman of the Japan-Bangladesh joint committee for commerce and economic cooperation mentioned hartal as the main reason for Japanese reluctance to invest in Bangladesh (The New Nation 2005) Regrettably, while foreigners correctly assess the impact of hartals on the national economy, whereas the politicians of Bangladesh are yet to realise it or do anything about the problem. Following table shows the number of hartals observed in Bangladesh since 1991 under different ruling part.

**Table: 4.1**

**Hartal Perpetrated to Falsify the Activity of Ruling Government**

Ruling party	Period of time	Days Hartals observed by the main opposition
BNP	1991-1996	416
AL	1996-2001	318
BNP	2001-2005	54

Source: *New Age* (Dhaka), 28 June 2003; *Daily Ajkerkagoj* (Dhaka), 10 October, 2005.

**4.4.2 Boycotting Parliament**

Since the re-inception of parliamentary democracy in 1991, a political culture borne of parliamentary boycotts by the opposition has posed a grave threat to parliamentary democracy in Bangladesh. The absence of an established opposition has created a serious obstacle in making parliament effective. In turn, this has made the

government unaccountable and unresponsive. The VIII JS began its first session on October 28, 2001, just 27 days after parliamentary elections. AL, the largest opposition party in parliament, responded to its landslide electoral defeat by announcing a boycott of parliament unless fresh elections were held. It was not until June 24, 2002 that AL participated in parliament's third session. Again it started boycotting parliament a year later, on June 25, 2003, because of an indecent remark by the State Minister of Housing and Public works in parliament about Shiekh Hasina, the leader of opposition in the House. The main opposition AL finally came back on the fifth day of the 12<sup>th</sup> session on June 9, 2004 with a view to preserving membership in parliament; as a rule provides : 'a member of parliament shall vacate one's seat if one is absent from parliament , without the leave of parliament, for ninety consecutive sitting days'. Since then, AL abstained from the parliament session till December 2, 2004, when they joined in the session for the third time. Again, parliament faced a serious boycott problem by the AL on the grounds that the Speaker did not accept AL's demand for adjournment of parliamentary activities on January 31, 2005 to honour Finance Minister Shah A.M.S. Kibria, who was killed by a grenade attack in a public assembly for days earlier.

The reasons for parliamentary boycotts since 1991 were mainly because of the opposition was not given enough time to talk in the House and that they were disallowed to pass parliamentary motions in the House. In fact, the opposition's demands for adjournment motions are rarely honoured in the House. Only one adjournment motion was discussed in V JS. Most disappointingly, no adjournment motions were accepted in the VII and VIII JS.

Following table shows the recent history of parliamentary boycott in Bangladesh.

**Table: 4.2**

**Parliament boycott form 1991-2006**

Ruling party	Boycott Party	Parliament (Date/Day/Session)	Boycott
BNP (1991-1996)	AL	March 1994-November 1994 Parliament Dissolved: December 1995.	
AL (1996-2001)	BNP	Total working days: 382; Boycott: 156	
BNP & its allies (2001-2006)	AL	Total working days: 373; Boycott: 222.	

Source: *Daily Star* (Dhaka), October 28 2005; *Daily Naya Diganta* (Dhaka), October 28, 2006.

The politics of Hartals and boycotting the JS have made the parliament dysfunctional. At the root of these two political problems of Bangladesh, there are animosity and; lack of trust, compassion and accommodation between the two arch rivals and the largest political parties of the nation : AL and BNP. The both parties have been at loggerheads for many years. After Ershad's exit from power, their animosity continued to increase as they have been continuing to fight for power. All the energy of these two parties is concentrated in devising ways and means of containing the influence of each other at any cost. The dislike, nay hatred, for each other is so great that the national issues of vital importance, for which a national consensus is imperative, cannot be addressed in the fear that the other party will gain political mileage from opposing it. (*Weekly Holiday*, March 3, 2006)

There are some reasons of the rabid rivalry between both parties – AL and BNP.



First, both the AL and the BNP do battle over the history of the country. The AL and the BNP wish to fashion the birth of Bangladesh reflecting the leading role by their founders. The AL wants to take full credit for achieving the independence of Bangladesh and downplays the role of others who fought the liberation war. After coming to power in 2001, Begum Khaleda Zia initiated steps, according to some, to shift the focus of the liberation war from Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to Ziaur Rahman. This has enraged the AL.

Second, personalized animosity between Begum Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina, has manifested by their behaviour since 1990's. Much of their animosity revolves around the assassinations of Mujib and Zia. If the latter's lenience to Mujib's assassins kindled the Awami League's hostility towards the BNP, the Awami League was accused of tacitly backing Zia's assassination in May 1981. In short, each accuses the other of compliance in the death of its founding leaders. (Dutta, 2004: 58-64). Personalised antagonism between both Begum Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina has reached such a level that they do not even meet socially; they do not have the time or the inclination to talk to each other.

Third, both the AL and the BNP fail to co-operate not only because they underestimate each other's political strength but also because each has an urge to establish a monopolistic rule by knocking out the other, believing that the losing party would simply fade away.

Last, the hereditary nature of leadership of both the AL and the BNP. As the hereditary leadership of major political parties under the guise of democracy generally impedes the growth of politics based on understanding and good behaviour. (*Daily Star*, January 5, 2006)

The Role of the Speaker is also responsible for the dysfunction of the JS. In the V JS (just after the restoration of democracy), the parliamentary democratic tradition of uncontested election of the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker was not maintained. Only one adjournment motion was discussed in this parliament. It is very much disappointing that there was no adjournment motion accepted by the Speaker in the VII and VIII JS. Opposition parties complain that the speaker of parliament is not neutral and acts as a

member of the ruling party. In the VIII JS, the Speaker evidently took a partisan role in upsetting the Opposition AL, which rightly criticized the government for the failure to provide the citizens with regular supply of electricity and water in the capital and elsewhere. Further, by expunging words like 'governmental failures' and 'resignation of the government' used by the Opposition MPs; the Speaker has not only played a partisan role in favour of the political incumbents, he has also proved himself 'holier than the Pope'. The Speaker also expunged the phrase 'ineffective parliament'. How one would call a parliament effective when most of its sessions were held with the opposition benches empty! This was equally true when the AL was in the Treasury and the BNP played the role of Opposition. In this last parliament, the Speaker also found objectionable, as the Opposition objection to the idea of assigning the armed forces with the responsibility to provide civic amenities. It is true that there is no bar in deploying members of the armed forces to work for civilians, but the government owes an explanation to parliament whether the military men are doing the job under civil authority or not. The Speaker, instead of asking the Treasury bench to explain it, preferred to delete the question raised by the Opposition! These all acts of the Speaker are completely inconsistent with democratic parliamentary practices. Thus the partial role played by the Speaker in the favor of the political incumbents, compelled the opposition parties to go, for walkout, boycotting parliament or hartals; which has ultimately dysfunctionalized the parliament (*New Age*, May 9, 2006).

**CHAPTER V**

**CONCLUSION**

Opposition is an intrinsic part of the democracy. Indeed, both the government and opposition in a democratic polity operate on the foundation of consequence that the party which obtains majority in elections will be in power for a fixed term while the minority party which becomes the opposition, will enjoy the right to disgrace the ruling party. The opposition is also regarded as the 'safety valve' of the political system; it can not be utterly negative, entirely critical or totally obstructive. The function, opposition performs in democracy, is fundamentally positive. With regard to practicing democracy as well as the role of constitutional opposition in the politico-governmental process of the developing countries, a quite different and somewhat opposite picture from the western liberal democratic system is observed. After independent, the various developing countries adopted the path of their colonial rulers in establishing their liberal democratic set up. The political establishment and institutional arrangements of the western colonial powers became an ideal for these countries to achieve speedy modernization, stability, integration and development. On the contrary, many of these countries have encountered a great many difficulties in practicing the western liberal democratic set up in a dissimilar environment.

In Bangladesh, there was hardly any viable opposition in the true sense of the term during the initial years of the Awami League government. As in the general election of 1973, the opposition political parties could not acquire sufficient seats and hence the AL leader Sheikh Mujibur asserted that the opposition parties could not be declared an official opposition in Jatiya Sangsad, attitude of which did not corroborate democratic ideals. Through the Fourth amendment bill, 1975(which contained characteristics like : switch over to presidential form, from parliamentary system; introduction to single party rule; an all powerful President; absence of independence of Judiciary and suspension of the fundamental rights of the citizens); the democratic principles which were highly valued by people and were incorporated in the 1972 constitution, were altered and replaced by a totalitarian semblance. The way this amendment was passed within 30 minutes and without proper debate or discussion, was objected to by the opposition members and they staged a walkout in protest. Whatever views were expressed by a few opposition and independent MPs were never taken seriously. The domination of parliament by a single party due to

absolute majority and lack of an effective opposition in the House, created unhindered opportunities for the regime to follow arbitrary practices opposed to the norms and conventions of the parliamentary form of government.

This authoritarian tendency of Mujibur Rahman eventually led to the military rule in Bangladesh which lasted until 1991. Two military rulers – General Zia-Ur-Rahman and General Ershad ruled from November 1975 to December 1990. The military rule under General Zia had a sort of democracy that suited his own interests. It had nothing to do with democracy. He had elected parliament, which was nothing but a rubber stamp. There was only one man's show i.e. General Zia's democracy. Latter on, General Ershad did really follow the same path pursued by General Zia. In fifteen years of military rule the opposition really did not have any space in the parliament, because of autocratic nature of military regime.

But, after elimination of the military rule, the scene has been changed. The parliament is not a rubber stamp of any regime; on contrary, the two main political parties AL and BNP have been ruling the country alternatively. The opposition, (owing to its meagre strength, used to be ignored in military rule) is no longer in that measurable condition. In fact, the numerical strength of the opposition has increased drastically in comparison to the military rule.

However, the parliament is still in dysfunctional state. Actually the dysfunctional political culture has inserted in the parliamentary democracy. The political parties and the politicians are not seemingly keen to practice democratic culture. They have not given attention to promote democratic culture, which includes not practicing inner party democracy. Both major parties AL and BNP have hereditary leadership, which generally impedes the growth of politics based on understanding and good behaviour. So far, even the democratically elected rulers have shown their great disdain for democracy and behaved like elected autocrats. Actually, the country has been witnessing confrontational politics since switching over to parliamentary democracy in 1991. Both the parties claim that patriotism is its monopoly, and they are the victorious party whose leaders won the independence of Bangladesh from the colonial rule of Pakistan, whether others consider this claim to be a myth does not matter at all. At the root of all political problems there is

animosity and lack of trust, compassion and accommodation between two arch rivals and the largest political parties.

Both the major parties have failed to co-operate not only because they underestimate each other's political strength but also because each has an urge to establish a monopolistic rule by knocking out the other, believing that losing party would simply fade away. The attitude of dysfunctional political culture is more or less available in both these parties. It is hardly matter for the both parties whichever be in the government or in opposition, as the attitude of both parties remain the same.

Whichever party comes in opposition faces its antagonist party only, in the government and hence the opposition party plays the same negative role, which ever is there. If there had been any third parties which were capable to be as a main opposition party, then the scene would have changed. Owing to the availability of only two major parties, which are having rivalry, the opposition hardly play the constructive role.

Boycotting of parliament by the main opposition party, regardless of the party in power, has become the political norms. When BNP is in power, AL boycott parliament, and almost in identical manner BNP remains outside the House when AL is in power. The opposition, instead of participating in parliamentary proceeding, resort to street agitation and enforces general strikes, causing paralyzing effects on the economy and disruption of normal life.

So, boycotting parliament and doing hartals are the two main tools which are used by the opposition. Hence, whichever party comes to power, has lack of tolerance and does not maintain democratic norms and decency. Besides this the role played by the Speaker is also biased and is in favour of the Treasure benches. All these factors do not give space to the opposition in the House and consequently the opposition is compelled to do walkout, boycott or taking the issue out of legislature i.e. in the streets by doing hartals, where they try to highlight the issues with the participation of the masses.

So, for making democracy strengthened in Bangladesh, the Opposition must be allowed space in the parliament, which has been the most frequently raised by the Opposition. If they are not allowed to speak freely, if their proposals are ignored; the nation will assume that the government does not want the system to sustain. Nowhere in the world's legislature, is the microphone stopped when opposition legislators are making a point. It is never done so when the leader of the Opposition is speaking. It is on record that Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy spoke for six hours in Pakistan Assembly as the opposition leader. One must assume that the polity survives on the good will not only of the Treasury Bench but also of the parliamentary Opposition. If the Speaker arrogates that responsibility to himself then the system will not work. The Opposition must be taken into confidence if parliamentary democracy is to operate. There can be no democracy without a vibrant opposition.(Bangladesh observer, February 7, 2006).

The leaders of Bangladesh should try to learn how democracy is being run in other countries including the neighbour, India. In India, there are two opposite forces, the Indian National Congress and Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP), which run the show. In July 2006, L.K. Advani, Opposition leader in Indian Parliament, had set a unique example as an Opposition leader, which Bangladesh leaders can learn from. Commenting on the devastating bomb blast on trains in Mumbai, killing some 200 persons and wounding 700, Advani said that it was "time for the government and the people to work together" to meet the situation. He, as opposition leader, had not called for country wide hartals and street demonstrations for the ouster of the Man Mohan government for its failure to ensure security of lives. Had it happened in Bangladesh, the opposition would have enjoyed 36 to 72 hours continuous hartal and all sorts of vandalism, including the burning and destruction of properties and vehicles. Great Britain is another example where the government and the opposition work in a more civilized way. After the London bomb blasts, both on the trains and streets, how many hartals were called by the opposition or country wide demonstration held? (Daily Star, July 27, 2006).

The difficulty with the leadership belonging to the two dominant parties is that their first preference is to hit the streets to gather support of the people

instead of sitting at the conference table to find an honorable way out from a national crisis. They try to keep the political kettle boiling to fish in the troubled waters.

So, it can be said that the parliamentary democracy is yet to be grounded in an institutional form in Bangladesh. In parliamentary form of government, it is hoped that the House of the nation (Jatiya Sangsad) would be the centre where all important issues and policy matters would be initiated and decided for the benefit of the people. But the Bangladesh parliament, the House of the nation, has not yet consolidated its position to meet the nation's expectation. Hence, to strengthen the democratic system of the country, the following suggestion can be given:

The presence of a vigorous and active opposition in the parliament should be ensured;

- Cooperation between the Treasury and the Opposition in the House must be established.
- The Speaker and Deputy Speaker should be elected from the opposition;
- All parties should have faith on the Speaker;
- The speaker should also play a neutral and unbiased role;
- The presence of the ministers during the sittings of the House should be ensured;
- Regular orientation courses for the new MPs on the Rules of Procedure of the parliament and other relevant topics should be arranged;
- Extensive discussions/debates should be arranged on the bills before enacting them into legislation;
- Separate and detailed discussion should be held on policy related issues;
- Parliamentary Committees should be formed urgently;
- Civil society should be involved with the activities of the parliament;



- Required procedural and political initiatives should be taken so that the opinion of the public is reflected on the functioning of the parliament.

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