

Chasm of the Creed

by Mohammad Badrul Ahsan

Someone should tell those self-righteous men that they have to heed the pious words and leave certain sins to be punished on the Day of Judgement, not on a busy highway where thousands of people have to go about their daily business.

"WHENEVER a man talks loudly against religion, I always suspect that it is not his reason, but his passions which have got the better of his creed," writes Laurence Sterne in book 2, chapter 12 of *Tristram Shandy*. But it must have been madness, not passion, which got the better of their creed when the two holy men of Dewanbag and Chormonal recently talked loudly for religion. Each of them set his followers upon those of another in a bloody confrontation, while arrogance of sanctimony gave way to anarchy of sacrifice. As the so-called god-fearing men threatened to destroy each other's lock, stock and barrel they blurred the line between religion and rowdiness.

Now, why did these 'guards' of religion let down their own guards to embark on that violent course? In Islam, blasphemy and apostasy are crimes punishable by death and the holy Quran has made injunctions for making war against the infidels. If the holy man of Dewanbag has said, written or preached anything, which is blasphemous the holy man of Chormonal has rightly given his reaction as a worthy sentinel of Islam. The only problem is that neither of them realized that as neither of them tried to embattled the religion because another tried to embroil it, both of them ended up embarrassing its glory.

For that matter, let us understand what religion is all about. It is an organized system of belief and worship, which expresses man's relation-

to divine or superhuman powers. The most essential criterion of any religion, therefore, is the attitude of worship, which is determined by how and what is worshipped. For example, the Jews believed that the Messiah would bring them temporal prosperity and victory over their enemies on earth. For Christians, it was not on earth, but in heaven that the Messiah was to enable them to triumph over their enemies. Again, while the Christian clergy preached humility, the pagan pride was deeply rooted in the duel, trial by battle, tournaments and private vengeance.

We don't need to delve into the depth of that senseless bloodletting at high noon to conclude that the righteous men of Dewanbag and Chormonal fought, because they couldn't agree over the attitude of worship. Theologians expound that when religious rites become detached from this attitude they become magical techniques. Again, when magical techniques are associated with the attitude of worship they become religious rites. The mysticism of religion is separated from the hocus-pocus of magic by how the act of worship is performed. If religious rites embody god, magic emulates His power. The saddest thing is that

those who died in that showdown actually believed that they were engaged in the act of worship while their leaders fought over the object of worship. During the sack of Rome in 410 pious virgins were raped by the invaders when a virgin named Lucretia had killed herself to escape that fate. St. Augustine was asked to address why should have those ladies, no fault of their own, had lost the crown of virginity? His reply was that chastity was a virtue of the mind, and was not lost by rape.

Could it be that those who died in the clash had died in vain because two godly men were too proud of their own righteousness? Could it be that it was wrong for them to sacrifice their lives instead of staying alive to tackle that conflict in a more sensible manner? After all, restraint, tolerance, patience and forgiveness are expected of devout men. In *The City of God*, St. Augustine argued that the Christians, who suffered when the Goths overran Rome, had no right to complain. Because, although some wicked Goths may have prospered at their expense, they will have to suffer hereafter. He then professed that if all sin were punished on earth, there would be no need of the Last Judgement.

The Day of Judgement is an article of every faith with a Book, when the righteous will enter paradise and the wicked will pass into hell. These faiths often overlap one another in their creeds. The virtue of Almsgiving was taken over by Christianity from later Judaism. The importance attached to Baptism might be derived from Orphism or oriental pagan mystery religions. The Christians kept part of the Hebrew Law, for instance the Decalogue, while they rejected its ceremonial and ritual parts. In Islam, Jesus Christ is recognized as a prophet and apostle who will come again to establish everywhere the Muslim religion and blasphemy against Allah. Prophet Mohammed (SM) Jesus Christ, Moses or any other prophet is forbidden.

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That is to say, religions have evolved over the centuries to create spiritual shelter for the human race. Man needed religion to believe in a higher authority so that he could deal with his own lower instincts, if not anything else. There is one enthusiastic school of ecclesiastic thoughts in this country, which attributes our social disarray to lack of piety. It resonates the pagan claim that Rome was sacked on the abandonment of the ancient gods, that Rome remained powerful

so long as Jupiter was worshipped. Once the Emperors had turned away from him by embracing Christianity, Jupiter ceased to protect the city of Rome.

If we have imprecated all our misfortunes upon ourselves by abandoning our creator it's because we have bifurcated the attitude of worship. Those who die in the act of worship are interested by those who define the object of worship. In the end, those who believe they are defending faith actually defend those intermediaries. This is where religion is different from martial art. In martial art the master teaches his followers how to fight for a cause, whereas religious teachings inspire believers how to choose the cause for a fight. The emphasis of the former is on the fight and the emphasis of the latter is not the cause.

What happened two Fridays ago on Dhaka-Chittagong highway during the day-long encounter between the two zealots put emphasis on the fight, not on the cause. And that was only an unfortunate extension of the attitude problem facing this nation. Someone should tell those self-righteous men that they have to heed the pious words and leave certain sins to be punished on the Day of Judgement, not on a busy highway where thousands of people have to go about their daily business.

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Toward Improving Appraisal Report for Rural Development

by ABMS Zahur

The Constitution of Bangladesh provides that the state shall adopt effective measures to bring about a radical transformation in the rural areas. This needs promotion of agricultural revolution, provision of rural electrification, development of cottage and other industries and improvement of education, communications and public health.

USUALLY principal elements of an appraisal report for rural development are: (a) summary and conclusion, (b) introduction, (c) background, (d) project rationale, (e) project area, (f) the project, (g) organisation and management, (h) production, markets, and financial results, (i) benefits and justification, and (j) outstanding issues. In the subsequent paragraphs discussion has been made in brief on what should precisely be its scope and contents to enable our policy makers and administrators for its better appreciation.

In part summary and conclusion, only the essential elements of the projects may be indicated. Introduction part may include origin of the project concept in the national development plan in a sector survey or by a project identification mission. Part on background may be prepared carefully. Background material may be annexed as far as possible. However, the analyst should be very discriminating when choosing material for this part. There should be a clear relation between the material and the contents of other sections of the report. Discussion in this part may include (i) current economic situation, (ii) the agricultural sector, (iii) income distribution and poverty and (iv) institutions. Discussion on current economic situation may include information about per capita income, dependence on particular imports and exports, balance of payments considerations etc. In describing agricultural sector the main elements of the national strategy for agricultural development may be mentioned. If the project aims at benefiting a particular group of the rural poor a discussion of income distribution and poverty alleviation would be appropriate. It is desirable to add a paragraph describing the institutions concerned with development and financing in the sectors covered by the project.

In part project rationale, there should be persuasive argument for selecting the project for priority attention. It should fully discuss the development opportunities and constraints within relevant sectors, explain the reasons behind selecting a particular development strategy, and establishing technical, social and economic reasons for selection of the project in preference to possible alternatives. There should also be a discussion of the project risks and steps that have been taken in project formulation and implementation to minimise them. Apart from describing in detail (with maps) existing status of the project area the discussion may include agricultural development strategy and the project concept, the development opportunities and potentials as well as the limitations of the area, the main geographical and topographical features of the area and relate the area to important features of the country as a whole.

After identifying the general location of the project area it may be defined more precisely in relation to administrative boundaries and other

criteria. Information about geology, soils and topography of the area should support conclusions about the land in the project. Surface and underground water resources to the extent relevant to project decisions should be described. The agricultural and livestock resources of the region should be described briefly and the major features quantified. The cost of on-farm development works is determined by aggregation from the pattern farm budgets to the economic cost of the project, however, the full incremental cost incurred by the farmers will be needed. If land is acquired for project purposes and a cash outlay is required, this outlay should be included in the items of capital cost. But if the government provides the land free of cost, land will not be included as a project cost item; the opportunity cost of land, however, will be allowed for in the economic analysis.

A brief description should be given about the existing channels for the supply of inputs and of the facilities for marketing farm produce. Because of its importance in a project cost item, the agricultural sector, (iii) income distribution and poverty and (iv) institutions. Discussion on current economic situation may include information about per capita income, dependence on particular imports and exports, balance of payments considerations etc. In describing agricultural sector the main elements of the national strategy for agricultural development may be mentioned. If the project aims at benefiting a particular group of the rural poor a discussion of income distribution and poverty alleviation would be appropriate. It is desirable to add a paragraph describing the institutions concerned with development and financing in the sectors covered by the project.

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A brief overview of the objectives, location, size, components may be given for clearer understanding about the project. The features of the project should be discussed in detail to that including discussion on technical aspects, scope and cost of the various measures proposed. Availability of irrigation facilities, general infrastructure for settlement projects, access roads, extension facilities and social infrastructure such as village water supplies, health clinics, schools and rural electrification may be discussed.

On-farm investigation such as fencing, farm irrigation and drainage systems, land clearing and levelling, pasture development, normally carried out by farmers themselves, indicates the kind of cropping patterns and the livestock enterprises to be undertaken.

Processing and marketing facilities needed under the project should be discussed to show market structure, availability of markets, processing industries and marketing agencies.

Accurate cost estimate is very important. The main text should give aggregate cost in a summary table; the complete cost break down can be given in annexes. Cost should be

broken down to show local and foreign exchange components. Cost should be presented in constant financial, not economic, terms and that shown at market prices. Capital cost may be summarised and discussed in the main report. The estimates for civil works should be based on unit rates and quantities. The cost of on-farm development works is determined by aggregation from the pattern farm budgets to the economic cost of the project, however, the full incremental cost incurred by the farmers will be needed. If land is acquired for project purposes and a cash outlay is required, this outlay should be included in the items of capital cost. But if the government provides the land free of cost, land will not be included as a project cost item; the opportunity cost of land, however, will be allowed for in the economic analysis.

As a financing plan for the project enables the government to be fully aware of the immediate and future budgetary implication of the project, the plan may be summarised in tabular form in the main text of the report. Completion of the full financing plan may need to await completion of negotiations with outside financing agencies. The amounts needed by the project each year during the investment phase should be tabulated by major category and broken down into domestic currency and foreign exchange. If the project will generate significant new tax revenue the amount and timing of the revenue should be detailed. A projection should be made of the recurrent cost necessary to operate the project once the investment phase, and any anticipated receipt of foreign financing ends. This will indicate the continuing burden on the treasury of maintaining the project administration. As the project cost normally is stated in constant terms, the financing plan should address itself to a tabulation of the investment and recurrent cost in current terms once the project is undertaken. Special requirements for procurement may be mentioned. Arrangements for assistance from expatriates should be noted and details about the qualifications of the expatriates given.

If credit is important for a project, particular attention must be paid to the administrative capability and financial status of the credit agency. In the main text only a summary statement may be necessary, but in the annexes it may be desirable to go into considerable detail. Such detail should include projected accounts for the credit agency and a thorough analysis of the position of the agency concerning arrears in repayment of loans and interest delinquencies. Other points to be considered are the legal character, capitalisation, powers and functions, direction, management, delegation of authority, internal organisation, staffing, accountancy and control, auditing, operating policies, terms and conditions of loans, collateral requirements and their appropriateness for the group of the project is intended to benefit, procedure for loan appraisal and the disbursement, and the capability of the agency to operate in a timely and effective manner in the project area. Arrangements for administrative improvement and staff training should be mentioned.

The organisational arrangements for marketing from production should be described and assessed.

Particular attention should be paid to any rigidities or insufficiencies, and to proposals for correcting the situation if these inadequacies are relevant to the project. The responsibility and the arrangements for the provision of supplies for farm

productions should be discussed.

The agency responsible for land tenure or distribution should be discussed and assessed if the project involves any change in the land or distribution. If new research is needed arrangements and staffing should be discussed. The arrangements to bring new information about production to farmers in the project area should be discussed. Staff training, especially for field agents in the project area, should be outlined. If cooperatives are used in the project the relevant legislation, organisation, structure and operating record of the cooperatives and the agencies responsible for encouraging and administering them should be discussed.

The report should show that the results of project actions will be sufficiently attractive financially to encourage farmers to participate. For processing industries or marketing agencies, the report should demonstrate that it will be financially viable for such firms to participate in the project and their financial return will be sufficiently attractive. The primary benefit of a rural development project is usually incremental output from the project farms. This is generally the basis on which the project is formulated. Project actions may permit introduction of completely new and more valuable crops but more often will be directed toward increasing yields of existing crops or permitting a more intensive form of livestock production. Attention should be directed toward the expected increase in production that is expected. A table showing aggregate build-up during development period of project may be included in the annex.

The market must absorb the production proposed for the project. If the scale of the project is large enough to exert an appreciable influence on the market, such effect will probably require fairly detailed treatment in an annex. If export commodity is involved attention should be paid to such special situations as preferential treatment, long-term contracts, or quality preferences. Domestic pricing policies should fully be covered. As farm budgets are fundamental to any rural development project analysis, it is important to present a fully developed analysis in the project report. A discussion of the financial effects of the project on processing industries and marketing agencies may be in order. If the project contains such components. If the project is to be administered by a largely self-supporting project authority an analysis of finances from the standpoint of the project is intended to benefit, procedure for loan appraisal and the disbursement, and the capability of the agency to operate in a timely and effective manner in the project area. Arrangements for administrative improvement and staff training should be mentioned.

If the project's main interest is

social benefit separate sections devoted to one or another significant social aspect may be in order. The extent to which the income of the poorest section of the rural population is improved as a result of the project may be shown. The extent to which the project reduces underemployment and unemployment may be discussed. The number of jobs created might be compared with the expected increase of the labour force in the project area. Where rural-urban migration is a serious problem it may be useful to note the possible effect of the project on rural-urban migration. If the project is located in an area where serious nutrition or health problems exist the expected effects of the project on these problems might be mentioned. The economic desirability of the project should be assessed. Through sensitivity analysis the effects of different assumptions about efficiency and prices on the project's wealth-generating potential may be shown. The outstanding issues must be solved after the preparation report is presented.

The Constitution of Bangladesh provides that the state shall adopt effective measures to bring about a radical transformation in the rural areas. This needs promotion of agricultural revolution, provision of rural electrification, development of cottage and other industries and improvement of education, communications and public health. Fulfilment of these needs require good projects. It is hoped that the preceding paragraphs might be useful for improving project appraisal reports for rural development.

Plato and Democracy

by Iftekhar Sayeed

women having acid thrown in their faces, kidnapped kids...

[Socrates:] In the next place, you would affirm virtue to be a good thing, of which good thing you assert yourself to be a teacher.

[Protagoras:] Yes, he said; I should say the best of all things.

And is it partly good and wholly good?

Wholly good, and in the highest degree.

Tell me then; who are they who have confidence when diving into a well?

I should say, the divers.

And the reason of this is that they have knowledge?

Yes, that is the reason.

And who have confidence when fighting on horseback — the skilled horseman or the unskilled?

The skilled.

And who when fighting with the peltasts — the peltasts or the non-peltasts?

The peltasts. And that is true of all other things, is it not? that is your point; those who have knowledge are more confident than those who have no knowledge, and they are more confident after they have learned than before.

And have you seen persons utterly ignorant, I said, of these things, and yet confident about them?

Yes, he said, I have seen such persons far too confident.

And are not these confident persons also courageous?

In that case, he replied, courage would be a base thing, for the men of whom we are speaking are surely madmen.

Then who are the courageous? Are they not the confid-

ent?

Yes, he said; to that state-

ment I adhere.

And those, I said, who are thus confident without knowledge are really not courageous, but mad; and in that case the wisest are also the most confident, and being the most confident are also the bravest, and upon that view again wisdom will be courage.

In order to be effective, education must not only be specialisation — the study of economics, say, alone cannot be a complete education. Alongside, the humanities should also be introduced. But the study of the humanities is unremitting — a history graduate's pay is pathetic. And I remember from my days at the university that the last refuge of the inept student was the philosophy department. If you think I'm exaggerating, consider just one fact: the British Council Library has done away with the philosophy and religion sections because, I was told by staff, 'Nobody reads those books anymore'. And the other day I scoured the whole of New Market for the Platonic Dialogues, and found — none! Our elite have decided to dispense with this 'enemy of the open society', it seems!

Mere specialisation is the bane of education today. And that brings me to elitism. An

elite must not have to struggle to earn a living — they should be above the marketplace. Like

Nietzsche's Zarathustra, and

Plato's Guardians, they must not descend to the market. Neverthe-

less, as Plato envisaged, there should always be some 'room at the top' for talented people, people who can guide the ship of state. But there should not always be room at the top for everyone — as is happening in Bangladesh, where since

1971 a new elite have emerged, and is still emerging. In fact,

throughout the subcontinent — India, Bangladesh and Paki-

stan — the elite are people who have always served foreign

rulers, — the Mughals, then the

British — people who have al-

ways viewed education as a means to promotion, a step up the

ladder, a bureaucratic step-

ping stone to higher (monetary) things. Consequently, we have</