

# Opinion poll and methodology

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TRANSPARENCY International Bangladesh (TIB) published the result of their survey on the activities of the members of parliament on October 14. They presented their finding in a press conference on the same day. According to their survey, 97% MPs are involved in "negative activities."

The prime minister questioned the motivation of the survey taking place a year before parliamentary election. She also said that TIB had published the result of a similar survey in 2001, implying that the result did not help her party then. She also said that TIB did not do any survey on the activities of her opponents. The speaker of the parliament said that the report was erroneous.

There was widespread coverage in the media and one daily published an article on the methodology of the TIB survey. One very experienced journalist praised the survey, saying that having felt one boiled rice you knew how the other boiled rice were in the pot (a comment which is totally opposite to the spirit of research). Every individual has his or her right to have an opinion. But to survey the opinion of many, proper methodology should be followed.

The methodology varies depending on what kind of research it is. Sociologists mostly use qualitative research, in which sample size is not important. Individuals or focused groups are interviewed. Detailed discussions take place on one's attitude. This type of study is subjective. TIB survey does not meet the criterion of qualitative study. This study is more like an opinion poll where survey method of research is followed.

A representative sample has to be taken to survey the

opinions of a population. A few basic rules have to be followed. A population has many types of people, males and females, adults and elderly, working class and middle-class, urban and rural and so on. Samples should be taken in such a way that everyone has a chance to be chosen. One type of choosing samples is "quota sampling." In this method the interviewer is asked to interview a certain number of a certain type of people, for example 9 men and 10 women, etc. Stratified samples are more scientific, in which sub-groups are chosen in the same proportion as they are in the population

There is another method called "area sampling." The area is divided into smaller areas. For example, a town may be regarded as an area, and is divided into wards. In this method, specific persons are interviewed. The problem here is that an alternative person will not be accepted. If a person is not at home the interviewer has to go back to that house, which may be on the other side of the town. The methods of choosing the samples have their own advantages and disadvantages.

In developed countries telephone directories or jury's lists are used to choose the samples, which is not possible in our country. Researchers should explain how the sample was chosen. Unfortunately, that was not done in the TIB research. It was mentioned that 46 meetings were held in 40 districts in which 600 people participated. They were teachers, lawyers, journalists and other professionals. It was claimed that these people were neutral, educated and well-informed. The question is, among so many teachers how were those particular teacher selected? The same question may be asked about the others. Who are "other professionals?"

It was not mentioned how many of which profession were chosen. Some people may think that TIB had something against the working class.

The next question is, what was asked or what was discussed? The answers given by the interviewees may vary depending on how the questions are asked. Answers may also vary on the order of the questions. There was no mention of any questionnaire. To prepare a questionnaire is not easy. Everybody must understand the questions. Words must be chosen carefully so that there is no ambiguity. A question, to be meaningful, must relate to existing opinions and attitudes on the part of the subject. The effect of the context has to be considered in framing a questionnaire. The question of explicit and implicit statement of alternatives has to be considered as well. Pre-testing the questionnaire helps prepare a good one.

We have no idea how the discussions progressed in the 46 TIB sponsored meetings. The general impression is that in any meeting a few people talk most, most people hardly talk and others in-between. The views of the most talkative ones should not be taken as the views of all the people present in the meeting.

The characteristics of the interviewer are also important. The interviewees knew that the meetings were conducted by the TIB. It has been seen in other studies that some interviewees consciously or unconsciously go along with the interviewers.

The next question is how were the interviewees'

responses interpreted? The survey report has given a list of activities which were described as "negative activities." Some of them can be described as serious offences, for example murder. Some activities are not serious offences. Some activities are immoral but not offences in legal sense. It is not mentioned how many people reported about the activities of how many MPs and how many "negative activities." There is a possibility that a few people reported about many MPs and

mentioned too many "negative activities." They were then added and the interviewer reported that they were given the information by all the interviewees.

We may not agree with the finding of a survey but there is no place for emotion. We must know why we

disagree. A little knowledge of methodology may help us. The disagreement may not be because of motivation but may be due to the methodology. It was good to see the government asking for an explanation of the methodology and a minister making comments on methodology in a press conference. The methodology of opinion poll has tremendously improved since the days of "straw polls." We must remember that there is no such thing as "absolute truth." As Karl Popper said: "Identifying the truth is actually achieved by moving further away from error, rather than discovering truth."

The writer is a Fellow, Royal College of Psychiatrists.

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## Let the baby cry

ANISUL HOQUE

I have gone through several reports on Bangladesh in the online edition of the *Telegraph*, UK. One report portrays the image of our parliament. The piece starts with admiration of the beauty and magnetism of the architecture of the parliament. Then the reporter moves to the history of Bangla Academy, our language movement, shedding blood in the street to establish Bangla as state language, and birth of Bangla Academy. The international literary festival "Hay" was organized in Bangla Academy. The writer is Sameer Rahim. He is the assistant books editor of the *Telegraph*. He visited Dhaka to attend the Hay Festival. One can find the article in:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/hay-festival/9682541/Hay-Dhaka-2012-Building-a-future-for-Bangladesh.html>

In another report, Sameer Rahim starts with the description of Rd. 32, Dhanmandi, the Bangabandhu Museum. In the Hay Festival politics of killing and related literatures were discussed. To report on that event Sameer visited the Bangabandhu Museum where Bangabandhu was killed along with his family members.

Sandeep Roy came from Kolkata. His writing was published in *FirstSpot.Com* (<http://www.firstpost.com/living/a-day-at-the-jadugar-close-encounters-with-bangla-525861.html>). He is the cultural editor of the magazine. He wrote that he had an idea that everybody in Bangladesh speaks in Bangla, but after flying in to Dhaka from Kolkata it was a unique experience from him to see and hear Bangla in an entirely new city. In Kolkata there is Bangla too. But it gets mixed with Hindi and English. So he writes: "How Bangla matters more in Dhaka than Kolkata."

Sandeep was in Dhaka to attend the Hay Festival also. There are often misconceptions about Bangladesh in the outside world. In 1995, when I first visited the US, people asked me how I got there since Bangladesh did not have any airplanes. I swam, I answered. This is the reason why we need festivals like Hay. Foreign writers came, journalists came; they saw and wrote; they have come to know that Bangladesh has a rich cultural tradition, incomparable hospitality, rich literature, genuine love for language, a vibrant present, and a shining future.

Our rich culture and literature can be the most effective, most suitable and the best means of enhancing our image abroad. So, going to the Hay Festival, I stood, walked, and tried to get into the herd. On November 15, at the inaugural session, Tahmima Anam could not resist saying: "One of my tasks will be to bring out the translation of Selina Hussein's writings. I must do it." Tahmima Anam herself has written two amazing novels, namely *A Golden Age* and *The Good Muslim*. These books were translated into several languages, and she won the Commonwealth Prize. We can also name Monica Ali, the Bangladeshi-born British writer. But whenever I think of her being refused visa by the BNP government I feel extremely ashamed.

But Tahmima is not alone. And we cannot do with her being alone. Indian writers have earned global recognition; Pakistani writers have done quite well; even writers from Afghanistan are emerging. Bangladeshis started to migrate abroad after independence, basically in the '80's. Their children have grown up, they have entered the professional world. Our children are also going abroad and learning English and world literature. They have started writing in English. As it is true for Shakib al Hasan, it is also true for

Tahmima Anam -- they have the entire world to conquer.

There were so many things that happened in the Dhaka Hay Festival. It happened that while I was attending a session my mind was actually on another programme being held in the next room where a lively discussion was taking place, and about the same time Syed Shamsul Haq and Vikram Seth were reciting poems on the stage outside. I did not attend many sessions, just idly sat near the pond. Novelist Debesh Roy was here from Kolkata. I found Moshui Alam, Shaheen Akhter, Parvez Hossain and Sajjad Sharif along with poet Gautam Chakrobarty, I gossiped.

The new building of the Bangla Academy is beautiful and functional too. There were beautiful swans in the pond.

I was thinking that it would have been wonderful if Syed Shamsul Haq's *Nurul Diner Sara Jibon* could have been performed in Mexico, Spain or France. Is Hasan Azizul Haq's *Ma-Meyer Songsar* any way less than

the literature of the two Bengals is no more the same.

We know that the future of Bangla lies in Bangladesh. The people of Bangladesh got Bangla through blood and tears; their country is named after their language. In this regard their passion does not bother about logic. However, I want to quote here Gabriel Garcia Marquez who said in his Nobel lecture quoting Faulkner: "I decline to accept the end of man. I refuse to accept this. I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among the creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance."

People abroad will know if they come to our country that Bangladeshi people have souls. Our guests at the Hay festival were amazed at our love for our language. People who came from abroad were amazed by our hospitality. After the inaugural of the World Cup Cricket at Dhaka, Crick Info.com wrote: "Bangladesh gives the soul to the World Cup." If anyone visits Shaheed Minar at midnight of February 21 or Ramna during the Pahela Boishakh, will not the immortal soul of Bangla invoke the roar of great ocean in his heart?

I thought of such matters at the Hay festival. There were hundreds of young people surrounding Zafar Iqbal. There is poet Mahadev Saha, I greeted him. Shook hands with Nirmalendu Gun. I talked with poet Mohammad Samad, Habibullah Siraji, Asad Chowdhury, Rubi Rahman, Tarik Sujat, Aslam Sani and Amirul Islam. I saw Zillur Rahman Siddiqui from a distance. In a festival we meet our friends with whom we have come a long way. That is why a festival is important.

I did not know Philip Hensher was such a great writer. He was listed for Booker Prize. I had given him a copy of the translation of my book *Ma*, named Freedom's mother, the previous night. The next morning he told me that he had finished reading my book in five hours as he could not sleep. I collected his book, *Sins from Early Life*. It was based on our

Liberation War. He mentioned that in 1971 parents did not allow their children to cry lest they were heard by the Pakistani soldiers.

Philip completed my whole book, I started reading his book while on stage. The first line reads, "Even the droppings of a dog smell good to you, if it is English." The second line is a Bangla sentence written in Roman alphabet (*Ingraji kuttar gu-o tomar kache bhalo*).

This type of debate is still going on in our society. But Bangla speaking people have spread worldwide. *Prothom Alo* is read in more than 190 countries. We have no reason to remain aloof from the world. We have to spread our voice to the world.

Philip did not make up the story. During 1971, parents did not let their children cry. One incident is very touching. A family took shelter in a jungle. Pakistani soldiers were on the road near the jungle. There was a child with the family. A child suddenly started crying. The mother clasped its mouth. She had to stop the baby crying. When the soldiers went away the mother found that the baby had died.

We had shut up our mouths fearing the barrel of the gun and were terrorised by the sound of boots for long. No we will cry aloud. We have to claim our rights before the new world. Let the world see, Bangladesh is emerging. We too know there is world beyond Bangladesh.

The writer is a litterateur and journalist. (This article was printed in *Prothom Alo* on Nov. 20. Translation by The Daily Star.)



KAZI TANJIN AGAZ APURBO

**Our guests at the Hay festival were amazed at our love for our language. People who came from abroad were amazed by our hospitality.**

Gabriel Garcia Marquez? At the closing ceremony the DG of Bangla Academy, Shamsuzzaman Khan, said that Kazi Nazrul Islam, Jibananda Das, Bibhuti Bhusan, Syed Waliullah were suitable for Nobel Prize. I think if Shamsur Rahman could have been portrayed properly he could have been selected for the Nobel Prize. This portrayal should be done perfectly. Literature is very relative in terms of country-time-culture. Translation cannot match the original. First, a writer has to be relevant and important to his own people. In our case Shamsur Rahman came to be so. The outside world is not aware of them. But they should be.

I was talking about Bangladeshi writers who write in English. We always want them to write their best and thus glorify our image. But another important thing they can do is what Mahmudul Rahman has done. A book of short stories, *Killing the Water*, by this American Bangladesh has been published from Delhi. Besides his own writings he has translated Mahmudul Haq's *Kalo Baraf*, and the translation *Black Ice* has also been published from Delhi. I think if our English writers follow this model of Mahmudul Rahman, they can also translate contemporary works besides their own writing, which will be a great contribution.

In the Hay festival, Debesh Roy and Syed Shamsul Haq discussed the literatures of the two Bengals. Moderator Sajjad Sharif asked a question: two countries, one language, two literatures or one literature? Both Debesh Roy and Syed Shamsul Haq agreed that



## 4 proofs that intelligence is falling

HUMAN intelligence peaked a couple of thousand years ago and people are getting steadily stupider, a scientist said last week. Professor Gerald Stupider's words in the UK's Independent newspaper on Monday last week rang true with me. Mine has definitely peaked. As for society as a whole, probably the same thing is happening. Proof? I'd just finished reading a case sent in by a reader for this column's dumb criminals file.

On November 9, a car thief stole a delivery vehicle from a Chinese restaurant. The carjacker then proceeded to deliver all the meals to the right addresses. Police in Connecticut found it easy to catch him. They simply waited at the next address and he conveniently delivered himself into their hands, accompanied by a range of tasty snacks, prawn crackers, etc. For cops, it was the best case ever.

Also last week, a famous UK store called Debenhams revealed that customers couldn't understand modern coffee terms. So they changed "venti cappuccino" to Big Frothy Coffee, and "café latte" to Very Very Milky Coffee and so on. Presumably staff will tell buyers: "After buying, insert into mouth."

On an aircraft, a friend of mine was given a packet of peanuts which carried the words: "Eat after opening."

Passengers must have been trying to swallow the packet whole!



And then there are the comments under YouTube videos, which offer convincing proof that humans are turning into primitive, brain-free forms of life, like primeval sludge, moss, nationalist politicians, etc. Typical YouTube comment on my videos: "Your stupid."

When I mentioned this in the bar, someone told me about a sc-fi movie called Idiocracy which predicts that the human race will descend into total brainlessness in 500 years.

We're ahead of schedule.

For more on being smart, visit [www.mrjam.org](http://www.mrjam.org)