

Corruption and our society

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"Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country"

-- John F. Kennedy

ALMOST every sector in our country is corrupted. About almost everyone here goes for inbound needs, desires, expectations toward money and power. We all are in a hurry. We have to be very rich and powerful soon as possible. We always assume that someone may get more advantages over others. So, we have a tendency to receive privileges and provide privileges in a reciprocal fashion.

We also have a tendency to prevail against other. This is usually called domination. The desire to dominate is the most basic cause of corruption and in our society when we see a corrupted, rich, powerful -- dominating others -- we want to be like him.

We observe him and his activities. Sometime we cannot get the opportunity to become as corrupted. But we simply learn corrupted behaviour. For example: Our University students are not corrupted. But as they enter their professional lives they are prone to corruption.

Perhaps their social context as well as their personal experiences pulls them towards corruption. The ethical value system of our country has after all degraded drastically. We don't value any honest person or a man who is leading an honest life. Our standard of dreams and expectations has changed, which is demeaning for the welfare of our country.

Plato in *The Republic* claims that the soul of every individual has three parts:

- A rational part which seeks after truth and is responsible for our philosophical inclinations;
- A spirited part which desires honour and is responsible for our feelings of anger and indignation; and
- An appetitive part of the soul, which lusts after all sorts of thing -- but mainly money.

According to him, a just person controls and guides his spirit and appetite by reason. He also provided the definition of justice and just society. Plato told states that an ideal society consists of three main

classes of people: producers (craftsman, farmers, artisan, etc.), auxiliaries (warriors), and guardians (rulers).

Producers are dominated by their appetite -- their urges for money, luxury, and pleasure. Warriors are dominated by their spirits, which flares courage. Rulers are dominated by their rational faculties and strive for wisdom. Justice is the principle of specialisation: a principle that requires each person to fulfill the societal role to which nature fitted him and not interfere in any other business.

Rulers must rule, auxiliaries must uphold ruler's convictions, and producers must limit themselves to exercising whatever skills nature granted to them.

Establishing a rule of law, by guiding ourselves by our reason not by our appetite, by valuing and rewarding the good people of our time, by changing the rotten part of our culture and value system to build a new one.

But what do we see in our society? Are we a just one? Plato would say that our society is full of producers. Our leaders are not guided by reason but by appetite. Our soldiers didn't follow the instruction of our ruler. They wanted to rule the country themselves.

That is why several military coups occurred in our country which destructed the maturity of our democracy. The presence and practice of rule of law is very poor here. The standard of the morality of our people is degrading everyday. Dr.

Muhammad Shahidullah said: "A nation who cannot give value to his wise people cannot produce wise people."

At present, we respect (at least forcefully) or try to be like a man who can abuse power, who can make money as early as possible by using corruption.

tion or by any illegal means someone who can control others. But then how far can a nation reach without using its wisdom? That's why we can only produce corrupted politician, bureaucrat, police etc.

But we are unable to produce great leaders anymore. A society without a vision, without an ethically standard value system, without justice, without the sense of nationalism cannot go far.

How can we build a just society? How can we build a corruption-free country? How can we reach the ultimate goal of our war of independence? Our new generation is our future. They will be the future leaders. So, we have to think about them. We have to nourish them.

Durkheim described three stages of the development of moral character in children. In the first stage, a child must learn to respect authority. In the second stage, a child must respect for the right of others. And lastly, a child must learn to articulate reasons for why he or she respects authority and the right of others.

That means we have to establish a society that is based on reason. In this era of globalisation and free capital market, it is tough to bridle our desire for appetite. It has to be distributed and limited by the capacity and potentiality of any individual of the society. We have to establish a just society by using our intellect. We need a society, in which every individual will have the same opportunity to flourish and utilise his potentiality without facing any unjust hindrance.

This can be performed by establishing a rule of law, by guiding ourselves by our reason not by our appetite, by valuing and rewarding the good people of our time, by changing the rotten part of our culture and value system to build a new one.

Our leaders will be derived by reason not by appetite or domination for power. Our children will learn from us not from any alien. So, we have to change ourselves first, then our future generation. Only then, can the dream of our war of independence be fulfilled.

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A miscarriage of politics

SHAKIL AHMED

DESPITE all the social development, why is Bangladesh still plunged into poor governance? Bangladesh has gained a considerable amount of both social and economic development over the last forty years. The last four decades has allowed Bangladesh's life expectancy to increase by 23 years, compared with 18 years in Iran, 16 years in India and 10 years in Afghanistan.

The transition to democratic process through the economic and social engagement is quite challenging here as politics has always been a compelling force. If economic development could guarantee democracy, China would have been the biggest democratic country in recent history.

In Bangladesh, political articulation runs through hyperpartisan clientelistic political parties. So, citizen withdraws from any attempt to monitor the state neutrally or promote governance in that manner.

Trust between political authority and citizen has broken down in Bangladesh as partisan politics is in the state of denial to support the narrow goal.

Political party leadership, party activist, party supporter and citizen are the major human faces of politics. We need to weave these sequences to make a political communication and, at the same time, it is also important to prioritise them to meet the end not means.

The constant combination and permutation is important to make democracy work. Machiavelli preferred the realist view of combination which put ruler first. On the other hand, Mahatma Gandhi acted for permutation that put the big block first such as citizen and then search for neighbouring pieces.

The approach of Machiavelli to power is immediate in nature and on contrary, Gandhi advocated for nonviolence which is not only based on deep moral conviction principle but also an effective strategy to sustain power.

Earlier in 1920s, nonviolent movement by Indian mass against British Raj was getting height. The Chauri Chaura accident was a turning point for the nonviolent movement of Gandhi. Chauri Chaura is small town of Uttar Pradesh. In February 4, 1922, an angry mob of citizens burnt alive 22 policemen in a retaliation of killing of their fellow men.

Under a repressive colonial rule it is easy to justify violence. But Gandhi immediately condemned the violence and called it as a crime. At that point he took the responsibility, disowned the action and distanced from the activists. He stated that, "non-violent non-cooperators can only succeed when they have succeeded in attaining control over the hooligans of India, in other words, when the latter also have learnt to ... refrain from their violent activities."

Gandhi was so saddened by the accident that he declined to lead the movement. Latter the other leadership of Indian National Congress promised to prevent such violent activities in future and he again came back. Politics with principle produces healthy amicable code between leaders and citizens.

The murder of Bishwajit precisely symbolises the malnourishment of our street politics which is in fact dominated by partisan politics and hooligans. The high-ups of Bangladesh Awami League are trying to say that family members of murderers of Bishwajit are the affiliated with BNP and Jamaat-Shibib. But this identity politics can't dilute the gravity of murderer by Chhatra League.

People are getting video and photographic evidences from media and other open sources. You don't have to be a genius to draw a conclusion on it. Nevertheless, the state of denial continues in an infinite manner. Machiavellians try to win the debate in expense of trust. Insistence doesn't prove always strength rather it sometimes relegates as weakness.

The silent majority such as party supporter and citizens are disillusioned by every election. Many people depoliticise themselves and regard politics as evil one. To them politics is about a patron-client relationship between leader and activist.

Every repeated vote is answered by repeated corruption. So, they withdraw themselves from active political systems other than the voting, and it turns into a major miscarriage of our politics.

Clearly, this State is losing surveillance on its political society as citizens are increasingly depoliticised by partisan politics.

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Feminisation of extreme poverty

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FEMINISATION of poverty" is a global problem. The Global Poverty Project estimates a staggering 70% of the world's poor being women. In Bangladesh, according to HIES 2010, about 28 million people are extremely poor, earning less than what is required to just meet their basic food requirements. Much of this burden falls on women.

Social practices such as early marriages, dowries, bigamy and abandonment are common among the poorest, where financial pressures often lead to the disintegration of families. Findings derived from shiree's monitoring system shed light on this situation.

This article explores the data and research findings of six major NGOs working within shiree. Quantitative data helps us identify important characteristics of extreme poverty and mechanisms which may help people escape from the trap, while qualitative data allows us to explore the context and processes underpinning changes in poverty levels and social indicators such as empowerment.

Female-headed households

Just over 40% of shiree households have a female head compared with a national average of 10% (HIES, 2005). We find the highest proportion of female-headed households in urban areas. Female heads were primarily widowed (61%) or divorced/abandoned (20%) and 18% were married. By contrast, nearly all male heads were married (96%).

Why do households become female headed?

As female-headed households comprise such a large proportion of the sample, it is worth trying to understand what makes a household female-headed. Shiree research shows that female-headed households are rarely the result of 'bad luck' such as a random event caused by a death or by marriage partners who can't get along.

Female-headed households are most often created by processes related to social gender norms, women's entitlements and responsibilities, economics (below-subsistence pay of those in the labour class) and the dynamics of extreme poverty itself.

There are a number of reasons why widowhood is so high (61%) among the extreme poor. These include the erosion of men's physical strength resulting from sub-subsistence food intake combined with hard manual labour which consumes more calories; related susceptibility to chronic illness; and high number of work related accidents in agriculture, construction and rickshaw pulling.

Often extreme poor families cannot afford the necessary medical treatment to manage minor injuries which then become major disabilities. With no savings, extremely poor women call on friends, relatives and patrons for support. Often the amounts offered are not enough.

Hence there is a much higher rate of death and widowhood among the extreme poor. High health costs combined with the death of an income earner

can drive families into destitution.

Separation and divorce is more frequent among the extreme poor for several reasons. For the 20% who were separated or divorced, we find that many were forced to leave their husbands in order to feed themselves and their children.

Others leave or are left when their husbands take on a subsequent wife or wives. A good portion of divorcees consist of relatively young women abandoned by their husbands because their families could not meet dowry costs.

Many women separate as a way of dealing with the tension and psychological stress that arise from difficult life circumstances.

Extreme poor households have to make potentially life-threatening trade-offs on a regular basis such as whether to spend household income on medicine for a sick family member or food for the primary income earner.

Extreme poor marriages and 'silent' female-headedness

Female-headedness also happens silently within marriage. For instance, in order to avoid the costs of dowry, some extremely poor parents marry their daughters at an early age to men who have impaired physical or mental capacity, or are simply old.

This may account for the 18% of female headed households who are married.

Second, there are many women who are married to physically fit husbands who secretly drink alcohol, smoke ganja, or gamble to excess and their earnings are consumed by those activities. Such women and their children can be destitute within marriage and these women are more likely to suffer domestic abuse.

Consequences of female-headedness for extreme poverty

Female headedness can lead to extreme poverty as women are forced to become the primary breadwinner for the family and are often less likely to have benefitted from education and asset inheritance.

Often a child labourer herself, she is thrust onto the labour market where the range of culturally acceptable jobs are far fewer than for men.

We found that in most cases, an extreme poor girl or woman might not work outside the home after the first few years of marriage. It is usually after the first child when women are forced onto the labour market and even then, they perform only paid work

'in the home' doing domestic chores or agricultural processing work on the homestead of the employer. This contrasts with Hindu and Adivasi extreme poor women who tend to work outside the home earlier and with greater regularity.

Remuneration is also significantly lower for women. Many for example work as housemaids and receive in kind payment usually in the form of food. This is then shared with other family members.

Because payment relative to men is so low, and jobs available so few, when a women becomes the key or sole breadwinner her children are withdrawn from school so that they too can work usually in domestic service or be married off.

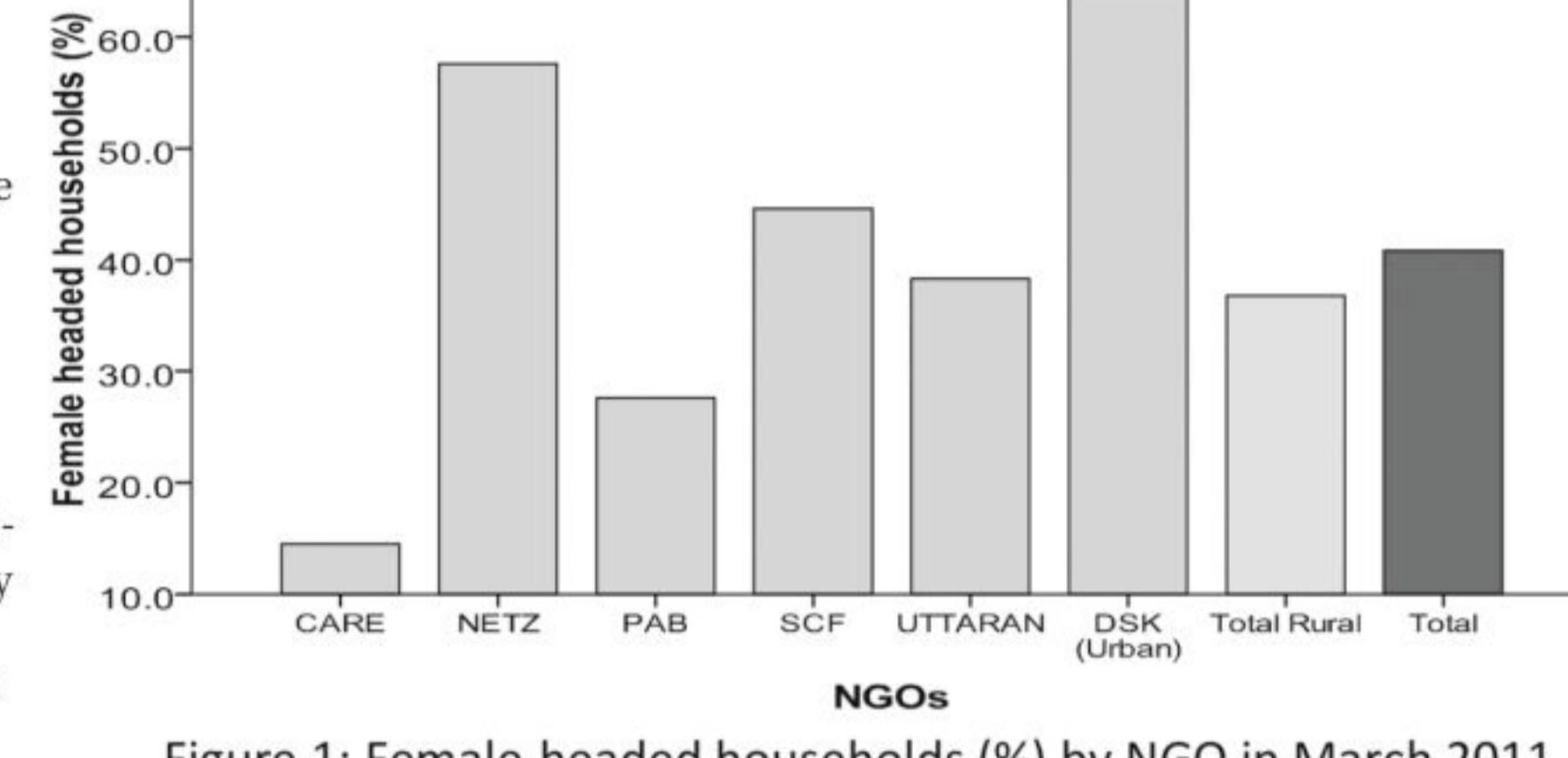


Figure 1: Female-headed households (%) by NGO in March 2011

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Tackle oppressive social practices

If some of these gender discriminating social practices are not tackled, women will continue to bear the greater burden of poverty. Education is key to changing mindsets and all school curriculums and village capacity building programmes should include gendered social transformation in their agendas.

Perhaps it would also be helpful to pull religious folks into the effort, since villagers tend to trust their religious leaders. For example, the message that demanding a dowry is anti-Islamic should be disseminated. The private sector should actively engage in recruiting women and Bangla media should be very sensitive to the way they portray women. Micro-finance, which is often only available to women, has done a great deal to change the balance of social power, but we still have a long way to go!

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