

Parliamentary Democracy in Bangladesh: Thought and Practice

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is to review the era of parliamentary democracy in Bangladesh since its emergence in the year 1972. While parliamentary democracy in Bangladesh, as a political ideal, is still exposed to hazards arising from the attitudes of certain political parties and criticisms from others, the mechanism of the system functioning through Parliament is being progressively perfected. Due to the opposition boycott, the ruling party's negligence and the absenteeism of ordinary members, the standing committees of the parliaments were less effective, and parliamentary accountability of government was lacking. Bangladesh shares its history of political development with the British and Pakistan era. The political parties in Indian sub-continent struggled for the rights, freedom and justice in the society. Westminster style parliamentary democracy was the driving force of the political parties. The party leaders were mostly known for their values, principles, and devotion for the causes of society. Establishment of parliamentary democracy in the state mechanism has been an uncompromising demand of people of the free world. At the end of the article the role of the opposition is emphasised on for the smooth functioning of the democratic system. This will hold both of them equally accountable to the people.

Introduction:

The word Parliament has been derived from an old French word Parliament and Latin word Parliamentum. The French word Parler means, "To talk". Again, democracy derives from Greek *demos*, "the people".ⁱ It was a result of long struggle between the barons and the kings of Great Britain in the 12th and 13th century on the charter of demands for establishing right to say on certain royal decisions and protection of the subjects against oppression. South Asian countries have had a variable Parliamentary democratic history since their emergence from British colonial rule in the late 1940s. The Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU), in its study Parliament and Democracy in the Twenty First Century, calls the parliament the central institution of democracy as it embodies the will of the people and carries all their expectations that "democracy will be truly responsive to their needs and help solve the most pressing problems that confront them in their daily lives" (Beetham).ⁱⁱ

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Definition of Parliamentary Democracy:

Parliamentary democracy is the type of government where the public vote government into power and parliamentarians are representatives of the people. The United Kingdom is a constitutional monarchy and a parliamentary democracy with Queen Elizabeth II having limited powers. Democratic form of government in which the party (or a coalition of parties) with the greatest representation in the parliament (legislature) forms the government, its leader becoming prime minister or chancellor.ⁱⁱⁱ Executive functions are exercised by members of the parliament appointed by the prime minister to the cabinet. The parties in the minority serve in opposition to the majority and have the duty to challenge it regularly. The prime minister may be removed from power whenever he loses the confidence of a majority of the ruling party or of the parliament. Parliamentary democracy originated in Britain (*see* Parliament) and was adopted in several of its former colonies.

Parliamentary Democracy as distinguished from Presidential Democracy:

Our constitution provides for parliamentary form of government.^{iv} We have borrowed the constitutional features of several democratic countries. But our parliamentary model is predominantly based on the British system. The Head of Government in our system, the Prime Minister, can hold office only so long as he commands the confidence of the members of the parliament. Confidence of the House is reflected in existence/continuance of majority support - whether it be of a single party or of a coalition of parties. This feature can, and does, cause instability in governance. In Presidential democracies, the Head of Government, the President is directly elected by the people and cannot be removed from office except in circumstances of high crimes and misdemeanour established through impeachment process. Hence, Presidential democracies provide stable governance. In our parliamentary system, we have had changes of government through mid term elections or political realignments. Changes in government undoubtedly bring about disruptions in implementation of policies, development programmes and schemes. A question that has been publicly debated often is whether we should not opt for Presidential form of government. Parliamentary form being a basic feature of the Constitution, as held by the Supreme Court, legal problems might arise in switch over to any other form. Nor is it the case that parliamentary form is without its merits. The Parliament is in a position to keep the Prime Minister and his Ministers under constant vigil through its oversight mechanisms and devices - Question Hour, Adjournment Motions, Calling Attention Notices, debates, Confidence and No Confidence Motions, Scrutiny of budget and its implementation, public accounts audit etc. We should also remember that lack of mandate for the parliament to force a government out of office when circumstance may result in dictatorial tendencies on the part of the Head of the Government. We can perhaps consider the feasibility of adopting the German model of constitutional/legal provisions for constructive Votes of No Confidence. Under this model, the parliament may express its lack of confidence in the Head of government only by electing a successor by the vote of a majority of Members and requesting the President for the appointment of the successor.

Parliamentary system:

A parliamentary system is a system of democratic governance of a state in which the executive branch derives its democratic legitimacy from, and is held accountable to, the legislature (parliament); the executive and legislative branches are thus interconnected.^v In a parliamentary system, the head of state is normally a different person from the head of

government. This is in contrast to a presidential system in a democracy, where the head of state often is also the head of government, and most importantly: the executive branch does not derive its democratic legitimacy from the legislature. Countries with parliamentary systems may be constitutional monarchies, where a monarch is the ceremonial head of state while the head of government is almost always a member of the legislature (such as United Kingdom, Sweden and Japan), or parliamentary republics, where mostly ceremonial president is the head of state while the head of government is regularly from the legislature (such as Ireland, Germany, Pakistan, India and Italy). In a few parliamentary republics, such as South Africa and Botswana, the head of government is also head of state, but is elected by and is answerable to the legislature.

History of Parliamentary Democracy:

The origins of the modern concept of prime ministerial government go back to the Kingdom of Great Britain (1707–1800) and The Parliamentary System in Sweden 1721 - 1772 that coincided with each other.

In theory, power resided in the monarch, who chaired cabinet and chose ministers. In reality, King George I's inability to speak English led the responsibility for chairing cabinet to go to the leading minister, literally the prime or first minister. The gradual democratization of parliament with the broadening of the voting franchise increased parliament's role in controlling government, and in deciding who the king could ask to form a government. By the nineteenth century, the Great Reform Act of 1832 led to parliamentary dominance, with its choice invariably deciding who was prime minister and the complexion of the government.^{vi}

Other countries gradually adopted what came to be called the Westminster Model of government, with an executive answerable to parliament, but exercising powers nominally vested in the head of state, in the name of the head of state. Hence the use of phrases like Her Majesty's government or His Excellency's government. Such a system became particularly prevalent in older British dominions, many of whom had their constitutions enacted by the British parliament. Examples include Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the Irish Free State and the Union of South Africa, though these parliaments themselves have often evolved or were reformed from their British model: the Australian Senate, for instance, more closely reflects the US Senate than the British House of Lords; whereas there is no upper house in New Zealand.

Ancient Athens was the cradle of democracy.^{vii} The Athenian assembly, was the most important institution, and every citizen could take part in the discussions. However, Athenian democracy was not representative, but rather direct, and therefore the ecclesia was different from the parliamentary system.

The Roman republic had legislative assemblies, who had the final say regarding the election of magistrates, the enactment of new statutes, the carrying out of capital punishment, the declaration of war and peace, and the creation (or dissolution) of alliances. The Roman Senate controlled money, administration, and the details of foreign policy.

Some Muslim scholars argue that the Islamic shura (a method of taking decisions in Islamic societies) is analogous to the parliament. However, many other disagree, highlighting some fundamental differences between the shura system and the parliamentary system.

In Anglo-Saxon England, the Witenagamot was an important political institution. The name derives from the Old English *itena emit*, or *whiten gemots*, for "meeting of wise men". The first recorded act of a witenagamot was the law code issued by King Ethelbert of Kent ca. 600, the earliest document which survives in sustained Old English prose; however, the witan was certainly in existence long before this time. The Witan, along with the folkmoets (local assemblies) is an important ancestor of the modern English parliament.^{viii}

Parliamentary in France differed from parliamentary in the United Kingdom in several ways. First, the French National Assembly had more power over the cabinet than the British Parliament had over its cabinet. Second, France had shorter lived premierships. In the seventy years of the Third Republic, France had over fifty premierships.

In 1980 Maurice Duverger claimed that the Fifth Republic was a government in which the president was supreme, a virtual king. More recent analyses of France's system have downgraded the importance of the French president. During cohabitation, when the National Assembly of France and presidency are controlled by opposite parties, the French president is rather weak. Thus, some scholars see the French system as not one that is half presidential and half parliamentary, but as one that alternates between presidentialism and parliamentary.

The spread of Parliamentary in Europe

Democracy and parliamentary became increasingly prevalent in Europe in the years after World War I, partially imposed by the democratic victors, Great Britain and France, on the defeated countries and their successors, notably Germany's Weimar Republic and the new Austrian Republic. Nineteenth century urbanization, industrial revolution and, modernism had already fueled the political Left's struggle for Democracy and Parliamentary for a long time. In the radicalized times at the end of World War I, democratic reforms were often seen as a means to counter popular revolutionary currents. Thus established democratic regimes suffered however from limited popular support, in particular from the political Right.

Many early twentieth century regimes failed through political instability and/or the interventions of heads of state, notably King Victor Emmanuel III of Italy's failure to back his government when facing the threat posed by Benito Mussolini in 1922, or the support given by King Alfonso XIII of Spain to a prime minister using dictatorial powers in the 1920s. Finland is sometimes given as a counter-example, where a presidential democracy was established after a failed revolution and more than three months of bitter Civil War in Finland (1918). In 1932 the Lapua Movement attempted a coup d'état, aiming at the exclusion of Social Democrats from political power, but the Conservative President Svinhufvud maintained his democratic government. Parliamentary was (re-)introduced by Svinhufvud's successor Kyösti Kallio in 1937.

Parliament Democracy in Bangladesh: Present Perspective:

For proper working of the parliamentary system of the government, a competent opposition is required. Political scientists and scholars keep speaking and writing, unequivocally, about the great significance of the opposition. Without an effective opposition, parliamentary democracy can in no way be imagined and be developed. Countries having vibrant parliamentary democracy have a long history of competent and responsible opposition parties in and outside of their parliaments.^{ix}

May, Kaul, Shakdhar and Hasanuzzaman have spoken of an ideal situation in parliamentary democracy. But the current scene in Bangladesh mocks this ideal situation. What the parliamentary affairs experts believe does not hold true in the parliamentary democracy being practiced in Bangladesh by the ruling parties since its independence in 1971. The current state looks even bleaker. This is a manifestation of a political culture of clinging to power which recently reached a situation that threatens even the existence of the country's democracy.^x

But the former military dictator has found himself unable to refuse acceptance to the post, fearing the dire consequences. Parliamentary affairs experts labeled it unprecedented and against the norms of parliamentary democracy. The ruling AL and the Jatiya Party paid little heed to the criticism, deciding to remain nonchalant. The 10th parliament began its journey on January 29 this year with the handmaiden and weak opposition against the brute treasury bench led by the AL. How is the opposition bench performing? The current situation in parliament is very appalling. In most times, opposition MPs often join in the chorus with the ruling AL-led alliance MPs to laud Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her government's functions. So, there is no prospect of having a competent opposition in the current parliament. This vacuum will infuse tumult in the unhealthy rise of the executive branch of the government without facing any challenge or scrutiny. If so, this will continue destroying the base of country's democracy.^{xi}

The party does not have representation in the parliament for the first time in the last two decades. All the prevailing signs now suggest that the coming years will not offer anything that might strengthen the country's democracy. This will make the long dark chapter of destructive politics a lengthy one.

In the era of united Pakistan, democracy found little space to flourish. Political unrest, military intervention in politics and grabbing of state power by the army generals and unjustified attitudes by the political elites of West Pakistan towards people of East Pakistan buried all prospects of democracy. Opposition political parties of united Pakistan remained in the streets almost the entire time with their justified demands including that for democratic rights. As elections could not be held on time, parliament was not constituted. This did not yield anything good for united Pakistan. This resulted in emergence of Bangladesh through a bloody liberation war in 1971.

In independent Bangladesh, the long cherished parliamentary democracy was not given sufficient time to take rooting. But there was an imbalance in state power in the absence of a strong opposition inside and outside of the parliament. The brute majority enjoyed by the ruling party brought some adverse consequences. In the face of violent activities of some opposition parties in the streets, the AL government opted for a strategy that cast a shadow on democracy in the new-born country. In exercise of the brute majority, government used the parliament to amend the constitution and introduced BAKSAL in early 1975. Through constitutional amendments, all other political parties were dissolved. The country was switched to the presidential form of government abandoning the parliamentary democracy. In reaction some disgruntled army officials staged a bloody coup on August 15, 1975 and assassinated Bangabandhu and most of his family members and overthrew his government. The country was put under martial law. A dark chapter began in independent Bangladesh, reminding people of the experiences before Liberation. The first martial law regime presided by Khandaker Mustaque, Justice Sayem and General Zia continued until the second parliamentary election was held in 1979. But within the martial law regime of around four

years, the country's politics was made more complicated and dirty. General Zia floated a political party, BNP, distributing state favors to many politicians. Anti-liberation people and organizations got the go-ahead to resume their activities in Bangladesh. However, in the second parliament, the AL was recognized as the main opposition party and one of its senior leaders was endorsed as the opposition leader when the country was being governed by the presidential form of the government. Parliament did not enjoy real power as all powers belonged to the then president.

Return to the so called 'democracy' however had to face a setback. President Ziaur Rahman was assassinated on May 30, 1981. In less than a year, then army Chief General Ershad staged a military coup and overthrew elected President Justice Sattar and grabbed state power. The country was again put under martial law. AL, BNP and other opposition political parties, student organizations and professional bodies later started taking to the streets against the Ershad regime demanding the restoration of democracy. Amid street agitations, the third parliamentary election was held in 1986. The AL and some other parties joined the polls while BNP and many others boycotted the election. The election failed to earn credibility as the Ershad regime manipulated it in favor of its newly floated party, Jatiya Party. In the third parliament constituted through the rigged election, AL emerged as the main opposition party with its leader Sheikh Hasina as the leader of the opposition. But the main opposition could not perform their role inside the parliament due to the regime's desperate bids to abuse the House for its political interests. The AL concentrated on street agitations alongside other opposition parties.

The street agitations by the opposition parties gained momentum and Ershad was finally forced to step down on December 6, 1990. Democracy was restored in the country. The fifth parliamentary election was held in February 1991. The BNP, under leadership of Khaleda Zia, emerged victorious. And a few months later, the country was switched to the parliamentary democracy discarding the presidential form of the government. In the fifth parliament, the AL emerged as the main opposition party and Sheikh Hasina as the leader of the opposition. A new chapter of parliamentary democracy thus began. But it did not take much time to upset the journey. The then ruling BNP and AL failed to resolve the dispute over the mode of an election time government inside the parliament. The AL, Jatiya Party and Jamaat opted for extra-constitutional means to force the BNP-led government to accept its demand for introduction of the election time non-partisan caretaker government. They took to the streets boycotting the parliament proceedings. This gave birth to the House boycott culture.

The BNP that emerged as the main opposition in the seventh parliament [1996-2001] followed the suit of the AL. They opted for frequently boycotting the House proceedings and took to the streets to force the AL-led government to accept their various demands. Being the main opposition party in the eighth parliament [2001-2006], the AL was loath to perform its role as opposition inside the parliament. It instead infused fresh blood to the House boycott culture. Its MPs frequently boycotted the parliament and started gearing up the street agitations against the BNP-led government demanding reforms in the caretaker government system which led to the declaration of emergency in January 2007.

In the ninth parliament [2009-2014], the main opposition BNP set a new record of House boycott. Its MPs boycotted most of the sittings of the parliament. Rather, they concentrated on the street agitation demanding restoration of the caretaker government system. The BNP-

led alliance's street agitations became violent, claiming the lives of more than 200 people in 2013. BNP's key ally Jamaat was blamed for the unprecedented violence. The AL-led government however did not pay heed to their demand. And it held the controversial 10th parliamentary election which was boycotted by the BNP-led alliance. And the AL made the Jatiya Party the main opposition in parliament, giving new definition of parliamentary democracy.

Bangladesh's trust with establishment of democracy through the parliamentary system of government has not been exemplary. In the opposition, both the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the Awami League have found excuses to stay out of the parliament. In the first year of the current 9th parliament, the opposition BNP and its allies attended parliament's plenary session for 23 of 95 working days. While this is unfortunate, it is by no means unexpected because the parliamentary system in Bangladesh has been working practically without the opposition since 1991.

The ruling party is blaming the opposition entirely for the current stalemate over the issue of boycott of parliamentary sessions. While the opposition is no doubt failing in its duties and responsibilities as an opposition in a parliamentary system of government, it is sadly following the "tradition" set by the ruling party when they started the "practice" of staying out of the parliament on one pretext or the other in the 6th parliament after Ershad's fall. The Awami League did the same in the BNP's 2001-2006 term. It is now getting a taste of its own medicine as the BNP is staying out of the 9th Parliament as they had in the 7th. It seems like the political parties of Bangladesh enjoy being in the Parliament only when in power.

The way the political parties of Bangladesh behave while in the opposition is unique for there is no other country where the opposition has made it a habit to stay out of parliament. The two mainstream parties do not hesitate to take opposing stand on issues that are related to nation building where consensus and bipartisanship are essential. On actions that harm the nation, there is a strange and eerie similarity in the behaviour pattern of the Awami League and the BNP. For example, when it comes to hartal, students' politics, etc., that impact the country negatively; the two parties compete enthusiastically to beat each other. It is perhaps in the fitness of things that the BNP and the AL have the same view on how to act as an opposition party in parliament because its impact is negative on the country.

The reasons that the opposition have given and still give for boycotting the parliament raises doubts about their seriousness to establish democracy. In the 8th Parliament, the AL stayed out of the parliament on the plea that the BNP did not relent on their "legitimate" share of seats in the front row and for not allowing their members the opportunity to speak in the plenary sessions. The BNP is using the same arguments against the AL for staying out of the 9th parliament. In the 8th Parliament, the BNP enjoyed 2/3rd majority and in the 9th parliament, the Awami League enjoys 3/4th majority. A minimum spirit of accommodation and compromise would have been enough for the BNP to keep the AL in the 8th parliament and the AL by the same effort to bring the BNP to the 9th parliament. It is strange that a political party with such majority in parliament can have such a negative mindset about the opposition, as the BNP had about the AL in the 8th parliament and the AL about the BNP in the present parliament. It is also unbelievable that the BNP and the AL do not see how their lack of spirit of accommodation and compromise not only makes democracy non-functional but also causes disruptions to the economy by sending the opposition to the streets as the AL did during the 8th parliament and as the BNP is threatening to do so very soon.

Given the state of politics currently prevailing in the country, the mainstream political parties have not even scratched the concept embedded in "Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition" in the last 16 years Bangladesh has "officially" been a parliamentary democracy. It does not seem that the two parties are likely to make any attempt to understand the concept anytime soon for they are not in any hurry to do so. Till this happens, Bangladesh can describe itself a parliamentary democracy; in practice is anything but that. Unfortunately, the fact that parliamentary democracy as practiced in Bangladesh is imperfect also negatively impacts upon establishment of democracy in the country. It is no wonder therefore that although the mainstream political parties speak about establishment of democracy in Bangladesh; the country is still as distant from achieving this goal as it was when it started the journey many decades ago.

Parliamentary Democracy in Bangladesh: Problems and Prospects:

Democracy is a relatively fashionable term in the political science literature that might be used gainfully to comprehend the nature of state authority, its performance, effectiveness and control. It implies a mode of governance that includes some form of widespread participation of the people who are governed.^{xii} Democratic ethos is, therefore, stresses voting in free and fair election that serves a variety of functions ranging from the choice of the government and the exercise of influence over public policies to the expression of the dissent and repudiation of those persons and policies which majority electorate no longer support. Democracy is found to be both parliamentary (UK, India) and Presidential (USA) from across the globe. It is a very delicate system and it functions well in a society which has developed a kind consensus in respect of the use of power, acquisition of power, peaceful transfer of power and also in respect of the critical national issues. Though Bangladesh has introduced parliamentary democracy as political system but it has failed to establish democracy as an institution even after thirty eight years of its independence. Specially, after the restoration and resumption of parliamentary democracy followed by a decade-long struggle, the people of Bangladesh expected a distinguishing mode of democratic governance which would sharply contrast with the previous military and military-bureaucratic regimes. But, people are now bewildered and disenchanted with the rule of democratically elected governments and their apathy of letting the parliamentary democracy to be flourished in the country. Against this backdrop, this study makes an effort to look into the overall state of democracy in Bangladesh with the focus on political institutions and leadership. It also attempts to analyzes the bottlenecks and at the same time prospects and factors in favor of institutionalization of democracy in Bangladesh. Finally, this paper suggests a set of measures to be undertaken in an effort to institutionalize democracy in Bangladesh.^{xiii}

Future of parliamentary democracy in Bangladesh

PARLIAMENTARY democracy is a way of life that demands of its adherent's qualities like tolerance, respect for differing views and freedom for all to express their grievances and seek legitimate remedies.^{xiv} The raison d'être of our war of independence was parliamentary democracy, and that commitment had been reflected in the Constitution although subsequent amendments stood in the way of smooth functioning of parliamentary democracy. Parliamentary democracy, despite the fact that it is very expensive, is the best form of governance in the contemporary world.

Does the legislature participate in governance? Who guards the guardians? Does the parliament speak for the people? These are some questions that need to be answered. As my understanding goes, yes, the legislature does participate in governance and it does guard the guardians and it does speak for the people.

The legislature participates in governance by performing its function, which is primarily the making of laws. The laws should reflect the collective will of the people. They should reflect, and be consistent with, what is understood as "Common Law" or "Natural Law," which is distinct from "Statutory Law." For example, Human rights and fundamental freedoms like freedom of association, freedom of speech etc., are natural and axiomatic and are, therefore, construed as part and parcel of the natural law. The legislature should also perform the function of securing the accountability of the executive. It is the job of the executive to run the government on a day-to-day basis.

In running the government, the executive yields enormous powers. Decision makers in the executive are like guardians of public interest. But the question that has always been asked since the days of Plato and Aristotle is "who will guard the guardians?" Legislatures, because they are constituted by the representatives of the people, are indeed meant to guard the guardians. This gives rise to the principle of accountability.^{xv}

The legislators themselves are accountable to the public at large. Stated differently, each parliamentarian is accountable to his electors. This again can only be ex-post facto. We cannot have the system of recall of legislators with whom the electorate is not satisfied. Hence, the ex-post facto exercise in securing accountability of their representatives by the electors. This brings us to the question of orderly conduct of business in the House by the parliamentarians.

Legislature simply means the national parliament of a country, and is composed of treasury and opposition benches. Both the treasury and the opposition benches, being inseparable parts of the legislature, are expected to perform their distinct roles. But, unfortunately, the opposition in this part of the world is either not allowed to play its due role or is not willing to play its due role. As a citizen of the country my only concern is that parliamentary democracy cannot take a shape without effective opposition in parliament.

The term "opposition" normally means a coherent group of people regularly acting together and able to present themselves collectively to the electorate as an alternative government with an alternative policy.

Ivory Jennings described the role of the opposition in a parliamentary democracy as: "The government tends to regard the opposition as the brake on a car going uphill and where the opposition think that the car is going downhill; uphill and downhill are terms relative to some motion of level. And there no recognized standard by which the impartial person, if there were one, could determine his conclusion."

Edward Shills observed: "The effective and continuous existence of political democracy requires a fairly coherent and responsible opposition to the ruling party, while working within the rules of the parliament.

This opposition should not simply interest itself in the obstruction and depreciation of the majority. It should be capable of criticizing the majority's measures on the basis of detailed and realistic information about the situation in the country and the performance of the executive. The opposition should be sufficiently coherent to control or to isolate extremists who do not wish to work within the constitutional system. The opposition must be able to resist the temptations of conspiracy and subversion and the governing party must like-wise avoid the idea that opposition is in itself a step in the direction of subversion."

Therefore, the future of parliamentary democracy largely depends on the constructive engagement of both the ruling party and the opposition in parliament, without which institutionalization of parliamentary democracy cannot be taken forward.

In a parliamentary democracy the party in power runs the government and the opposition gives alternative plans of governance and forms a shadow cabinet. But it is unfortunate that in our country the opposition boycotts the parliament sessions in protest of political issues, thereby depriving the constituents they represent in the House. The opposition says that they are not allowed to play their right role in the parliament while the party in power says that the opposition is boycotting the parliament on flimsy pretexts, keeping their constituencies unrepresented. Whatever the case may be, there must be a happy marriage between the two at least for the sake of sustenance of democracy. This culture of boycotting the parliament or not accommodating the opposition in the parliament should go once for all for the growth of parliamentary democracy.

If we cannot make sure that both the treasury and the opposition benches are playing their right roles in parliament democracy will continue to be interrupted, and the event popularly known as "one eleven" will be repeated.

It is the high time for us to find a way out of the confrontational and conflicting way of politics and to come forward to establish consensual nature of politics. It is a disgrace that even 38 years after independence we could not achieve national consensus on national issues. How long do we have to keep on debating issues like who declared independence, who are the freedom fighters and who are the war criminals? It does not make sense in an impoverish country of 150 million people.

The essence of parliamentary democracy is certainly good governance. The smooth functioning of parliamentary democracy cannot be ensured unless we can develop a parliamentary culture of our own in order to make sure the participation of the legislature in the process of governance. I sincerely hope that these vital issues will be addressed by the political community with due importance.

Parliamentary culture is a broad expression in which several aspects of representative democracy are subsumed. Parliament reflects people's power. We follow the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy. Oliver Cromwell's victory created an all-powerful image for parliament. The Earl of Pembroke declared in 1649 that: "A parliament can do anything but make a man a woman and a woman a man."

The primacy as well as supremacy in democratic government according to my knowledge is fundamental to wholesome parliamentary culture. Along with the executive and judiciary, the legislature has its own role in the governance of a country.

We have learnt many lessons in the recent past about how the democratic process can be upset by other forces; therefore the political community must bridge their narrow political differences for growth and sustenance of parliamentary democracy. I would like to conclude by quoting an English philosopher who said: "Nothing can be more authentic than one's own experience."

Conclusion:

Parliamentary democracy in 1970s had practiced the main components of liberal democracy such as freedom of press and freedom of expression, free and fair general election, popular political participation, and independence judicial system. However political parties in this period were founded on social divisions based on ethnic, class, and religions. These social divisions were transformed into political cleavages perpetuating polarizations among political parties and also tensions within political parties. Political parties in the era of parliamentary democracy had met the requirements of procedural democracy. Thus the nature of politics, mindset of the leaders and other objective conditions are not conducive to a parliamentary democracy system of government in Bangladesh. Unless there is a sea change in the mindset with which the two mainstream parties conduct politics, the parliamentary democracy system that we have will be one in theory only; in practice it will continue to be more presidential than a presidential system of government. In being so, the country runs the risk of power being exercised at the executive level arbitrarily because the two parties between them have made the "watchdog" of the people toothless in keeping the executive accountable.

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