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AGENTS OF POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION AND THE WOMEN OF BANGLADESH

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Abstract: Political Socialization is not “natural”, but be learned, and for learning, one must have capacity and motivation. The Process through which an individual acquire these qualities is the political socialization .In fact, the politically socialized persons having a sense of civic duty, are politically informed, see the impact of public policies on their lives,feel politically efficacious,attentive in political matters and show interest to participate in politics. Political socialization may be mediated through different formal or informal organizations. The prime aim of this article is to assess the role of some important agents of political socialization in the political socialization process of Bangladeshi women.

The means by which individuals acquire motives, habits and values relevant to participation in a political system is the political socialization. It is a learning process whereby an individual becomes a functional member of the political system in which he lives. As Gabriel A. Almond notes:

Political socialization is the process of the induction into the political culture. Its end product is a set of attitude, cognition, value standards and feelings towards the political system, its various role and role incumbents.¹

Through the political learning process, individuals gradually attain maturation as responsible political citizens.² Result of several investigations reveal that people acquire political values and outlooks not only during their active political participation but mainly in the period before they engage in a explicitly political activity. Political Socialization process is a life time process. A child with the growth of his age gradually learns about society, different social and political structures and their role in the social and political arenas.

Political socialization is a sort of civic training. One may learn different aspects of the political cultures from different sources. There are a number of agencies which directly or indirectly facilitate political socialization. These

agencies may be political or non-political, formal or informal. A broader conception would include all “political learning formal and informal, deliberate and unplanned, at every stage of the life cycle including not only explicitly political learning but also normal non-political learning that affects political behavior.

Political Socialization as the process is mediated through various agencies of society by which an individual learns politically relevant attitudinal dispositions and behaviors. Some of the effective agencies of political socialization identified by prominent political scholars are: family, educational institutions, voluntary organizations, political party, mass media etc. All these agencies together play a formidable role in making citizens politically conscious, socially assimilative and culturally articulative.⁴ In Bangladesh, especially in the rural areas, there are the existence of a number of “unexplored agents” that facilitate the political socialization process of the rural people. Some of them are: drawing rooms, idle gatherings of the tea stalls, grocers’ shops, physicians’ chambers and gatherings at pondghats.⁵

The present study is an attempt to find out the role of various agencies in the political socializations process of the women of Bangladesh.

A. Family

Among different agencies of political socialization, family has received by far the greatest attention. Regarding the role of the family, major contribution came from the works of Davis and Coleman.⁶ Jennings and Niemi,⁷ Hess end Tourney,⁸ Gillespie and Allport,⁹ Dawson¹⁰ and Chaff.¹¹ All those scholars have focused exclusively on the family as the primary agent of political learning and have emphasized that the family environment plays the most vital role in the development of a Child’s political orientation through transmission of the parental partisan attitude among their children. In a study designed to measure the relative contribution of family in the acquisition of sense of political efficacy, it is apparent that, among different agencies, family has the greatest impact on the development of political efficacy.¹² This study has revealed that, a family that is open to reciprocal discussion of political issues provides a type of political socialization that develop a sense of political competence among its members and thus provides a context on which development of political orientation takes place.

Against the back-drop of the above assumptions, here an attempt is being made to measure the role of family in the political socialization process of the women of Bangladesh.

Different studies have revealed that due to “prudah” custom, Bangladeshi women in general feel more restricted in their communication.¹³ In fact “Purdah restriction” prevent them to disseminate ideas and information.¹⁴ Here women are to depend largely upon the male family members for any

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sort of information including political. So in a conservative society like Bangladesh, family can play important role in the political socialization process of the women. But the reality is that except few educated families in the urban areas, no political discussion is held in majority of the families. The prime causes are: mass illiteracy (due to illiteracy, most people are ill-informed about politics), absolute poverty (both male and female members always remain so busy that with their economic problems that they neither sufficient time nor interest for political discussion)¹⁵ women, educated or uneducated, employed or unemployed alike generally remain involved in their domestic duties. The multi-farious activities in which the women are engaged at home are exhausting and time consuming. Except for women of wealthy families whose labour is mitigated by hired women, most of the women have to work 12 to 14 hours a day (the average work day for men lasts about 10 to 11 hours) at task.¹⁶ Under such a circumstances, they have hardly any time to spend for any extra activities. Being tired after working for the whole day, they sleep down at night. They again have to wake up early in the morning and begin to work.

B. Educational Institutions

Strictly speaking, education is a process that strikes its roots deep within the individual and involves all his attitudes, behaviors, reactions to life, his tasks, responsibilities, the obscure as well as the light side of the personality. It is a cultural action by means of which people learn, in place of passivity, new attitudes and habits of participation and intervention. Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney have identified a close relationship between education and political orientation. The more educated individual, as Almond and verbal notes "feels free to discuss politics with a wider range of people. Those with less education are more likely to report that there are many people with whom they avoid such discussion".¹⁷ Some modern scholars hold that in the process of political socialization, the role of educational institutions comes next to that of the family.¹⁸ There are two basic ways in which an institution may be considered as a socializing agent: as a pervasive environmental context and as inculcator of specific political values.¹⁹ This supposition can be further extended to college and University because students at these levels tend to possess a more mature information absorbing capability. A part from class room teaching, students learn many things through participating in extracurricular activities.²⁰ It is emphasized that educational institutions impart rudimentary ideas about civic rules and provide basic information about history, politics, economics and geography. It can also inculcate political beliefs through conscious and planned instructions. All these enhance students' store of political knowledge and play a positive role in shaping attitudes about the unwritten rules of political game.

In Bangladesh, the role of the educational institutions in the political socialization of the women is not so significant because here the women constitute the majority of illiterates and school dropouts. The problem of female education is not, however, a problem merely of bringing girls in school. It is also a problem of retaining through five years course. At the secondary levels, most girls study only until they are unmarried. On the other hand, higher education is more or less confined to the males. Higher education for women is still considered as a wasteful pursuit by the conservative members of the society.²¹

Prevailing economic conditions have also a negative influence upon a girls' access to education. Poverty retards the progress of education in general and female education in particular. The problem is more acute in the rural areas where the bulk of the populations are landless, near landless and subsistence farmers. Some rural households may afford to send at best one or two to school and the choice invariably goes to the boy who is considered as the future bread-earner. The lower classes still consider education for their daughters a luxury fit only for their superiors.

C. Voluntary Organization

Voluntary Organizations are the most important means through which an individual is able to 'relate himself' effectively and meaningfully to the political system. These associations help him to avoid the dilemma of being either a parochial, cut off from political influence, or an isolated and powerless individual.²² Involvement in organizations gives an individual a more structured set of political resources which facilitate his political participation. Organizational involvement creates in an individual a sense of a normative obligation for participation. Because membership in organizations which have some connection to public affairs and which arrange from time to time formal or informal discussions of politics at meetings, naturally increase the political consciousness of the participants. As Almond and verbal observe:

Membership in even a non-political organization will affect attitudes. The experience with social interaction within the organization, opportunity to participate in the decisions of the organization (if there is such participation) and the general broadening of perspectives that occurs in any would be expected to increase an individual's potential for political involvement and activity.²³

A study conducted in five nations (USA, UK, Germany, Italy and Mexico) has revealed that, individual who are the active member of some social organizations are more likely to participate than those who with few or no organizational involvement. The study has revealed that organizations provide inducement and gratification to their members, such as sociability, political information, awareness and so forth. Even person belonging to a

disadvantaged group of the society may become politically active through his organizational involvement.²⁴

As indicated earlier, in Bangladesh, socialization among girls is curtailed by the all pervasive 'purdah' which so greatly restricts their mobility. Even visiting a friend requires parental approval. The parents are always afraid of possible "bad" influence of other outside their family. So interest in their fellow beings, even of the same sex is deliberately discouraged by the parents as detrimental to their reputation.²⁵ Girls usually do not associate even with other back ground girls and friendship relating with people on purely social or intellectual ground is mostly unknown. Thus disassociation from peer group at the formative period makes it difficult for most of them to take part in any organized group, except the family. Outside the family there is actually no social life for majority of women.

Lack of women's organizations is a serious obstacle to women's social exchange specially in rural Bangladesh. A few organizations which exist also operate within their narrow visions of elitist urban women and are not generally extended to country side to integrate the rural women with the result that scattered rural women are in serious difficulty to organize themselves into a cohesive social group to arouse social and political consciousness. A Survey conducted in Bangladesh, report that at present only 326 women organizations are in existence in Bangladesh.²⁶ These organizations are trying in their own field to help women and also find out ways to develop both social and political consciousness in them. But as indicated earlier, activities of these organizations are confined to certain specific areas.

D. Political Party

Writers on political socialization have recognized the significant role of political party in the political socialization of individuals and political party has been considered by them as the major mobilizer of people.²⁷ Political parties serve as guides to people through posters, pamphlets, slogans, public meetings etc. In addition to these, political parties play significant role in a democratic society in socializing people politically through their programmes and ideology. In this respect, the illiterates get better benefit than the illiterate ones, as they cannot get political information by reading newspapers, books or articles on politics.²⁸

Before discussing the role of political parties of Bangladesh in the political socialization process of the women, it is necessary to shed light on the nature of the political parties of the country. The fourth amendment of Bangladesh constitution initiated by Sheikh Mujib in 1975, provided for a

single party system. Later on in 1976, the Government of Ziaur Rahman issued a political party regulation (PPR) which provided for multi-party system in Bangladesh. However at present there are more than one hundred political parties in Bangladesh.²⁹

In spite of the existence of so many political parties in Bangladesh, only small numbers of parties have their offices at the local level. Again the activities of most of the political parties are concentrated mainly in the urban area. Through a few political parties are playing some role in the political socialization process of the people, their role in respect of the women is almost insignificant. Due to the 'purdah' restrictions, majority of the women neither can nor attend political gatherings or other political activities arranged by the political parties. On the other hand, most of the political parties have failed to expand their activities among the womenfolk. Again activities of the woman fronts of different political parties are limited in the urban areas. Hence, these woman fronts are almost certain to be out of close touch with the bulk of the women of the country living in the rural area.

E. Mass Media

In the past two decades, communication media have gained tremendous significance throughout the world. Beginning with newspaper, Radio, then with television and today with satellites and other sophisticated delivery systems, modern communication have been trust into almost every corner of the world. Mass media, which primarily include newspaper, television, radio and magazines have attracted the attention of a vast number of researchers in recent decades. Several studies have explored linkage between mass media communication and political orientation from both diachronic and synchronic points of view.³⁰

In fact, Some key forms of mass media, particularly newspaper, radio and television together constitute the principal sources of political socialization. An individual is being educated everyday what he reads that is, by the picture of society which he receives every morning or evening from the columns of his favorite newspapers. The newspaper is not only the most powerful transmitter of political news but also creator of political interest. It is rated as a primary socializer simply because news content in the press provides the bulk of politically relevant information in the mass media. Besides newspaper, radio and television are also capable of transmitting information to a very large number of people. Even that, part of media or communication, which is nearly designed for entertaining, may well serve the latent function of political socialization. In developing like Bangladesh where

most of the women are illiterate, radio and televisions which do not require skills or literacy may have a very effective role to inform, educate and motivate women.

It is needless to say that newspaper cannot reach the conscious of the illiterate people. In country like Bangladesh where women's functional literacy is not so satisfactory, the utility of newspaper in familiarizing them with politics is corresponding limited. It appears that news contents of the press do not play any formidable role in the political socialization process of the women. On the other hand, in Bangladesh, especially in rural areas the electronic media like radio and television have no significant role to play in the political socialization process of the women. Due to poverty, most families are not in a position to buy radio or television. Still today, television is not available in most of the villages. The scarcity of TV sets is again aggravated by the lack of electricity. Most villages of Bangladesh have not yet been electrified. Again those who have television set are found to enjoy the entertaining programs. The programs that are obviously "educational" or "politics-oriented" in their content do not reach the intended women audience simply because that they have very little interest in them. Besides, most of the rural and urban women spend their days from before dawn until well into the night doing house work. They have to carry out the total responsibility of housekeeping and have to handle everything connected with child rearing. All these works curtail their leisure to watch TV program.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is clear that, the role of different familiar agencies of political socialization in the political socialization process of the Bangladeshi women is not so mentionable. As indicated earlier, in Bangladesh especially in the rural areas the drawing rooms, the idle gatherings in the tea stall or in front of grocer shops also have a role in rural political socialization. Every well to do family of the village has its drawing room. Mainly the drawing rooms of the 'matbar', chairman or members of the union perished are the places where a large number of rural people gather almost every day. There are permanent tea stalls in everywhere in rural Bangladesh. Generally, permanent tea stalls are located at important public squares, bazars and densely populated areas. The gatherings of the tea stalls generally swell in the evening. The villagers after finishing the day's work join the gathering for refreshment and relaxation. Besides the common people, sometimes college students, school teachers or local politicians are also found in those gatherings. In some drawing rooms of the rural influential

or tea stalls, radio television and newspapers are also found. Local, national and even international politics are some of the popular subjects discussed there. Generally due to 'purdah' restriction, the women do not join the gatherings of drawing rooms or tea stalls. Hence the drawing rooms or tea stalls have also no role to play in the political socialization of the women of Bangladesh.

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