



Islam, Politics and Bangladesh: A Qualitative Content Analysis on the Democratic and Political Culture of Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (BJI)

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Abstract

This study attempts to explore the political culture and democratic participation of Bangladesh Jama'at-e-Islam (BJI) from a historical perspective. It first looks at how Islam came in Bangladesh and how Islam has evolved in the political sphere and its association with democracy in the country. The paper is keen to establish how BJI is using its political objectives, mission, and vision to reach the ordinary people of Bangladesh. In the process of achieving this objective, the study also investigates the policies, motives, and experiences of this organization from the historical arena to the current situation. It also assesses the programmes, contemporary controversies, and policy challenges of this organization. In examining the engagement and ongoing political activities of BJI, this study is providing an ethnographic analysis of Bangladesh Jama'at-e-Islam (BJI) with regard to its role in the democratic movement in the country. The paper particularly focuses on the national election and adopts a qualitative approach to understand the purposes and the perceptions of this political party. Overall, descriptive and analytical methodology has been applied in this paper to narrate the situation related to BJI. This paper utilizes the qualitative content method as a strategy of analysis.

Keywords

Qualitative Content Analysis, Political Culture, Democratic Participation, Islamic Movement, and Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (BJI)

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İslam, Siyaset ve Bangladeş: Bangladeş Cemaat-i İslami (BJI) Demokratik ve Politik Kültürü Üzerine Nitel İçerik Analizi

Öz

Bu çalışma, Bangladeş Cemaat-i İslami'nin (BJI) siyasi kültürünü ve demokratik katılımını tarihsel bir perspektiften incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. İlk olarak İslam'ın Bangladeş'te nasıl ortaya çıktığını ve İslam'ın siyasi alanda nasıl geliştiğini ve ülkedeki demokrasi ile olan ilişkisini inceler. Çalışma, BJI'nin Bangladeş'in sıradan insanlarına ulaşmak için siyasi hedeflerini, misyonunu ve vizyonunu nasıl kullandığını belirlemeye çalışmaktadır. Bu hedefe ulaşma sürecinde, çalışma aynı zamanda bu örgütün politikalarını, motivasyonlarını ve deneyimlerini tarihsel arenadan mevcut duruma kadar araştırmaktadır. Ayrıca, BJI'nin programlarını, güncel tartışmaları ve politika zorluklarını değerlendirmektedir. Çalışmada BJI'nin halk ile iletişimini ve siyasi faaliyetlerini incelerken, demokratik hareketteki rolüyle ilgili niteliksel bir analizi sunulmaktadır. Makale özellikle ulusal seçime odaklanmakta olup bu siyasi partinin amaçlarını ve algılarını anlamak için niteliksel bir yaklaşım benimsemektedir. Genel olarak, bu yazıda BJI'nin ile durumunu anlatmak için tanımlayıcı ve analitik metodoloji uygulanmıştır. Bu makale nitel içerik yöntemi bir analiz stratejisi olarak kullanılmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Nitel İçerik Analizi, Siyasi Kültür, Demokratik Katılım, İslami Hareket ve Bangladeş Cemaat-i-İslami (BJI)

Introduction

Bangladesh is a country in South Asia that situates on the southern side of India, and above the Bay of Bengal, particularly, it is a tiny country, with a population of about 163 million people. Following a nine-month bloody *Liberation War* in 1971, Bangladesh was liberated as an independent country. This however came at a huge cost as three million people were killed during the Liberation movement against the government of West Pakistan. At the time liberation war, some political parties thought it would not be for the interest of Bangladeshi people to secede from Pakistan because they believed India was behind the calls for separation of Pakistan into two so as to achieve its own political and imperialistic policy. Consequently, there were more than six political parties disagreed with the separation movement of Bangladesh from Pakistan. The respective parties were namely *Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami* (BJI or better known as Jamaat) *Muslim League*, *Nejame Islami*, *Pro-China Communist Party* renowned. Besides, thousands of scholars and intellectual people who were not involved in any political party also sincerely opposed the Liberation of Bangladesh from Pakistan. Because they hypothesized liberating Bangladesh with the assist of India might not be favorable for the future of Bangladeshi people.

Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (BJI) is an Islam based political organization in Bangladesh (Islam, Bingöl, and Nyaburi, 2020). Jamaat-e Islami has been trying to execute the code of conduct ordered by the Almighty Allah and guided by Prophet Mohammad (Peace be upon him) in order to change Bangladesh into Islamic welfare and peaceful state, ultimately, obtaining the contentment of Allah and escape in the life henceforward. In Bangladesh, as in March 2019, the number of members (Rukon, a highest-level member) stands at 55, 000 including 17, 000 female members, and its associate members and supporters crossed almost 16 million (Jamaat Internal Report, 2020)¹. The Jamaat is now facing an acute crisis in leadership. Currently, most of the Executive Committee, including its Late President (Ameer-e-Jamaat), working committee members, including the top leaders of BJI, Abdul Quader Mollah, Muhammad Kamaruzzaman, Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed, Mir Quasem Ali, are being hanged or in prison on charges of committing crimes against humanity in 1971. This crackdown against Jamaat, its student front, and other affiliated

1 Interview with one of the leaders of BJI

organizations are going on unabated for the last six years and a half. Most up-to-date information showed that over 35,000 cases have so far been instituted against more than 7,500,000 Jamaat leaders and workers across the country (Odhikar Reports, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014), though the current internal report by BJI showed that in 2020, the individual cases instituted against more than three hundred thousand Jamaat members where about ten thousand members are in the prison (Jamaat Internal Report, 2020)².

Moreover, to understand the last decade's political situation in Bangladesh, the incident on February 28, 2013 when government killed 170 people who were shot dead on a single day when Moulana Delowar Hossain Syeedi's verdict was announced (Human Rights Watch, 2014). By identifying the current scenario, this study investigates the policies, motives, and experiences of this organization from the historical arena to the current situation. Accordingly, this study also evaluates the programmes, contemporary controversies, and policy challenges of this organization by examining the engagement and on-going political activities of BJI through an ethnographic analysis with regard to its role in the democratic movement in the country.

This paper identifies the three thematic aspects of the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (BJI): historical development of BJI; political culture of BJI and recent policy challenges of BJI. For examining this, qualitative content analysis has been utilized to find out the purpose of this research, as Julien (2008) portrays qualitative content analysis as latent content analysis, which is shortening facts and simplifying information and data in an understandable way by analyzing textual data, such as recording of the interview, observations of artificial intelligence (AI), descriptive studies, open-ended surveys, speeches, and media highlights, like videos, photos, and sketches. In the assessment, units of groupings or codes throughout all the variables and samples are converted into "themes" or "categories" (Mayring, 2015 and Islam and Cansu, 2020). As Nyadera and Islam (2020) argued: "significant changes experienced at the domestic and international levels have compelled scholars and practitioners to rethink the different dimensions in theoretical and practical application".

Historical Development and Challenges of Political Culture in Bangladesh

Scholars like Önder and Nyadera (2020 & 2011) explores the meaning of political and administrative culture in the political parties and administration, as they refer to identify the culture in the political environment as "to the analysis, perceptions, and interpretation of bureaucrats (politicians) behavior. The analysis of these behaviors can be done internally, for example, by examining how public servants interact among themselves or with their

superiors as well as internal organizational units on the one hand. On the other hand, it can be done externally, mainly by examining the nature of politics, other public and private organizations, the media, character, and beliefs of the citizens among other factors. Administrative culture thus represents a set of public interests as it seeks to represent both the collective interest of people and personal attitudes and behavior”.

After the independence from Pakistan in 1971, Bangladeshi politics as it has evolved, and the country’s politics tend to take regime histories as their point of departure. Historically, several interlocking themes characterize political culture in the country. Dependence on totalitarianism in times of catastrophe and promise of political differences through extra-parliamentary way is consistently conveyed by appeals to contradictions in nationalist ideology and the representation of political balk as anti-patriotic. Along with the extraordinary partisanship that informs the politico-cultural landscape under all regimes, patronage politics tends to predominate whether governments are elected or military. Ironically, both ordinary citizens and opposition parties often find that the only effectual mode of political engagement open to them is mobilizing on the streets. The most lasting sites of contestation rotate on the question of national uniqueness and the place of religion in defining Bengali/Bangladeshi nationalism, and the historically constructed Bengali/Muslim dichotomy. As we shall see, efforts over narration and reminiscence have confidentially formed the construction of political oratory and practice. To put it differently, the setbacks of statecraft and record script have been profoundly knotted. Highly charged ideological debates about nationalism frequently eclipse conversations on other critical issues, such as distributive justice. Moreover, constant “culture wars” have permitted a deepening division of the political scene; the general upshot is a progressive hollowing out of political philosophy and performs (Siddiqi, 2010: 8 and Sobhan, 1979). “The challenges that confront politicians and policymakers, as well as the general public, are mostly due to negative legacies that may have roots in the colonial past” of Bengal and current Bangladesh (Islam, 2017).

Characteristics of Political Culture in Bangladeshi State from Socialism to Neo-Liberalism

At first, the structure of Bangladesh is different compare to ancient times. Today this state appears as fundamentally diverse from its antecedent at independence time. The first original constitution of Bangladesh (1972) was drafted by the Awami League (AL) as they formed the government. The government created a team to formulate a constitution and set four fundamental state policies of Bangladesh. They passed the constitution and enacted nationalism, democracy, secularism, and socialism as fundamental principles of state policy (Riaz, 1994: 116). Less than three years later, the “father of

the nation” and the country’s first Prime Minister, the Awami League’s Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (1972–5) pushed through the Fourth Amendment to the constitution, which instituted an authoritarian one-party rule in place of parliamentary democracy. The military government of General Ziaur Rahman (1975–81) dispensed with both socialist ideology and secular state policies. Zia lifted the ban on the practice of religion in politics, thereby, political groups such as the Jamaat-e-Islami got the prospect to enter in Bangladesh political system. In 1978 the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) embraced an explicitly Muslim Bangladeshi identity inaugurated by Major Zia. Zia’s successor in the army, General Ershad consolidated the non-secular face of the nation by declaring Islam the state religion. Moreover, both Generals Zia and Ershad reversed the socialist policies, withdrawing state subsidies, and promoting a regime of trade liberalisation and export promotion (Siddiqi, 2010).

Democratic Culture and Political Nature since the 1990s

The immediate post-Ershad and post-military period was one of euphoria and high expectations for a new beginning. It was followed by extreme disenchantment, especially with the actions of the newly elected Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) government and the opposition Awami League (AL). The reinstatement of democratic politics opened up old ideological fissures between the AL and the BNP; those soon became the two prime strong actors in the political landscape. Although an estimated 170 political parties existed in 1996, Bangladeshi politics operates – for all intents and purposes as a two-party system with the Ja’amat-e Islami (JI) and, on occasion, the Jatiya Party (JP) playing a vital side-role. The outcome of parliamentary elections in 1991, 1996, and 2001 demonstrates this – the BNP and the AL together secured almost 80 percent of the votes. Remarkably, the margin of victory in each case has been very close. In 1991, the BNP obtained 31 percent of the vote and the AL 28 percent. The AL won in 1996, with 38 percent of the vote (BNP received 34 percent). Finally, in 2001 the BNP won through an even narrower margin – 41 percent in contrast to the AL’s 40 percent. The small gap suggests that the differences between the two parties are not necessarily sharply defined at some level.

Understanding the nature of the intense rivalry between the two parties is critical to understanding the political landscape in Bangladesh. Sheikh Hasina, the leader of the AL and daughter of Mujib and Khaleda Zia, the widow of Zia who had taken over the BNP, successfully overcame their differences during the anti-Ershad movement. The Mujib regime had branded its opponents BNP as anti-patriotic, anti-secular, and pro-Pakistani. Its opponents in the BNP painted AL supporters as pro-Hindu, pro-India, and anti-Islamic. The AL represented itself as the keeper of secular Bengali cultural identity and values. The BNP under Zia promoted Bangladeshi nationalism, one that explicitly acknowledged the role of Islam in the making of identity. The AL

heroized the role of Mujib in the Liberation movement while the BNP under Zia attempted to erase all mention of Mujib and represented Zia (and the military) as saviors of the 1971 war.

The polemics approximately distinctiveness politics lay down the character and skeleton for future political debates in Bangladesh (Siddiqi, 2010). These types of the division led some polarizations and institutionalized and naturalized in the society. As a result, everyone directly declared their affinity to the political parties, including public and professional associations. Different types of educational and professional institutions were also maintained their relationships with the political and ruling parties, including public university students and teachers, medical colleges, bar councils, and lawyer associations. As a result, surprisingly, the ultimate beneficiary group was the government. The skeleton for political debate in favor of and opposed to AL/Liberation stayed fundamentally iced up in this circumstance. This trend threatens to the ownership of the Liberation War. The question remains in a dilemma, who led the nation in the Liberation War and undermined the national identity regarding the ownership of the Liberation War. Conversely, these sorts of debates and initiatives portioned society from different angles. People were divided into various levels (Siddiqi, 2010 and Uddin, 2006).

History of Islam in the Land of Bangladesh

Islam entered Bangladesh as a process of amassing sediments with the same progression as the territory has been shaped in a continuous procedure. Before the formation of the Muslim empire in this region for six centuries, it was sermonized by cohort after cohort. Consequently, people were welcomed to know the Islamic rule and culture, and this region was turned into a suitable consign for Islam in the company with fundamental comprehension. Islam preached in Bangladesh (Bengal Region) in the following three approaches.

- *Arabic merchants preached Islam in this region. The Chittagong port was a primary hub of a business port in Bengal. It was also a prime port for continuing business with the eastern regions together with Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, and China. Some traders used to run their business by using the Chittagong port and Bengal land in order to visit China. The Arab businessmen were used to lead their crafts in this path before the past and post-Islamic period. They also preached Islam in conjunction with running their merchant's activities. Hence, the genesis of Islam was started since then.*
- *There was also a historical trend of preaching Islam. King Cherumul Perumul, a Tamilnadu³ coastal kingdom, hugged Islam during the existence of Prophet Hazrat Mohammad (PUH). Subsequently, this region was transformed into a hub for advocating Islam. The respective preachers used to visit Bangladesh in order to convey the message of Islam in this area.*

3 Currently, one of the districts of India

- *In the 7th Century, after the triumph of Sindh by Muslim General, Mohammad Bin Kashem, many clergymen came to the Bengal from the Arabic land, Turkey, Iran, and Iraq to preach Islam.*

The unvoiced sermonizing of Islam was remained concealed due to the shortage of historical evidence. Some books that were written by Arab Muslim historians, geographers, and Muhaddises⁴ favored the mentioning arguments. E.g., it was verified from the narratives of Muhaddis, including Imam Abadna Marwazi highlighted that groups of Sahabis⁵, for example, Abu Oakkas ibn Ohaib visited Chittagong in 618. There were other narrators who described the merchant relationships and settlement of Arab traders in Chittagong seaport, Ramu, Cox's Bazar and Chandpur river port, etc. For example, this narrative was cited by including Abul Kasem Obaidullah Ibn Khurdadbi, Al Idrisi, Al Masudi, and Yaqub Ibn Abdullah. These Arabic geographies belonged to the 11th century. Their argument favored the recent discovery of archaeological evidence. A coin, gold coin of Harunur Rashid (788) was found at Paharpur in Rajshahi, Bangladesh. On the other hand, another set of coins was discovered at Mainamoti in Comilla, Bangladesh. There was also discovered lately in Lalmonirhat district of Bangladesh that was constructed in the 7th century (689 BC, Arabic calendar year 69 Hijri). The folk stories and songs of Bengal indicated a considerable historical foundation of Islam for the favor of Islamic preachers and saints. Some other indicators were verified for the gestures of their tombs and Dargahs⁶. It was found that many Mosques (Masjid) were built by their hands. These historical trends and developments of Islam proved that Islam conquered in the 6th century before the Muslim triumphed over Bengal. So, the self-conscious Anti-Aryan people of Bengal began to start to admire Islam from that time. It was recognized that the triumph of Bengal began in 1204 with the hands of Muslims. Aftermath, Islam started to patronize the region through proper ways, including justice and equality (Islam, 2017; Islam & Hossain, 2020).

The rise of political Islam and political culture in Bengal and Bengali Muslim identity, obviously, the flow of the incidents must be discussed through the three major historical events and initiatives during the colonial period (Islam and Islam, 2018): *firstly*, the *Fara'idi movement* led by Haji Shari'at Allah in the 1820s (1781–1840); *secondly*, the *Basherkeilla movement* led by Mir Nisar Ali alias Titu Mir (1782–1831); and *thirdly*, the major initiative led by *Deoband and Bengali Ulema* against the British colony to preserve the Ottoman Empire, historically, which was introduced as the *Khilafat movement* between the late 1910s and early 1920s (1918–1924). These were the primary factual movements for identifying the Bengali Muslim identity, Islam and its vast and deep

4 Expert on Prophet Mohammad's Speech, PBH

5 Associates of Prophet Mohammad

6 Rest and residential house of Islamic preachers, refugees, and insolvent people

impacts on the sociopolitical and cultural aspects of Bengal, and current Bangladeshi Muslim society. “The challenges that confront politicians and policymakers, as well as the general public, are mostly due to negative legacies that may have roots in the colonial past” of Bengal and current Bangladesh (Islam, 2017). “Despite an end to Muslim political rule, seeds of Muslim identity remained buried in Bengal, coming to the fore with the establishment of a Muslim political movement in Dhaka in the early decade of the twentieth century. The movement gradually turned into a movement calling for an independent homeland for Muslims, leading to the formation of Pakistan in 1947. Although designated as a homeland for Muslims, discontentment arose in the eastern part of Pakistan over economic and social policies which were seen to be favoring the western part. East Pakistan became independent from Pakistan after a 9-month bloody war which led to the formation of Bangladesh in 1971” (Islam & Hossain, 2020).

Historical Measurement to Promote Islam and Democracy in Bangladesh

Historically, there were some procedures that followed to uphold Islamic values and cultures in Bangladesh. Some important features are mentionable for Islamic teaching and values (Hasan, 2011: 8):

- (1) *The government of Bangladesh enacted one of the four state principles, i.e. ‘absolute faith and trust in the Almighty Allah instead of previous secularism principle and added “Bismilla-hirrah-manir-rahim” (In the name of Allah, the Merciful, and the Compassionate) into the Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh. Moreover, it (absolute faith and trust in the Almighty Allah) was amended by the 15th Amendment of the constitution in 2011. On the other hand, the Supreme Court, an apex court of Bangladesh declared illegal Amendment which was a favor for the 15th Amendment.*
- (2) *There is a symbolic initiative to hang various posters in government offices, residential houses of the premier and president with the quotations from the holy Quran (Divine Verse of Allah), displays some verses of Quran, and finally the Prophet Mohammad’s advice in public places.*
- (3) *Taking off some flags, festoons especially in Eid for celebrating religious festivals and wishing some welcome messages from the head of state or government on various religious circumstances*
- (4) *Proffering of Munajat (prayers) on special occasions*
- (5) *Perform Namaz (Prayers) and call of Azan (Prayer) five times in a day*
- (6) *Foundation of a newly separate division of Religious Affairs, under a matured ministry*
- (7) *Institution of the Islamic Foundation with an extensive network of research facilities*
- (8) *Set of connection of an Islamic University with an Islamic Research Centre attached to it*

- (9) *Foundation of a Zakat (One of the basic principles of Islamic Foundation) Fund headed by the President*
- (10) *Suggestion for an education policy intended to introduce Arabic schools, starting with class 1*
- (11) *Expenditure of enormous funds for the building of the Mosque before and after election and Madrasah (religious, educational institutions)*
- (12) *Foundation of the Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board*

Additionally, there are seven Islamic political parties catalogued with the Election Commission Bangladesh. E.g., Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, Jaker Party, Khelafot Andolon, Muslim League, Jomioti Ulamaye Islam Bangladesh, Islamic Front Bangladesh, and Islamic Oikko Jot (IOJ). Only JIB and IOJ achieved Parliamentary seats in the Nation of House among these seven parties in the 2001 general election. On the other hand, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) won 193 seats in that Parliament. JIB and IOJ turned into a leading alliance cohort with BNP for assisting to form the central government during this time; even two BJI MPs got an opportunity to hold the ministerial positions in the BNP-led government until 2006.

Political and Democratic Culture of Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (BJI)

Historical Development

The Jamaat-e-Islami (BJI) emerged in North India as an ideological group in the 1940s. Maulana Maududi was the founder of Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), formed the institution of an Islamic values-oriented state (Hashmi, 2011). However, Jamaat-e-Islami is an Islamic movement that was established by the theologian expert and socio-political logician, Abul Ala Mawdudi (1903–1979), in 1941, in undivided British India. It was initially founded as a religious movement aiming at the socio-religious development of the Muslim community in the colonized Indian subcontinent. The division was visible after the establishment of the division between Muslim-majority Pakistan and Hindu-majority India in 1947. Maududi migrated to Pakistan, while the movement also continued to function in India, with autonomous and independent leadership but with a strong ideological influence from Maududi's writings. Similarly, the Jama'at in Bangladesh has also functioned with completely independent policies and leadership since it began work in Bangladesh in 1979, eight years after the country gained independence from Pakistan in 1971 (Amin, 2016: 25). Since its creation, in academia, Jamaat-e-Islami argued as "well-organised and controversial Islamic party" which has some "similarities, but more dissimilarities with other political parties", (Banu, 1994: 80) whatever, it is in Bangladesh, India or Pakistan.

in political issues in the late 1940s. In 1951 it participated for the first time in a provincial election in Pakistan. Since then, the Jama'at has functioned as a full-scale political party in Pakistan (Jama'at -e-Islami, Pakistan), India (Jama'at -e-Islami Hind), Kashmir (Jama'at -e-Islami Kashmir) and Bangladesh (Bangladesh Jama'at -e-Islami). Moreover, expatriates originating from these countries, who are influenced by the ideology of the movement, have formed several religious-social movements in various countries: for instance, the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), Islamic Forum Europe, and the UK Islamic Mission. All of these groups continue working, with their own independent constructs and activities in their respective countries, towards Islamizing the society, as advocated by the movement's founder, Maududi (Haq, 2010; Nasr, 1994; Nasr, 1996; Riaz, 2010). Maududi's objective is summarized in the World Almanac of Islamism: "Maududi hypothesized and selected a way in which Muslims might safeguard their political and religious interests by understanding pure Islam and Practices those were contradictory with Hinduism. He condemned the earthly ideologies, i.e., nationalism and secular politics, and strongly proposed that Islamic State could reduce all types of problems Muslim communities are facing those" (Amin, 2016). In other way Bano (2012) argued the Jamaat's social roots through its social welfare works as that "in Pakistan and Bangladesh there are other Islamic parties but none on the scale of the Jama'at and none with as extensive welfare network. Thus, a sophisticated organisational hierarchy and not just commitment to welfare work is critical for enabling a religious political party maintain a large network of welfare organ" (Bano, 2012: 93).

This revivalist approach has ideological similarities to the approach of Muslim groups in other Middle Eastern countries, e.g., the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. The objective of Hasan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt is also described in the World Almanac of Islamism: "He proposed that the fault of Muslim Communities could only be alleviated through revisiting to the unique structure of faith, following its guidelines developed from the divine book .e.g. the Holy Quran and prophetic tradition to all aspects of modern life as well as in the political ground" (Amin, 2016).

In the arena of Bangladesh, during the Mujib government, Jamaat was prohibited like other religious organizations, but following the regime of the Sheikh Mujib government in 1975, the Jamaat became a legitimate political party in Bangladesh. Aftermath, the Jamaat led religious-based politics and pursued mostly by upper peasants and lower-middle classes in Bangladesh dissimilar to its counterparts in India and Pakistan. On the other hand, it was welcomed by several NGOs, clinics, and philanthropic organizations across Bangladesh, which had been ahead ground for appearing as a different to the secular parties in Bangladesh. That being the case, there is no simple way to identify the Jama'at as either a political party or a small religious revivalist movement

(Pattanaik, 2009). Nevertheless, due to its emphasis on political action, the Jama'at is predominantly considered as a political party, with a mention of its distinctive aspect of ideological identity. For instance, the Jama'at is described in the Encyclopedia of Islam (Sija, 2009: 388):

“The Jamaat-i-Islami is an Islamic political party in Pakistan founded in 1941 by Abu Al-Ala Mawdudi (1903–79), the most widely influential Muslim thinker of South Asia in the 20th century. It is an ideological movement that has aimed to create an Islamic state in which all aspects of social and political life would be governed according to Islamic standards and law”.

BJI's Activities in the Political Environment of Bangladesh

Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami is the popular Islamic organization as well as one of the most historic and popular political party in this country. As the constitutional objectives of Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami articulated that BJI firmly believe that for the sake of world peace and the salvation in the hereafter, each and every human being should accept and acknowledge Allah as the only God and Prophet Mohammad (Peace be upon him) as an ideal leader. The main activity of Jamaat is encouraging people to follow Islam meticulously in their personal lives. They believe that the society based on Islamic values can ensure peace and welfare to the world humanity where competent government is very much crucial for protecting and sustaining welfare of the society. By this way, Jamaat has involved with the democratic and systematic activities of Bangladeshi politics to formulate a government on the basis of Islamic values and responsibility.

According to the statement of BJI, they are working and involved in politics in a democratic way where they maintain no hatred for any political party and organizations working at home and abroad. Additionally, historically, Jamaat is keen to keep up a friendly relationship with the followers of different faiths, beliefs and opinions to build welfare, happy and prosperous Bangladesh in a democratic way. Moreover, as a part of such a vision; Jamaat has joined in all the national and local elections since the independence of the country and played their role as a democratic political party.

Literally, BJI's constitution and its activities in the political environment of Bangladesh pleas to human being in general and the Muslim Communities in meticulous in retorting to three points call derived from the unique message of all envoys of Allah cited in the Holy Quran. “O people, surrender to Allah, there is no other Lord for you except Him”. Hence, these pleas can construe in universal and eternal call, which will attain through the following three points (jamaat-e-islami.org, 2020):

1. *“Admit Allah as the only sovereign Lord and the messenger Mohammad (Peace be upon him) as your one and only leader in all segments of your life for desiring peace in this life and desire recovery after death.”*

2. *Every judgments, actions and habits revolting faith and proclaim not to follow anybody against Allah and His envoy Mohammad (Peace be upon him).*
3. *Build practical efforts to modify fake and inactive chiefs by good and active ones to execute these two procedures in the life.*

BJI wants to change the feelings of the people, which will be followed to the right path. People of same thinking have to be united and instructed as active chiefs, and capable activists in order to remove the social upheavals with the strength of with the strength of selfless examine of the people, they shall outline the government and shall revolve the country into a peaceful and prosperous state in the light of the Quran and the Sunnah (Prophet Mohammad's Guidelines). Additionally, to sustain these types of missions and vision; BJI clarified their activities through four approaches:

- (1) *"Decontamination and renovation views: Some specific methods are mentioned categorically-to proliferate Islam and to entitle the people to the method of Allah, to sanitize and recreate the thoughts of the human beings on the base of the Quran and the Sunnah, to carry out an association for making authentic Islamic ideology in all sections of the people and to craft them experience the requirement to pursue Islam in each globe of life.*
- (2) *Association and teaching: Some methods are distinguishable. E.g. To investigate and systematize Islam-loving conscious and truthful people and those intending to be sincere, to educate them up through realistic activities in order to appropriate to enlarge them as true servant of Allah and competent activists for the basis of Islam and kindness and build up a cluster of activists for providing the society with frank management at all segments of the society.*
- (3) *Community repair and public improvement: To Endeavour to fortify the conditions of the people and the country through general and common examine and some societal wellbeing activities, to hand out the misery of humanity, to commence Islamic traditions and rebuild human quality on foundation of Islamic teachings and values. Finally, take some steps to prepare people for resisting anti-social activates through cooperative and diplomatic ways.*
- (4) *Reforming the Government and Organization: BJI undertakes some reforming of the government and organizational transformations for administrative and country's development. These are-to counsels the government in the illumination of Islam concerning internal administration, oversees strategy, laws and acts, ethical and worldly expansion of the people, teaching system, the proper management of the country, to restore active and productive people in every segment of public services through truthful and competent persons."*

The campaigners of Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (BJI) try to set up individual contact with common people belonging to all aspects of life, clarify dissimilar aspects of Islam and advocate upon them to interpret Islam text and this kind recommend is differentiated with Quran and teaching of Prophet Mohammad (Peace be upon him) class at diverse venues for creating the people familiar with the knowledge of Islam. Moreover, the Jamaat coordinates public meetings in cities, at townships and pastoral areas for communicating the memorandum of Quran and teaching of Prophet Mohammad (Peace be upon him).

If anyone responded by the calling of Jamaat member, then they will be trained through its regular activities which are included with social, political, educational and cultural campaigners. They are inspired to study the Quran, teaching of Prophet Mohammad (Peace be upon him), and other Islamic text for improving personal development. They are advised to say their daily prayers in parishioners. They are motivated to employ new associate members by individual communication and good relations. On the other hand, they have to present a report of the daily activities at regular contacts with organizational hierarchical members.

Finally, at the third phase, Jamaat-e-Islami members endeavor to restructure the sufferings of the unfortunate and the impoverished by extending assistance to them both money and kind. This political and religious organization initiates some relief programmes and endeavors to recover the victims as far as potential whenever environmental, natural or human-made disasters happen in the country. It endeavors to assemble community estimation, in distinct ways, alongside all sorts of anti-societal and anti-religious activities.

Lastly, in this stage, Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami endeavors to encourage the ordinary people with the spirit of independence in order to uphold the survival of Bangladesh and national development.

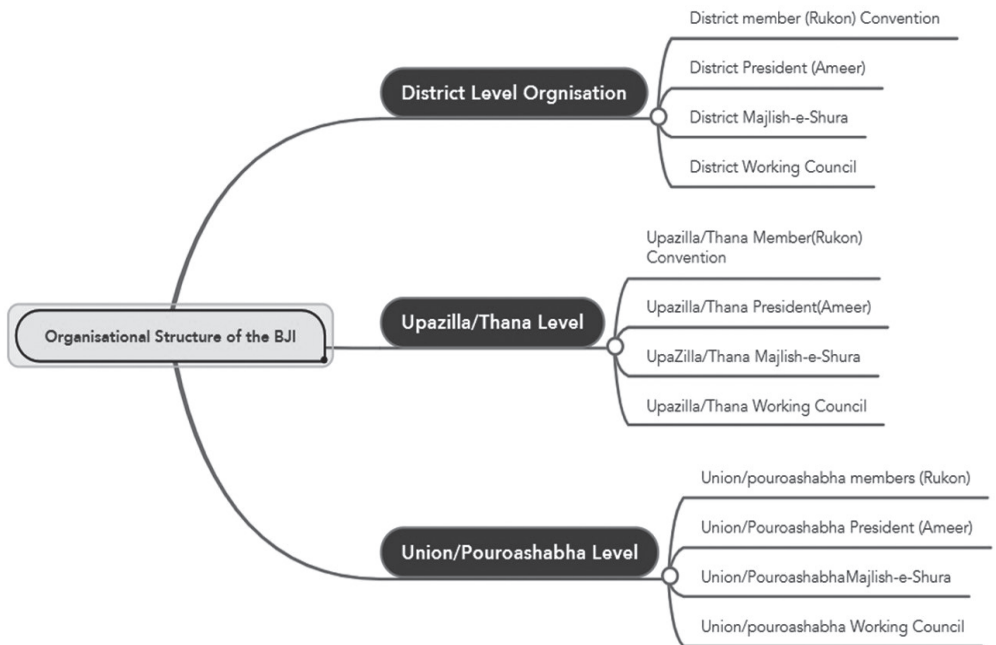
The major goal of "Jamaat-e Islami is to turn Bangladesh into an Islamic welfare state. Only practitioner and good followers of Islam can achieve this goal. As a result, some committed members to the organization can fulfil the dream of BJI. To this end, this organization does not welcome inactive and uncommitted people to the philosophy and Islamic movement like BJI. Hence, without memberships of the organization, on one can able to start his/her journey with this organization. The pattern of leadership is different from anti-Islamic political parties. Though elections holds regularly, proclamation of candidature is prohibited in this organization. The system is like the democratic system as members voted secretly and openly. The voters of the organization usually follow some qualities and characters in selecting their leaders. These include religious traits regarding Islam, integrity, activeness and commitment to the organization (jamaat-e-islami.org, 2020)".

BJI's Structure

BJI is a cadre based, hierarchically organised political party which emphasized by Riaz and Raji (2011) as they explained BJI is a "hierarchically organised and well-disciplined and cohesive". Through Central Member Conference (CMC) and by the highest member (Rukon), BJI assembles their political leaderships in every three years where the members of BJI elect the executive head of the party which they usually called as Ameer-e-Jamaat and Central Majlish-e-Shura (CMS). The chief of the BJI, called Ameer-e-Jamaat look at the political and organisational activities of the party where CMS activities confined to

support and guidance the BJI's Ameer-e-Jamaat, as they are the top policy and decision-making body of the BJI. There is a Central Working Committee (CWC) who are evaluating the daily works and look at the managerial activities of the BJI, as Jahan (2014) and Upendra (2017) explored through the BJI's constitution that CWC "formed with one secretary general, number of Nayeb-e-Ameers, assistant secretary, divisional secretaries, and members of women's working committee and other member". CMS and Ameer-e-Jammat is controlling the CWC, as they are accountable for their activities to them. There is another organ of BJI, called Central Executive Committee (CEC) whose functions directed from the CMC and CWC, as they implement their decisions in the field level. The members of the CEC elected by the CMS where 15 member's body elected to implement the activities provided by the CMS and CWC. For greater interest like social welfare, vote, study and work, BJI's women wing played very important role through its organisational structure, as that stressed by Shehabuddin (2008), Jammat "go to great lengths to highlight Islam's recognition of women as 'individuals' with 'individual' responsibilities to God and Islam as well as Islam's support for women's right to study, work and vote" (Shehabuddin, 2008: 577). The following Figure highlights the organizational structure of BJI.

Figure 1. Organisational Structure of Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (BJI)



Source: (Prepared by the Authors)

BJI's Role in Political and Democratic Participation of Bangladesh

From the political history of Bangladesh, Jamaat has an influential role, and significant contribution, particularly this political organization joined for the democratic continuousness in all national and local level elections within the Bangladesh constitutional scaffold. The important thing is that BJI has a vital role in the democratic movement of Bangladesh from the military and authoritarian regime of Bangladesh. According to the BJI, hundreds of its well-wishers and members of the organization sacrificed their lives and injured severely in upholding the philosophy of the organization and in many democratic processions of Bangladesh. There are some particular contributions of BJI in the democratic movement of Bangladesh particularly establishing of the baseline for non-partisan caretaker government system (CGS) which was in mid of the 1980s where eminent professor Ghulam Azam, the Late Ameer (Former President of the party, BJI) fixed some proposals concerning non-partisan CGS for a free, fair and credible election before the party central working committee. On the other hand, the then acting Ameer of Jamaat, Abbas Ali Khan has also presented that proposal before the nation in a press conference in Ramna Green auditorium in Dhaka on 7th December 1980 (jamaat-e-islami.org, 2020), United movement for restoring democracy in 1983 against the military and autocratic government and mass uprising in 1990 for protecting democracy. Moreover, the CGS was annulled by the 15th Amendment of the Bangladesh Constitution in 2011 by the AL government.

The Jama'at even enjoyed the position of a stakeholder during the formation of the governments in 1991, 1996, and 2001, when both of the major political parties failed to achieve absolute victory in the national elections. The following table shows the position of the Jama'at, which is usually considered to be the third or fourth-largest political party of Bangladesh⁷, in four general elections contested for the 300-constituency national parliament.

7 The three parties which are larger than the Jama'at are, in decreasing order of size: 1) Bangladesh Awami League (Urdu: lit. Bangladesh People's League), a centre-left secular party; 2) Bangladesh Nationalist Party, a centre-right nationalist party; and 3) Bangladesh Jatiya Party (Bengali: lit. Bangladesh National Party), the party of a former military dictator, which preceded the Jamaat in Bangladesh with regard to its position in the national political arena.

Table 1. Election Results of Bangladesh Jamaat-e Islami in the National Elections of Bangladesh

Election	Date	Total Votes Cast	Votes for the Jamaat	Seats Contested	Seats Own	Percentage of Total Votes
Third National Parliamentary Election ¹	7 May 1986	28,903,889	1,314,057	77	10	4.60
Fifth National Parliamentary Election ²	27 February 1991	34,477,803	4,117,737	222	18	12.2
Seventh National Parliamentary Election ³	12 June 1996	42,880,576	3,653,013	300	3	8.61
Eighth National Parliamentary Election ⁴	1 October 2001	55,736,625	2,385,361	31	17	4.28
Ninth National Parliamentary Election ⁵	29 December 2008	69,372,897	3,289,967	39	2	4.70
Tenth National Parliamentary Election	5 January 2014	-	BJI Boycott the Election ⁶	-	-	-
Eleventh National Parliamentary Election	30 December 2018	-	BJI Boycott the Election though they attended the election at first stage ⁷	-	-	-

Recent Controversies in the Political Culture and Policy Challenges of BJI in Bangladesh

BJI's politics in Bangladesh has been surrounded by increasing controversy in recent years. Allegations have been made against some of its leaders relating to their association with and participation in the war crimes primarily performed by the Pakistan army during the 1971's Liberation War.

A 'War Crimes Tribunal' was established in 2011 after four decades of independence. Throughout this period, the Jamaat had joined in every national and local government elections had participated in all national and local government elections. Though the election results represent a debatable scale by which to measure public acceptance, where a myriad of variables such as democratic conditions, local agendas and interests, and the law-and-order situation has impacted on them, they generally provide an acceptable appraisal of the status of the political groups involved. This is also important when the Jama'at, whose ideology and objectives are religious, has adapted to the electoral democracy in order to establish its ideology (Amin, 2016:81).

It is mentioned that BJI traditionally disagreed with the cessation of Pakistan in a company with five political parties on religious grounds. Though they have disagreed with the Independence struggle of Bangladesh in a peaceful manner, they did not participate in the killing mission, rape, and systematic torture against freedom fighters or supporters of the Independence movement of Bangladesh. The Awami League (AL) government structured the government based on the 1970's Pakistan regional and general election after obtaining victory against Pakistan in 1971. Later, the AL government generated an International War Crimes Tribunal Act 1973 under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in order to find out war criminals from the Pakistani Armies. Although the tribunal found some war criminals from the Pakistani soldiers, it did not get any Jamaat leaders/supporters in this regard (Rawsab, February 13, 2010).

The AL government detained more than 100,000 people for the allegation of helping Pakistani armies as they commit war crimes. The litigation was followed by the Bangladesh Collaborators Act (Special Tribunal Act 1972). The charge sheets were presented to the court only against 2,848 people after completing the investigation. After accomplishing court's procedures, the prosecutor teams were proved before the court only against 752 accused as a criminal offence, and they were penalized for different terms of imprisonment. There were no name lists of Jamaat leaders or its supporters as convicted people in that trial (Abu Rawsab, February 13, 2010; RTNN, March 23, 2010⁸; Daily Sangram, April 1, 2010⁹) which was verified from the investigation and trial procedures in 1973. However, it was also well established that the governments led by AL consecutively in 1972-1975 and 1996-2001; they did not take any legal process against Jamaat leader and its supporters during the 1971's role in the Liberation War even in those times. Moreover, AL and its allied political parties maintained their good relationship with Jamaat and its leaders. Moreover, both AL and Jamaat worked together and arranged joint meetings and press conferences in restoring democratic principles in Bangladesh. The evidence and photographs are still available for both parties, meetings and conferences in the press and media in Bangladesh.

Nevertheless, it is estimated that the members of BJI had been arrested in custody under false and politically motivated cases, where more than 4,000 Jamaat and Shibir¹⁰ leaders, supporters and well-wishers since 2009. They were systematically killed, forced disappearance, and deprived of political and civil rights. AL affiliated student's wings and some other organization

8 This news online's archived has been shut down by the govt.

9 This newspaper's archived has been shut down by the govt.

10 Bangladesh Islami Chattra Shibir (BICS) is affiliated student wing of Bangladesh Jamat-e-Islami which has been working with its integrated manpower all over the schools, colleges and universities of Bangladesh.

typically handed over to the administration to out forward litigation against Jamaat and Shibir. The police department and law enforcement agencies oppressed severely in custody in different incidents since the last week of February 2010 (Abu Rawsab, February 13, 2010; Daily Sangram, April 11, 2010)¹¹. Additionally, before the resignation, the Assistant Secretary of BJI explains the current situation to Aljazeera (2019) accordingly-

“Jamaat is a legal political party, since 2011 the government has not given it any space. The government has closed down all its 65 district offices and 4,000 other offices around the country. It cannot organise any public or indoor meetings and it is not allowed to hold press conferences and it cannot take part in elections” (Bergman, 2019)

Principally, Jamaat was recognised as a democratic political party in the eyes of ordinary people for its pro-people agenda and uncorrupted leadership in the country since its inception in Bangladesh. As it mentioned that BJI did not discourage its political leaders in local and parliamentary elections. Even they did not encourage any contentious politics in practising democratic principles. As a result, supporters and members of Jamaat are increasing day by day for their pro-people agendas such as social welfare activities of BJI, including building hospitals, schools, zakat distribution for poor people, aid for physically disabled people especially children, education scholarship for underprivileged students, legal assistance for politically affected persons, and youth employment through their own capacity. Through this way, as it had only 100,000 (one million) supporters in 1971, and now it has 1000, 0000 (ten million) supporters in Bangladesh. Some critics argued that the politically motivated trial and procedures against BJI violated their democratic and fundamental rights in Bangladesh. The government parties, including AL led allied political parties through *Shahbag protest in 2013*¹² took the initiative against opposition parties with bad intentions and wanted to jeopardize the opposition in the political arena (Abdul Kader, Daily Sangram 25 March 2010)¹³. The AL government employed three War Criminal Tribunal Judges, investigators, and prosecutors who were former benevolent and trustworthy supporters of AL political parties. Subsequently, there is a little hope to get the proper justice in the trial procedures of Jamaat-e Islam (Islam and Islam; Abu Rawsab, 29 May 2010). The main motion of AL government on starting trial procedures to discourage people about getting membership in Jamaat-e Islam and undermine the popularity of the parties to the ordinary people as the membership of Jamaat-e Islam was increasing speedily. AL was concerned

11 Newspaper's archived has been shut down by the govt.

12 “On 5 February 2013, protests began in Shahbag Square, Dhaka, Bangladesh following demands for capital punishment for Abdul Quader Mollah by the International Crimes Tribunal of Bangladesh”

13 This newspaper's archived has been shut down by the govt.

about the BJI's future political popularity in Bangladesh. Thousands of people are the members of these political parties compared to AL and other political parties in Bangladesh. But the hidden blueprint of AL did not to currency to ordinary people, the international community and especially, Muslim worlds where BJI's popularity and acceptability are increasing through these three arenas especially the world community and ordinary people stood against AL's bad motivation for their inhuman and cruel stands (Jalil & Rahman, 2011:3) that makes BJI in its general appeal to the common of Bangladesh.

Scholars argued that the present war crime trial happened only for the interests of India; for example, recently, the current government of Bangladesh has intoned and ratified many international agreements regarding security, border, trade, and defence against national interests of Bangladesh. It is a well-established argument that the AL government's stand served for the interest of India. For example, recently, the current government of Bangladesh has signed to borrow one billion US\$ with irrational high interest to build up development projects, including roads with India in order to upgrade Chittagong and Mongla seaports. Bangladesh's government was consented to use these seaports without any payment by India. Bangladesh has to invest this money according to the Indian government's suggestions which creates a complex environment for the future of Bangladesh's national interest, security, and sovereignty (Jalil & Rahman, 2011: 3).

Additionally, on the name war crime tribunal, the current AL led government controlled most of the institutions, organizations, banks, and hospitals of BJI such as the Islami Bank of Bangladesh Limited (IBBL) and Ibni Sina Trust. Recently, Bangladesh Bank systematically overthrown the top decision-makers of Islami Bank and employed a new chairman and reshuffled the whole administrative structure of Islami Bank. Now, this Bank is controlled indirectly by the government. Some critics evaluated that it takes a long time for Awami League (AL) government to raise the issue of war crimes trials to cover up their failures in many sectors of Bangladesh, such as failing to ensure the democratic and inclusive Bangladesh. Scholars argue that the process of war crime trials is politically motivated, and their master plan is to destroy the opposition parties, including Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and its allied political parties and also other most of the Islamic political party in Bangladesh (New York Times, April 13, 2010).

Political Challenges of BJI

Currently, in Bangladesh, BJI is facing some sort of critical political challenges. The registration of Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (BJI)'s was banned by the High Court Division (Petition No. 630/2009) of the Supreme Court in August 2013 (Bangladesh Election Commission, 2018). Subsequently, BJI did not appeal to the Supreme Court's Appellate division for the present political and societal

circumstances. Considering its rise in the 1980s and 1990s, it was generally expected that the party would continue gaining acceptance in a society where most of the members are Muslim and well aware of their religious identity. Some political observers, intellectuals and party activists argue that compromising certain religious principles for the sake of political gain has created a 'power-hungry' image of the Jama'at in people's minds and resulted in 'a narrow support base' for this movement (Hossain & Siddiquee, 2006). Examples of the success of several Islamic political revivalist movements in various Muslim countries have also been introduced into this discourse. Most importantly, Barrister Abdur Razzak, a former central executive committee member of the Jama'at wrote an article, "Islamic Movements in Different Countries and the Arab Spring", where he described the modern strategies adopted by Islamic movements in several countries and especially in Tunisia, Egypt, Turkey, and India. Justifying those strategies with different verses from the holy Quran and message of Muhammad (PBU), Abdur Razzak called on the Jama'at's leaders and followers to abandon rigidity in policy making and to be more pragmatic when dealing with public issues. After describing the recent progress of various Islamic movements, he has rationalized the victory of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt's national election after Arab spring as the result of "their being very close to the general people through their social welfare activities" (Razzak, 2012). However, last year, Abdur Razzak resigned from the BJI by showing the cause that "the party's failure to apologise for its role in supporting Pakistani military 50 years ago" even he said that the resignation was also due to the BJI's failure to rethink its view of the Islamic state and restructure itself to become "a democratic principled party adhering to Islamic values operating within the secular constitution of Bangladesh" (Bergman, 2019).

Conclusion

It is well established that "the contemporary salience of political-religious movements across the world seems to represent a challenge, in some places even to constitute a threat, to the project" (Asad, 1992: 3) while Nasr (1994) asserts that "the rise of Islamic revivalism has presented a serious challenge to conventional wisdom in the social sciences and as a result has been the object of considerable debate and inquiry".

Bangladesh Jama'at-e-Islami, an Islamic revivalist political movement that embraces modern socio-religious strategies in order to attain its primary objectives of establishing an Islamic governance structure at a state level, focuses significantly on providing social welfare assistance (Amin, 2016). Jama'at involvement in politics is to sustain the Islamic values at the state level, as reflected in its calls for stronger adherence to the prescribed principles and rules placed in the constitution. The Bangladesh Jamaate Islami (BJI)

strongly follows the constitutional and democratic process in the light of the guidelines enacted by its founders. It is true that the oppression and repression on Bangladesh Jama'at-e-Islami (BJI) are vast; however, they try to work according to the democratic political culture to establish social justice and social welfare for the development of Bangladesh based on Islamic values. There are so many political analysts who think that the current government of Bangladesh has no good intention to enrich the country to resolute the internal and international problems and its only duty is to finalize policies to attack, oppress and kill opposition political party members mainly Islamists and Jama'at members, and to set up a one-party autocratic rule (Jalil & Rahman, 2011). However, it could be argued that the total development and socio-political maturity process of Jama'at is not enough and successful in leading the political arena of Bangladesh, but their consistency for legal rights, positive activities and democratic attitudes make them one of the most popular party in the near future of Bangladesh. While the study has given a general analysis, it provides a basis for future research on BJI, and how BJI played a political impression on the political culture and "political strategy" (Islam, 2019) of Bangladesh, why Islamism might be the best option and central point to resolve the current political vacuum in Bangladesh and how Islam, as a "complete code of life", may help the current political parties of Bangladesh to develop its unique model that can "ensure the people's rights, freedom, sovereignty, participation, equality, and social justice" (Islam, Bingöl, & Nyadera, 2020). As it can be said that "in every context, to find out cooperations is the best way to arrive at an unparalleled solution" (Islam, 2020).

Additionally, one can argue that the current position of Jamaat-e-Islami in Bangladesh may decrease their political performance in the electoral field, but it has huge impacts in the socio-economic environment of Bangladesh. As BJI is an ideology based organisation, they may have so many controversies and critics in its political activities, however, the socio-economic influences, by its members are vast, which may exist in the long run on Bangladesh. Since the last five years, the political agenda and activities of BJI are very confined to social, organizational, economic and international base. The political influence and the agenda related to election is partially secondary. After one decade of political instability and chaos in Bangladesh, it remains to be seen how long the Jamaat-e-Islami can hold their strength in the socio-cultural, economic and political sphere in Bangladesh.

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Footnotes

- 1 Data of the third and fifth elections are gathered from Bangladesh Election Commissions, Available at <http://ecs.gov.bd> [26.11.2015]
- 2 The fifth general election, in 1991, was the first of its kind to take place under a non-political 'caretaker government' after the public revolution against the military dictatorship. It is considered by many as the first fair national election in the country's history
- 3 Data from the Statistical Report of the Bangladesh Election Commission on the seventh general election (Commission, 1996: 9)
- 4 Data from the Statistical Report of the Bangladesh Election Commission on the eighth parliamentary election (Commission, 2002: 6-8)
- 5 Due to the unavailability of a digital statistical report of the Bangladesh Election Commission on the ninth parliamentary election, data have been collected from a UNDP report (Eicher, Alam, & Eckstein, 2010:80- 81)
- 6 BBC (2014). Q&A: Bangladesh General Election. Accessed: 10.05.2019. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-25584962>
- 7 Dhaka Tribune (2018). Jamaat boycotts election. Accessed: 05.02.2019. Retrieved from <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/election/2018/12/30/jamaat-boycotts-election>