The Implementation of Islamization Policy Under Awami League Government, 2009-2023

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ABSTRACT

Bangladesh is the third largest Muslim-majority nation globally, with 92% of its population identifying as Muslim. However, no Islamic party has ascended to power in this region thus far. The Awami League is a prominent political party in Bangladesh that has implemented several Islamization tactics to maintain its authority. This paper seeks to fill that void by surveying the literature on Islamization, bringing together the fragmented ideas on secular actors' Islamization from the available literature, and applying these to the situation in Bangladesh. It contends that secular governments may be compelled to Islamize public policy by three primary factors: ascendancy of Islamist social movements, intense political rivalry, and authoritarian control, particularly when these factors interact with one another. This is based on thorough content analysis and interviews, total participants 235. In addition to eroding Muslims' fundamental right to practice their religion, this aggressive and violent strategy is growing more and more antagonistic to democratic values, the rule of law, freedom of movement, and political pluralism. This study will primarily highlight the Awami League's efforts to convert Bangladesh into a state and will also provide insight into the anti-Islamic actions that the league has undertaken. It has also been suggested that legislation against Islam was passed under the administration of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his daughter, Sheikh Hasina.

Keywords: Secularism, Awami Leege, Islamization, Bangladesh

INTRODUCTION

Islamization primarily refers to the revival of outdated customs and practices without any significant modification. Islamization has merely involved implementing Sharia law as it was intended. Islamization was defined as an endeavour to make Islam a worldwide, in theory, standardised, fundamentally immutable, and usually well-integrated system of rites and beliefs—not only as a religion but as a complete and comprehensive way of life (Clifford Geertz 2013) This is because Islam is seen as a movement that wants to build a legitimate source of power and control over society in Bangladesh.

Islam, a religion of peace, has a strong influence on Bangladesh's political culture and administration in terms of its nature, functions, and performance. Islam, by its very nature, directly or indirectly incorporates and mirrors the fundamental principles of Bangladeshi society, which principally involve social, political, and state behaviour (Nyadera & Islam 2020a). Islam as a religion has significantly influenced Bangladesh's political culture and governance, which might be considered "secular" at the state level but religious (believer) at the "personal/individual" level. Islam has always been linked to a wide range of cultural, social, economic, political, and democratic in Bangladesh. This is because Islam is a complete code of life.

The Awami League is a long- standing political organisation that rules Bangladesh, a nation with a majority.

The leader of the Awami League is Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the assassinated founding father of Bangladesh who spearheaded a pro-secular movement during the nation's 1971 war of independence against Pakistan, is the father of Sheikh Hasina. Before assuming power in 2009, the Awami League made some Islamization-related pledges. The people wished to freely exercise their religion, but their 2009–2023 Islamisation strategy was nothing more than a display.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The People's Republic of Bangladesh's state religion is Islam. With a Muslim population of 130 million, Bangladesh is the third-largest Muslim-majority country in the world; yet, it has retained a tolerant and secular character for most of its history (Khondkar 2010). Politics and Islam are intricately connected. Politics has a huge influence on people's lives. The importance of politics in the people of Bangladesh's observance of Islam will be explained in this study.

Bangladesh gained independence from Pakistan in 1971. For nearly two centuries, the country was under British colonial administration alongside India and Pakistan (1757–1947) and subsequently became part of Pakistan (1947–1971). Bengal, East Bengal, East Pakistan, and Bangladesh are all names given to the same territory at different times in history. According to historians, (Guhathakurta, M., & Van Schendel, 2023) the arrival of Islam in Bengal occurred long before the conquest of Bengal by the Turkish Muslim conqueror Ikhtiyar Uddin Muhammad bin Bakhtiar Khalji in the early thirteenth century. Beginning around the middle of the ninth century, Islam entered Bengal through Arab traders, Sufis, and saints. From its very inception, the Awami League has been a secular and non-communal party. As a mark of its secular posture, the term 'Muslim' was deleted from the name of the party at its third council meeting held on 21-23 October 1955.

After nine months of a nine-month-long bloodshed war Bangladesh became Independent and started its journey in 1972 as a secular state with other three basic state principles. Awami regime in 1972 adopted a draft constitution which would abolish various forms of communalism. But unfortunately, it was true, Mujib established the "Islamic Foundation" an Islam-based educational and research institution. It was contradictory to Mujib's secular policy.

Statement of the problem

Although most of the population in Bangladesh is Muslim and extremely pious, most of them prefer that Islam only be practiced in mosques and other religious institutions (Kibria, N. 2011). They think that politics and Islam are two distinct things. In addition, the current Awami League administration upholds secularism; they have been in power for a while and have been prohibiting common people from taking part in actions that would Islamize their society. Because of social and economic factors, secularists and atheists predominate in Bangladesh's print and electronic media, and many people disapprove of Islamic politics. Bangladesh's aggressive efforts at secularization are unappealing to many people (Shams, T. 2015). As a result, there is a movement against the regime and growing opposition to it. All this regime's selected policies—both those that displace and those that reclaim—are primarily seen as violent impositions rather than the natural results of public opinion, which poses a challenge toit. After all, a large portion of those who oppose Islamization policies are ignorant of religion.

The main goal of this study is to evaluate and investigate how the Awami League government carried out the Islamization strategy, as well as why they did it, what happened, and how Bangladeshis felt about it.

Research Objective

The primary objective of this research Examine the Awami League government's islamization policy from 2009 to 2023. Some objectives include the following:

Firstly, to analyze the Islamization policy was implemented by the Awami League Government. Secondly, to

Identify the motive of Islamization policy by the Awami League Government. Thirdly, to explore the impact and the response of people towards the Islamization policy by the Awami League Government.

Significance of the Study

The importance of this thesis arises from the empirical analysis of the feasibility of the Islamization agenda under the Awami League government. This study will offer insights in this context. The study seeks to establish a framework for evaluating the Awami League's political philosophy and Islamization program, thereby assisting future researchers in further exploration of the topic. Secondly, to provide pertinent studies regarding the Islamization strategy of the Awami League government. This study aims to enhance the current corpus of research on the Islamization agenda of the Awami League government and serve as a foundation for future enquiries. Furthermore, this research will be a significant reference for political science students. The research findings will benefit students seeking to comprehend the criteria that substantially influence the Awami League government's actions and Islamization agenda.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Geo- politics and Islamization in Bangladesh

Bangladesh possesses geographic and strategic significance to India, China, and the West. It also has some strategic importance to the oil-rich Muslim monarchies and dictatorships of the Middle East and East Asia. Surrounded by India to its west, north and east, Bangladesh shares a 4096-km border with India, the fifth longest land border in the world (Zaman 2017). Bangladesh's other neighbor is Myanmar with which it shares a 271-km south-eastern border (ibid.). Its south side is bound by the Bay of Bengal (Cookson & Joehnk 2018) argue that 'Bangladesh is a transport corridor to India's north-eastern states and a vital alternative route to the vulnerable Siliguri corridor that in the past has been threatened by China's military, isolating all northeast India. India fears that 'Islamic fundamentalism and jihadism in Bangladesh may spill over the border' and for that reason it works actively with Bangladesh in countering terrorism and radicalization (The Hindu 2017).

However, in recent times, against the backdrop of a more aggressive Chinese foreign policy, there has been concern that China has gained significant influence in Bangladesh. According to Bhandari (2018), 'China has committed to $31bn worth of projects in Bangladesh, making it the second-biggest recipient of money in South Asia behind Pakistan'. These projects include 'roads, railways, coal power plants and water treatment facilities' (Stacey 2018). Bangladesh also formally joined the China-led One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative by publicly voicing support for OBOR a day after the Trump administration joined India in its opposition to OBOR (Hashim 2017). Proposed by President Xi in 2013, 'the OBOR program is an estimated $5 trillion infrastructure spending spree that spans 60-plus countries across Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and Africa' (Huang 2017).

Islamization Under Awami League

When the Awami League first took office, it emphasized secularism. During her second term in office (2009–2014), Sheikh Hasina initiated a new chapter in her leadership that aimed to re–establish the state's traditional secular worldview. The administration replaced the 1972 constitution's Article 12 with a new one that reinstated secularism and eliminated the constitutional precept of "absolute trust and faith in Almighty Allah" by the Fifteenth Amendment. Both activities were opposed by the orthodox Deobandi organization Hefazat-e-Islam, which has its roots in the Quami madrassahs of the country, as well as all Islamic political organizations, including Jamaat-e Islami (Kabir 2015, 69). In Bangladesh, 92% of the population is Muslim. The school system underwent numerous modifications following the Awami League's 2009 election to power. Secularism is perceived in the field of education. Atheists around the nation have contributed to the development of a new curriculum for schooling. Controversial subjects like transgenderism and Darwin's theory of evolution are discussed in textbooks. However, Maulana Delwar Hossain Sayedee, the nation's principal Islamic speaker and a legend across the globe, including Bangladesh, was convicted of war crimes, and given a life sentence; he passed away while incarcerated. In addition, the top five Jamaat-e-Islami leaders were hanged.

While making concessions to Hefazat, the Awami League has tried to increase state power over the Qawmimadrasahs. The Ministry of Education issued a directive in April 2017 acknowledging the Dawra-e-Hadith certificate of Qawmi madrassahs as being equivalent to a master's in Arabic and Islamic studies, completing the process that the 4-party alliance government had begun under its previous administration. The committee in charge of developing the curricula of the madrassah and awarding Dawra-e-Hadith certificates will be led by Ahmad Shafi, the leader of Hefazat. This group will report to the Ministry of Education, nonetheless. The proposal, while offering some government oversight over Qawmi madrassahs, would Islamize bureaucracy, as many graduates of these institutions will be able to pursue jobs in the civil service (Bdnews24, April 13, 2017). Simultaneously, the government is growing its bureaucracy related to religion. It was reported that the government intended to invest over 70,000 million takas to construct a sizable mosque and an Islamic studies center in Dhaka, as well as comparable, smaller mosques and study centers at all local government levels throughout the remainder of the nation. The goal was to centralize supervision over religion.

Secularism and Awami League

Secularism was emphasized in the constitution of 1972 as one of Bangladesh's fundamental guiding principles of government. In contrast to the French version of secularism or what academics have dubbed "assertive secularism" (Kuru 2007), which emphasizes the elimination of religion or atheism, Mujib's version of secularism was more in line with Anglo-American secularism that strengthened the neutrality of religions and eliminated communal politics. The second term of Sheikh Hasina's leadership (2009–2014) marked the beginning of a new era in which the state once again adopted the previous secular worldview. The dictatorship reinstated secularism by eliminating the constitutional premise of "absolute trust and faith in Almighty Allah" through the fifteenth amendment to the constitution, which also reinstated Article 12 of the 1972 constitution (Salehin 2013; Pattanaik 2013). In addition, it kept the phrase "In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful" (bismillah-ar-rahman-ar-rahim), which scholars like Dr. Akbar Ali Khan and Nurul Kabir have called "the political and ideological conflicts of the ruling Awami League" (Salehin 2013; Jahan and Shahan 2014). However, by rephrasing the Islamic provisions of the constitution, it has attempted to provide non-Islamic individuals a sense of belonging. For example, a second translation of bismillah-ar-rahman-ar-rahim was added, which reads: "In the name of the Creator, the Merciful" (The Constitution 2011, p. 1)

Activities of Awami League Government in 2009-2023

The President of Bangladesh signed the new amendment into law three days after the national parliament approved the fifteenth amendment to the constitution (daily independent). The amendment's main points are on the place of religion in Bangladeshi politics. The amendment keeps the preamble language "Bismillah-Ar-Rahman-Ar-Rahim (In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful)/ (In the name of the Creator, the Merciful)", proclaims Islam as the official religion (Article 2A), but also guarantees all other religions "same status." The Constitution also states that the state will not award political status in favor of any religion, which is somewhat at odds with Article 2A (Article 12). The phrase "Absolute Faith and Trust in Allah as the Basis of All Action" was taken out of the constitution by the amendment. A ban on the "abuse of religion for political reasons" has been reestablished along with secularism as a basic principle (Article 12).

There was no surprise in the recommendations because the amendment bill had been in the works for around 11 months, but as many observers had warned, the outcome was incongruous with the role of religion in public life (Riaz 2010). To scare and eventually destroy Bangladesh Jamaat-e Islami (Jamaat), the country's largest mainstream liberal Islamic party, the Bangladesh Awami League and its ultra-secularist alliance partners came up with a plan to try the war criminals of 1971. As a result, their remarks focused solely on the Jamaat leaders. After considering the overall level of instability in the country, the Bangladeshi government, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, announced a statewide amnesty in November 1973 to put an end to this troubling chapter permanently (Saidul Islam 2011). Prominent Jamaat-e-Islami leaders were hanged, and war crimes proceedings started after the Awami League came to power in 2009.

They did not participate in the offences for which they were convicted. The people of Bangladesh did not respond well.
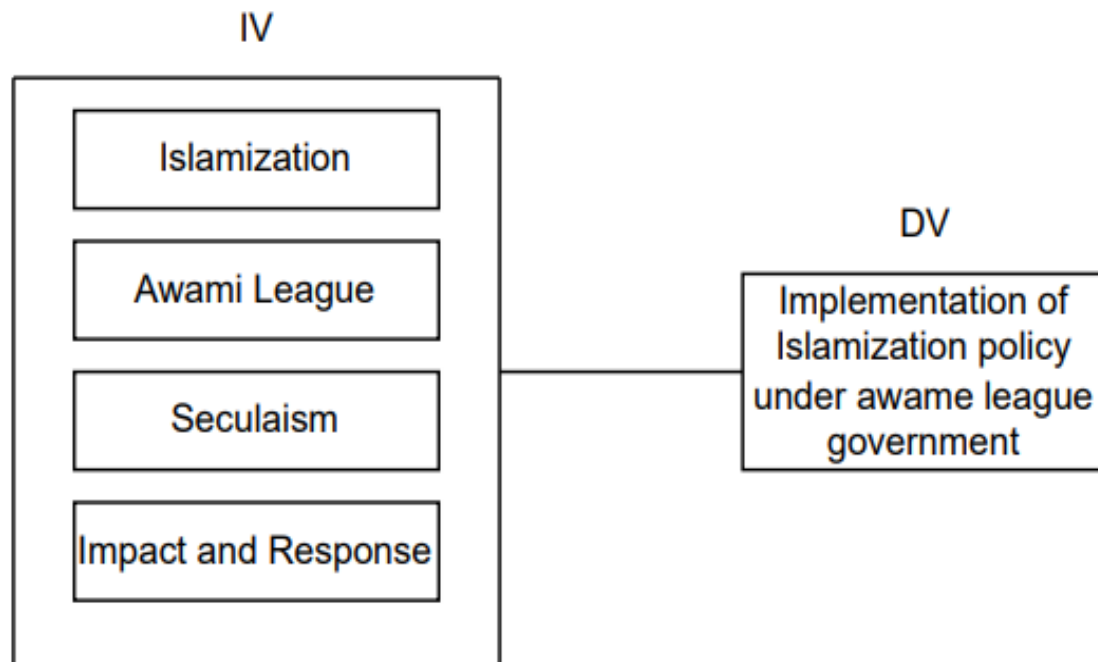
Conceptual Framework

Figure 2.1: Conceptual framework

In the framework above, the four independent variables are Islamization, Awami League, leadership and impact and response. The implementation of is Islamization policy under the Awami league government is dependent variable.

Definition of Variable

Islamization

Islamization is often used interchangeably with the word "Islamic Revivalism" (Renaissance), which is referred to as a reform-oriented movement that is motivated by an intentional shift in Muslim beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours and is distinguished by a desire to resurrect Islamic civilization. Here are a few definitions of (Islamization) that certain experts have noted to understand its facets: Islamization stands for the justice, transformation, and reformation that all Muslims are concerned with. All people are included in its care and concern. It aims to accord all people who inhabit this planets dignity and honour. The call for Islamization is one that a civilization built on divine principles has made to the fractured globe of the present (Al Faruqi & Razi 1989). Emad (2013) says that the word "Islamization" means everything that is based on a true belief in Allah (SWT).

 Awami League

One of the nation's oldest and most powerful political parties is the AL. Husain Shaheed Suhrawardy established the Awami (People's) League in Pakistan's East Bengal province (later renamed East Pakistan in 1955). This occurred in June 1949. Young, ambitious politicians who rejected communalism in Pakistan were assembled by H. S. Suhrawardy along with older Muslim League figures whose influence had waned inside their own organization. The Awami Muslim league was created in 1949 by Husain Shaheed Suhrawardy, Ataur Rahman, Maulana Bashani, Shamsul Huq, and Shaykh Mujibur Rahman. It was the first party to genuinely offer East Pakistanis an alternative form of representation. It adopted non-Muslims and changed its name to the Awami League in the late 1950s, signaling a dramatic turn toward secularism. The Awami League became the Muslim League's major rival for power in East Pakistan in 1956 after being the most well-liked party there. As guiding

principles of religion for the country, the Awami League adhered to four policies: democracy, socialism, secularism, and nationalism. (Mazumdar & Alharahsheh 2020)

Secularism

The most frequent definition of secularism is the exclusion of religion from public life and the state, but it can also refer to the necessity to eliminate or diminish the influence of religion in all areas of public life (Luke W. Galen 2016). In its most simplistic form, the term "secularism" can refer to any position that supports the secular in any setting (John R. Shook 2017). It could imply non-religiousness, atheism, naturalism, non-sectarianism, neutrality toward religious issues, or the complete elimination of religious symbols from government buildings (Nader Hashemi 2009). Secularism, as a philosophy, aims to explain reality without the aid of religion, using only ideas found in the physical world. It reorients the discussion away from religion and toward "temporal" issues.

Impact and response

Despite having similar meanings and being applicable in comparable contexts, the phrases influence and effect do not signify the same thing. Impact and effect differ primarily in that impact refers to how an action or phenomena affects something or someone, whereas effect refers to the result or outcome of an action or a phenomenon. Implementing government policy requires careful consideration of the public reaction process. There is much evidence to support the idea that people act defensively in response to warnings depending on the nature of the warning and the method used to communicate it.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter of the research project delineates the methodological foundations of the study by exploring the theoretical underpinnings of several philosophies that may contribute to a novel area of inquiry, specifically the implementation of Islamic principles within the political system of Bangladesh. This chapter elaborates on research design and strategy, including the technique employed in this study. The preceding chapters addressed the study's background, problem statement, objectives, and literature review to substantiate the research subjects presented. This chapter aims to evaluate the precision with which this research will fulfil the specified objectives. Researchers gather information employing various approaches and methodologies to address the research questions and identify solutions to the proposed problem. This chapter delineates the methodologies employed by researchers to conduct this study.

Research Design

The design of research is an essential component of all academic investigations. Upon defining the research problem, the subsequent critical step is to formulate the study plan. There are two primary types of research designs: exploratory research designs and confirmatory research designs.. The research design assists researchers in taking actions on research concerns such as when, what, where, by what means, and how much. In this case, exploratory research designs are typically qualitative, whereas definitive research designs are typically quantitative. The hypothesis can be tested more effectively using quantitative data. As a result, it can be useful in assessing implementation of Islamic values in the political system in Bangladesh. The research is based on both primary and secondary sources of information. Primary data sources include respondents' responses to a questionnaire and face-to-face conversations with the Islamic political party's leader in Bangladesh.

Research Approach

A detailed discussion of research philosophy has largely helped the researcher to choose an appropriate research approach for the current study. After a broad investigation on the features and advantages, the researcher has chosen a deductive approach for the data collection to address the main research question(s) of the study through a survey questionnaire. This research is exploratory as well as explanatory in nature as it develops and examines the relationship among the selected independent, intervening, and dependent variables. The researcher has

developed a conceptual framework and a set of hypotheses to test the relationships among the study's constructs. In view of these facts, the current study adopts a deductive approach on the grounds that the conceptual framework and hypotheses are derived from the surveyed literature in the domain (Saunders *et al.*, 2009; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011).

In addition, there are certain other grounds behind the selection of a deductive approach for the present investigation. Firstly, this investigation examines the relationship between the variables. Secondly, the ontological position recommends that objectivism necessitates a social fact. Thirdly, supposition is a part of human nature, and they make this according to their surroundings and determinism. Finally, there can be methodological concerns pertaining to the measurement and recognition of the basic themes.

Sampling

Sampling is the process of selecting individuals from a larger group to draw accurate conclusions about how the larger group behaves or thinks (Sekaran & Bougie, 2019). Researchers should pick a typical sample of the target population after choosing and characterizing the group they wish to investigate (Sim, Saunders, Waterfield, & Kingstone, 2018). In statistics, quality assurance, and survey methodology, sampling is the selection of a subset (a statistical sample) of individuals from within a statistical population to estimate characteristics of the whole population (Sekaran & Bougie, 2019; Sim et al., 2018). The samples are supposed to reflect the population in question, according to statisticians. When surveying the whole population, sampling has two advantages: cheaper costs and quicker data gathering (Sykes, 2018). According to Erba (2018), to conceive the sampling plan is to make a set of decisions leading to selecting the sample. The sample of this study will be defined as people of both genders, of Bangladeshi Islamic political party's leaders.

CONCLUSION

Muslims in Bangladesh have demonstrated a tremendous devotion to Islam ever since it was introduced to the nation, mostly through the nonviolent missionary efforts of Islamic movement leaders and saints. During the early years of British colonization, political Islam in British India merged with puritanical reformist elements within the Islamic community. Under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's leadership, Bangladesh transitioned to a secular state after gaining independence. Along with democracy, nationalism, and socialism, secularism was listed as one of the pillars of the state in the 1972 constitution (Jahan 1973). Ziaur Rahman took over as the de facto leader in 1976. To eradicate secularism and prioritize Islamic theology, Zia made amendments to the constitution (Ahamed 1983). The people of Bangladesh did not choose secularism, which is now defined as the exclusion of Islam and its symbols from the political and social spheres. Instead, it was imposed from above. It was clear that the secular population and a secular state were incompatible. Bangladeshis have always maintained their religious convictions in their social interactions. For this reason, Bangladeshis are against secularism. The influence of religion on politics and society has become more significant in Bangladesh.

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