CHAPTER SEVEN

Socio-Economic Groups, Classes and Military in Bangladesh

Domination of the Intermediate Class

The process of class formation in Bangladesh was heavily influenced by colonial rule. Both the British and Pakistani rulers refrained from creating an industrial base in the country which hindered the growth of a hegemonic capitalist class. Instead, an intermediate or petty bourgeois class consisting of traders, medium and large landowners and urban professionals climbed up the political ladder in Bangladesh.¹

The Bangladeshi middle class is very articulate, cohesive and organised and has played a significant role in the country’s socio-economic and political life.² It was this class which championed the cause of independence in 1971. The Awami League was its political vehicle. It was a party of the petty bourgeoisie composed of small entrepreneurs, traders, contractors, surplus farmers, middle and lower level civil servants, intellectuals and various other professional groups.

With the attainment of independence, the party formed the government and declared socialism as one of the state principles of Bangladesh. The regime nationalised

¹ The social structure of Bangladesh had always been characterised by sharp cleavages. The British who ruled Bangladesh for about 200 years created a large number of zamindars and a small section of English educated professional and salaried middle class. They were separated from the masses by their values, interests and life style. During Pakistan period, a Bengali bourgeois class consisting of surplus farmers, small and medium entrepreneurs, businessmen and commission agents emerged under the patronage and collaboration of the West Pakistani civil and military bureaucratic oligarchy. After independence, the Awami League regime failed to bring about significant changes in the social structure of Bangladesh. Following military’s assumption of power in 1975, class cleavages were further reinforced due to complete lack of checks and balances. The military regimes sustained themselves in power by maintaining a strong and well-knit patronage network. Thus, the presence of social inequalities in Bangladesh was the consequence of policies pursued by the ruling elite in different phases of its history. Military rule was indeed a factor – may be – the dominant factor in the perpetuation and consolidation of this social structure. But there were also other factors – both historical and contemporaneous which played their role. That is the principal reason why in the absence of conscious and active measures for bringing about a change, the structure had remained more or less the same even after the recent spell of democratic rule.

most of the big industries, banks and insurance companies and gained control over 86% of the foreign trade of Bangladesh.  

However, the regime's socialist policies finally ended up benefiting the petty bourgeoisie. The Awami League government mostly appointed party leaders and supporters as administrators of the state-run corporations who had neither experience nor managerial ability. They turned state enterprises into private estates, and sold much of the machineries for personal gains.

Awami League's nationalisation policies seriously threatened the interests of the economically powerful sections of the society, particularly the industrialists and traders. Moreover, the surplus farmers were also antagonised by the compulsory co-operative scheme introduced under the BAKSAL formula.

All these economic forces sided with the Bangladesh military in toppling the Awami League regime in August 1975. Following its assumption of power, the military began to accommodate the interests of the dominant economic groups such as the rising industrial bourgeoisie, traders, businessmen and rural rich by reversing the socialist policies of the previous regime. Thus in the post-1975 period, the upper strata of the society mainly with urban background replaced the petty bourgeoisie as the ruling class of Bangladesh. The Bangladesh military being an integral part of the bourgeois class tried to protect and promote its interests.

Economic Policies of the Military Regimes

The first military regime headed by Ziaur Rahman adopted the capitalist model of development in Bangladesh. The primary objective of Zia's economic policies was to maximise GNP growth rate through encouragement of private sector. To encourage the private entrepreneurs, the regime formulated a new investment policy, abolished

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restrictions on private investment and liberalised trade policy. The military regime assured the businessmen and industrialists that there would be no more nationalisation and takeover of private property by the government.

Lt. General Ershad tried to follow Zia’s major economic policies. In the industrial sector, the process of disinvestment and privatisation was given a new impetus. In June 1982, the Ershad regime announced a new industrial policy offering incentives and opportunities for private investment. The Revised Industrial Policy, announced in July 1986, further enlarged the scope of private investment – both domestic and foreign. Another notable aspect of the military regime’s new economic policy was the denationalisation of state-controlled banks, insurance companies and other financial institutions.

The retired military officers too benefited from various privatisation schemes. After Zia’s coming to power, a large number of military officers were offered bank loans to start business. As a result of the active patronage of the Zia regime, about 500 retired military officers got into the fields of industry and different kinds of business. The number of military-turned businessmen increased manifold during Ershad’s rule.

**Rise of Business Elite in Bangladesh**

The economic policies pursued by successive military regimes had significant impact on the social formations in Bangladesh. The post-1975 industrial policy not only revitalised the old business groups but also led to the rapid growth of a new industrial bourgeois class. The strategy of emphasising the establishment of import-substitution and export-oriented industries through private entrepreneurs mainly benefited the industrialists and businessmen. Some of them established firm control over the country’s industrial, trading and business activities. By the end of 1980s, Bangladesh had developed about 100 to 200 business groups. Of these, some were quite big having

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annual turnover of over TK250 million. Stanley Kochanek has prepared a list of top 14 industrial houses of Bangladesh. The list contains the following industrial groups: Zahurul Islam, Ispahani, BEXIMCO, Anwar, A.K. Khan, Muhammad Bhai (Panther), W. Rahman Jute, Apex, Pacific, Square, Elite, ERBA (Alpha Tobacco), Karnaphuli and Kumudini. Among them, the Zahurul Islam group emerged as the largest industrial conglomerate in Bangladesh. It owned 24 companies.

Most of the above mentioned industrial houses were established during Pakistan period. After the usurpation of power in 1958, the Pakistan military which had its roots in landed aristocracy, developed a symbiotic relationship with the business class delegating them the charge of industrialisation with the help of foreign capital. The military junta provided all kinds of assistance for the full-fledged development of indigenous capitalist classes. The industrial and business groups which flourished under the direct patronage of the military regime were mostly West Pakistanis, particularly Punjabis.

The Pakistani military oligarchy also created a small entrepreneurial class in East Pakistan. Like the West Pakistani entrepreneurs, they too flourished under official patronage. Following the Liberation War of 1971, the new Awami League regime undertook a massive programme of nationalisation. This hindered the growth of the emerging Bengali business and industrial classes in the immediate post-independence period.

However, after military’s assumption of power in 1975, state-sponsored capitalism of the Pakistani days was revived. The Zia regime assured the businessmen and industrialists that there would be no more nationalisation and takeover of private property by the government. The military regime of Ershad followed Zia’s privatisation policies with renewed vigour. As a result, several new enterprises also began to grow.

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Most of them were highly dependent upon patronage in the form of contracts, loans and credit. They were well-connected politically, and some were very active in politics.\(^7\)

The other most striking feature of the elite formation in Bangladesh during the military rule was the emergence of an indigenous banking bourgeoisie. A large number of business families who had borrowed capital from the development financing institutions for building new industries, ventured into the banking business with state resources. A study notes that about 35 families controlled all the private banks. Some of the leading banking families were Zahurul Islam, Khan Mohammad Iqbal, Din Mohammad, M.A. Hashem, Abul Khair (Litu Mia), Khondkar Mahatabuddin Ahmed (Mashrequi), and Abdul Barik Choudhury and his brothers.\(^8\)

**Military Regimes’ Rural Development Strategies and their Fallout**

The military regimes’ rural development policies became strongly aligned to the interests of the landed elites. In order to sustain themselves in power, the military rulers needed to garner rural elite support and loyalty. Another factor that influenced successive military regimes’ rural policies was the socio-economic background of the Bangladeshi officer corps. Both Zia and Ershad tried to protect and promote the interests of the landowners because a vast majority of the Bangladeshi officer corps had come from landowning families. All the rural development programmes and agrarian reforms largely benefited the rich and the surplus farmers and other rural elites. The Zia regime’s input subsidisation programmes served the interest of the rich peasantry who had access to state patronage. After Ershad’s coming to power, subsidies in the form of agricultural inputs were gradually withdrawn. This weakened the small and middle farmers, but consolidated the economic base of the large landholders who received dealership in agricultural inputs distribution. Thus, a new “class of private agricultural entrepreneur” emerged in Bangladesh.\(^9\)

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\(^7\) Ibid.


The rural credit institutions, too, favoured the landed elites. Between 1971 and 1982, surplus farmers and rural entrepreneurs received 97.5% of the total credit disbursed and the landless received only 2.5%. All these policies siphoned off capital from agricultural production for investment in urban service and trade sectors.\textsuperscript{10}

The Ershad government initiated a number of land reform measures especially in regard to the ceiling legislation. The Land Reform Ordinance, 1984, fixed the ceiling of landownership at 20 acres. However, the government's land reforms did not lead to significant changes in the structure of landownership in the rural areas. The large landowners who enjoyed some amount of political clout prevented any attempt to implement land reforms. Besides, the government also could not implement land reforms due to the lack of proper machinery. On the whole, Ershad government's land reform measures did not result in the improvement of the living conditions of the peasant society in Bangladesh.

The military rulers made serious efforts to rope in rural elites in the local level power structure by devising a series of administrative decentralisation schemes. Rural development funds were channelled to local bodies. They were given more power in the planning and administration of development projects. The new role enabled them to enhance their authority which in turn ensured the loyalty of these local representatives to the ruling elites at the national level.\textsuperscript{11}

However, the administrative decentralisation efforts failed to involve the rural masses in the development programmes. Local government officials mostly served the interests of the large landholding families and other rural elites. Besides, the local functionaries indulged in large scale misappropriation of government resources. The groups which enriched themselves from various rural development projects included local and central government officials, rural touts, contractors and engineers. A study suggests

\begin{footnotesize}
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  \item \textsuperscript{10} Ibid.
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that the decentralisation of power to the local bodies reinforced the accumulative and patronage character of the rural power-holders through their effective control over different aspects of development schemes.12

Privileged Status of the Military

The Bangladesh military, which remained at the helm of affairs from 1975 to 1990, too, received a large share of state's largesse. During this period, the military personnel not only exercised full control over the distribution of patronage but also acquired for themselves material benefits from the dispensation of their patronage. They used their dominant positions within the state structure to get permits, licenses, and contracts for various developmental projects. Access to higher echelons of the armed forces became a necessary condition for securing business. The association of retired officers with business houses and on the board of directors of companies became a common feature in Bangladesh.13

Following the 1975 political changeover, the Bangladesh military enjoyed one of the most privileged status in the society. Military expenditure rose from 13% of current expenditure in 1974-75 to 19% in 1982-83.14 In 1985, Ershad had raised the salaries and allowances of the armed forces personnel to such an extent that they even surpassed the salaries and other benefits generally received by their civilian counterparts if the real wages are taken into account.15 Additionally, the armed forces personnel could draw their usual salary for 6 months and retain their official accommodation for one year even after their retirement. The Khaleda government discontinued the rationing system in the country, but this did not apply to the armed forces. Besides, many plots of land in and

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around Dhaka were sanctioned to the defence personnel at nominal price by the military regimes of Zia and Ershad. The perks and perquisites received by the military personnel during 1975-90, were retained even after the transition to civilian rule. For, the country’s political elites knew fully well that the military would vehemently oppose any cut in defence budget. This, however, resulted in the siphoning off of scarce resources which otherwise could have been utilised for the benefit of the military class in the social sector and for the economic progress of the country.

Massive Infusion of Foreign Aid and its Consequences for the Bangladesh Economy

During the military rule, a major portion of government spending was financed through foreign aid. The country had been receiving foreign assistance on a massive scale since its inception. According to a statement issued by the government in 1991, Bangladesh received a total foreign aid of US$22.46 billions during the period December 1971 to June 1991. Of this, 49% came as grants and 51% was in the form of concessional loans.

Bangladesh economy’s heavy dependence on foreign aid to a large extent determined the nature of policies the country adopted in the post-liberation era. Aid donors imposed various conditions on the policy makers of Bangladesh. The donors, particularly the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Asian Development Bank and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), prescribed a capitalist mode of development for Bangladesh. The military rulers who lacked legitimacy, meekly surrendered to the dictates of the aid agencies and international lending institutions to prolong their stay at power. This was clearly reflected in the report submitted by the Ershad government in the 1982 Aid Group meeting on foreign economic assistance to Bangladesh. The report categorically stated: “Greater reliance on the private

16 The above mentioned data was collected from defence sources.
sector is a cornerstone of the economic policy of the government. The government will continue to encourage foreign private investment and technical know-how either in joint ventures or in direct investment and the policy to promote and protect the interests of foreign investor will remain unaltered.\textsuperscript{18}

The policy of privatisation pursued by the military regimes had almost entirely been financed by foreign aid. As the regimes accelerated the process of privatisation, foreign aid increased. This is reflected in the actual contribution of foreign aid to the development budget. When the first Five-Year Plan was launched in 1973, the contribution of foreign aid to the total development budget was 39.44%. But during the Two-Year Plan period (1978-80), 72% of total development investment came from foreign sources; during the Third Five-Year Plan (1985-90), it increased to 80%.\textsuperscript{19}

Successive military regimes tried to serve the interests of both the indigenous and the metropolitan bourgeoisie. The latter's interest, represented by foreign aid agencies and multinational corporations, advocated a greater role for the private sector in industrial development.\textsuperscript{20} The military rulers by pursuing denationalisation and disinvestment policies and liberal distribution of state patronage to private enterprises, incorporated Bangladesh into the world capitalist order as a country almost exclusively dependent on foreign aid.

**Implications of Foreign Aid for Class Formation**

Apart from influencing the form of economic development, foreign aid in a peripheral society like Bangladesh also shaped the process of class formation. The massive foreign aid that the country received after its independence contributed to the growth of peripheral bourgeoisie. Habibul Haque Khondker observes that the bourgeoisie in peripheral societies were unlike the independent revolutionary bourgeoisie in the west.

\textsuperscript{18} Quoted from Golam Sarwar Khan's, "Dependent Development and Bangladesh Situation", *Bangladesh Sociological Review*, vol. II, no. 1, March 1987, p. 44.

\textsuperscript{19} See S.M. Shamsul Alam, n. 8, pp. 93-94.

\textsuperscript{20} See Mannan, n. 9, p. 400.
which played a revolutionary role in the social transformation leading to the advent of
capitalism. The peripheral bourgeoisie have been dubbed by Marxists as “comprador” —
a class of middlemen between the dominant capitalist world and the rural hinterland.
This class lacked revolutionary zeal owing to its dependent growth and existence.

The nascent bourgeoisie in Bangladesh was dependent on the state and on
foreign capital for its growth and sustenance. Foreign aid helped the rising industrial class
to accumulate capital. More than 90% of the industrial loans distributed by the
development financing institutions and nationalised banks came from external sources.

The private entrepreneurs having close connections with the decision makers
could easily set up industries by investing a small amount of their own capital. Those
who utilised the investment opportunity only required 10-14% of the total capital for
investment and the rest was available from financial institutions and banks. The loans
received by 408 industries at the end of 1980-81 reveal the magnitude of
misappropriation of the state money by the new rich classes. Among the debtors, only
5.9% fully repaid their loans. In contrast, 27.5% had not even paid interest on their debt.
In total, 42.5% and 78.6% of the enterprises paid less than 10 or 50% respectively, of
what they owed. Zahurul Islam, who became the richest man in Bangladesh, owed
TK110 millions to banks and development financing institutions in 1982.

The loot and plunder of the state capital continued unabated under Ershad. After
1982, about 190 industrial borrowers received an amount of 90 billion taka in the name of
different projects. However, the government in 1991 revealed that nearly 80% of the
“projects” did not exist. Most of the borrowers were cronies of the Ershad regime. They

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21 See Habibul Haque Khondker’s, “Political Elite Formation in the Peripheral Societies: Bangladesh and
Kenya”, in R.N. Thakur, ed., Elites: Paradigm and Change in Transitional Perspective (New Delhi:
23 See Maniruzzaman, n. 17, p. 219.
24 See Maunun, n. 9, p. 403.
25 See S.M. Shamsul Alam, n. 8, pp. 93 and 120.
had international credit card facilities and diverted around one hundred billion taka to foreign banks. According to an estimate, these cronies swallowed 30% of the national expenditures of 1200 billion taka during Ershad’s rule.26

Studies reveal that industrial borrowers were involved in trading, black marketeering, hoarding, and other illicit and non-productive activities. Foreign aid had given rise to a new class of “intermediaries” consisting of indentors, local consultants, contractors and private importers.27

The Bangladeshi indentors served as local agents for foreign suppliers. A major portion of aid received by the country was mediated through indentors and commission agents. Following military’s coming to power, Bangladesh witnessed a speedy growth of indenting firms. By the late 1980s, about 100 indenting firms had been in operation. A recent survey of major indenting firms shows that at least 50% of them were owned and managed by business groups like Zahurul Islam and BEXIMCO.28

The private importers constituted another group of beneficiary. They received commission for importing machinery for the development projects. One significant change that took place in the trade policy during the military rule, was the privatisation of import trade. The share of private imports increased from 33% in 1980-81 to 74% in 1985-86. Within the category of private imports, about 55% of all goods were imported by importers having industrial users’ licenses and the rest 45% were imported by commercial importers. According to a study, the number of registered commercial importers stood at 40,000 in 1985-86.29

Consultants are also required by donor countries to design, supervise and evaluate projects. They generally get 3% of the total amount of a project for their

26 See A.M.Q. Alam, n. 9, p. 321; and Maniruzzaman, n. 17, pp. 219.
services. Some of the major consulting firms active in Bangladesh today are: Shahidullah and Associates; Development Design Consultants Ltd.; Technological Services Ltd.; Dexttorous Consultants Ltd.; Proknushal Sangsad Ltd.; Prastapana Ltd.; and Index Architects Ltd.\(^3\)

Contractors who build the projects, too benefit from the foreign capital inflow. The profits of contractors are listed on paper at 15% but their actual profits range from 20 to 30%. The construction contracting firms began to emerge in large scale during Zia’s rule. At present, about 10 major construction firms control the majority of the construction works in Bangladesh. Some of the big construction firms include Concorde, Rana Construction, the Engineers Ltd., and Nirman International.\(^3\)

These intermediaries often share commissions with state functionaries, particularly the policy makers and bureaucrats who are involved in negotiation with the aid donors. This indicates that foreign aid also benefited the bureaucratic bourgeoisie.\(^3\)

The new wealth accumulated by these middlemen, commission agents and defaulters was largely invested in unproductive activities. The major areas of investment for the *nouveau riche* class were real estate and apartment complex development, and service and transport, which involved little risk and a guaranteed quick return. For instance, Zahurul Islam invested the development financing institution loans he received, in trading, real estate and contracting; both nationally and internationally.\(^3\) According to one source, he has recently bought 3000 acres of land in Dhaka and its surrounding areas.\(^4\)

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32. See Mosharaf Hossain’s, *Bangladesher Samaj O Samarik Sashan* (Dhaka: Dana Prakashani, 1988), pp. 54-55; and Maniruzzaman, n. 17, p. 218.
33. See S.M. Shamsul Alam, n. 8, p. 123; and Maniruzzaman, n. 17, p. 218.
34. See A. Muhammad, n. 31, p. 107.
The new rich classes pursued life styles of conspicuous consumption. They bought imported cars, gold and jewellery with state monies. Moreover, they spent considerably on food and entertainment. Many of them constructed luxury houses in the capital’s posh areas. A government investigation found that the government’s loans to prospective industrialists had also been used to buy foreign real estate. For example, Zahurul Islam bought 17 houses in expensive London residential areas.\(^3\)

All these groups which were involved in trade and plundering of state resources can be termed as “lumpen” or “parasitic” bourgeoisie. Their contribution to Bangladesh economy is minimal. They had a high stake in perpetuating the country’s dependence on foreign aid. They enjoyed enormous political clout and managed to thwart any attempt to restrict the flow of foreign capital.

The foregoing analysis suggests that the massive inflow of foreign assistance helped only certain segments of the population to enrich themselves. It did not reach the disadvantaged and down-trodden sections of the society—industrial workers, marginal and landless peasants— who constitute the majority of the population.

The State of Socio-Economic Development under Military Rule

During 1975-90, Bangladesh was afflicted with myriad socio-economic problems. The country ranked very low even among the least developed nations in terms of human resource development measured by such basic indicators as per capita income, employment, literacy, health and nutrition.

The country’s growing dependence on foreign aid, market-oriented economic polices, misappropriation of state resources and prevailing high rate of corruption led to the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few and created inequality in the distribution of income. Gross social inequalities persisted in both rural and urban areas. A study

\(^3\) See Ayesha Jalal’s, Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia: A Comparative and Historical Perspective (New Delhi: Foundation Books, 1995), p. 154; Maniruzzaman, n. 17, pp. 218-19; and S.M. Shamsul Alam, n. 8, pp. 104 and 120.
conducted in 1991 showed that 42% of Bangladesh's national income went to the highest 20% while the lowest got only 12%. In 1975, the number of Bangladeshi millionaires was just 2; in mid-1980s it became more than 200.37

The socio-economic policies and programmes devised by the military rulers failed to improve the standard of living of the common people. Bangladesh had one of the lowest levels of per capita income at US$170 in 1988.38 The percentage of people living below the poverty line had been increasing over the years. According to a report, about 86% of the population was living below the poverty line in 1990.39

The country's employment situation was equally bad. A study shows that about 67% people of Bangladesh were unemployed or under-employed. The rural employment scene was worse. The overwhelming majority of the rural work force was either unemployed or seasonally employed.40 The increasing rate of unemployment indicates that the strategy to promote industrialisation through private sector and the introduction of various rural development programmes did not create sufficient job opportunities.

High rate of illiteracy was another serious concern of the society. In 1990, adult literacy was amongst the lowest in the world at 32%. Besides, health was also one of the most neglected sector in Bangladesh. The rate of malnutrition was high with 71% of the children suffering from this problem. The daily calorie supply was only 83% of the requirements and under-five mortality rate was 184 per 1000 of live births. Only 6% had access to sanitation, 49% to safe water and 45% to health services. Public expenditures for human resource development remained constant at about 2.5% of GDP between 1981-90. Public health expenditure as percentage of GNP was only 0.6% in 1990. Public expenditures for human resource development remained constant at about 2.5% of GDP between 1981-90. Public health expenditure as percentage of GNP was only 0.6% in 1990. Public

39 Ibid.
40 See Shahidullah, n. 36, p. 135.
expenditure on education as percentage of GNP of was 1.3% in 1986. These suggest that the military rulers did not put much emphasis on the social sector.\textsuperscript{41}

\textbf{Structure of the Rural Society}

The military rule also could not effect any fundamental change in the structure of the rural society. In Bangladesh, the bulk of the poor are rural who rely primarily on agricultural and related activities for their livelihood. The rural poor include landless workers, small/marginal farmers, tenants, and petty traders. Poverty in the rural areas stems from unequal land distribution. The Land Occupancy Survey conducted in 1977-78 showed that 50% of all rural households were functionally landless (i.e. households that owned less than 0.5 acres of land), 29% of the rural households did not own any land except their homestead. On the other hand, the top 2.7% of households who owned more than 10 acres controlled approximately one-fourth of the total land. The survey further reveals that about 56% of all cultivated lands was in the hands of the top 2% of the total rural households.\textsuperscript{42}

Land is a key source of power in Bangladesh. Control over arable land shapes economic and political power in the countryside. Those who own more land, possess more economic power, influence decisions and derive more benefits from government infrastructure and other social networks. It has been noticed that the surplus and the rich peasants have easy access to the rural power structure and state patronage. A study shows that 63% of the Union Parishad chairmen came from households who had more than 7.50 acres of land. About 80% of them had annual income of more than TK40,000 and 75% of the chairmen had marketable surplus after meeting their own needs. Another survey indicates that 45% of the Union Parishad chairmen and 54% of the members gained land after coming to power.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{41} See Iftekaruzzaman, n. 38, pp. 191-193 and 215.
\textsuperscript{42} See S.M. Shamsul Alam, n. 8, p. 233.
Thus, the landed elites emerged as the most powerful class in rural Bangladesh. Their grip over the poor tightened through their greater bargaining power in leasing out land, purchasing crops from the poor farmers, or lending crops during pre-harvesting period at higher prices. The inequality in the distribution of land made the rural poor victim of political domination and economic exploitation.  

Socio-Economic Background of the Ruling Elites

The rich peasants and rural entrepreneurs had always maintained an alliance with the urban-based political leaders, civil-military bureaucracy, middle class professionals, industrialists and large traders. Following the political changes of 1975 and particularly after Ziaur Rahman’s assumption of power, the latter groups occupied position of authority within the state apparatus. In the initial phase of his rule, Zia relied mainly on senior military officers, civil servants and technocrats. He subsequently civilianised the polity and shared power with the political leaders, urban professional groups and the rising industrial bourgeoisie.

The background of the members of Zia’s successive Council of Ministers makes it clear that the elite composition of Bangladesh had undergone a major change after 1975. Under Zia, certain new groups such as military officers, civilian bureaucrats and technocrats made serious inroads into the decision making process.

In February 1979, Zia held parliamentary elections on the basis of a multi-party system. The table below shows the socio-economic background of the members of parliament:

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44 See Bhuyan, n. 2, p. 18.
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Businessmen</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawyers</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculturists</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technocrats and Bureaucrats</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired Military Officers</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade Unionists</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 1 shows that no single group was dominant but businessmen were the largest group (28%), followed by lawyers (26%). It also indicates that 19.3% of the members of the parliament were rural landowners. Technocrats and bureaucrats constituted 7.7% of the total members of the parliament. In terms of composition, there were some significant differences between the parliament members elected in 1973 and 1979. In 1973, only one retired military officer was elected, while 17 were elected in 1979. Moreover, the representation of businessmen, technocrats and bureaucrats was higher in 1979 than it was in 1973.

The BNP, which emerged as the single largest party in the 1979 parliamentary elections, was dominated by the propertied classes of the society. The economic background of the BNP members of the 1979 parliament is given below:
Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Less than TK 2000</th>
<th>TK 2001-5000</th>
<th>TK 5001-8000</th>
<th>TK 8000 and above</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of the Total</td>
<td>30.24</td>
<td>27.45</td>
<td>22.15</td>
<td>20.39</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land Holding by Size</th>
<th>Less than an Acre</th>
<th>Acre 1.5-5</th>
<th>Acre 5.5-10</th>
<th>Acre 10.5-15</th>
<th>Acre 15.5-25</th>
<th>Acre 25 and above</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>18.14</td>
<td>31.37</td>
<td>19.35</td>
<td>18.14</td>
<td>23.00</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 2 shows that in a country where nearly 86% of the population lives in abject poverty, about 43% of the BNP members of parliament were in the higher income group (more than TK 5000).

Table 3 shows that 23% of the members of parliament belonging to BNP owned more than 25 acres of land, 60% owned over 10 acres. While in Bangladesh the average size of land holding is less than 3 acres, about 80% of the BNP members owned 6 acres and above.

The above mentioned data relating to the socio-economic background of the members of parliament demonstrate that the Zia regime was dominated by businessmen, industrialists, rural rich, civil-military bureaucracy and urban middle class. The regime needed the support of these groups, especially the burgeoning class of industrialists and
traders to stay in power. Therefore, it was no wonder that the regime’s policies and programmes were designed to satisfy these groups.

The Zia regime had been characterised as an alliance between the senior civil servants and the higher echelons of the military; but after Ershad’s seizure of power in 1982, the military emerged as the single most dominant group and the civil bureaucracy became the subordinate partner of the former. In July 1982, Ershad appointed a 16-member Council of Ministers which was composed of 7 military officers, 3 retired civil servants, 4 lawyers, and 2 technocrats. Later the regime included a number of businessmen, industrialists and political leaders to broaden its power and support base.

In 1986, the military regime of Ershad floated a political party, the Jatiyo Party. In the same year, a parliamentary election was held in which the Jatiyo Party won the majority. After the election, Ershad formed a 43-member cabinet from among the leading personalities who had joined his party.

A majority of the ministers in the Jatiyo Party came from the rich families. Most of the cabinet members were established industrialists and businessmen. The people who came from other professions were linked with land and had connections with the civil-military bureaucracy. The Ershad regime liberalised and deregulated the economy and distributed state largesse among these groups and in return received their support.

However, the regime was opposed by students, intellectuals, urban middle class and industrial workers. All these forces were instrumental in Ershad’s removal from power in 1990. The Bangladesh military, which was the primary support base of Ershad, distanced itself from his regime during the final phase of the anti-Ershad movement. The military was no more a contender of power following the ouster of Ershad, but the domination of the urban bourgeoisie in Bangladesh politics continued after the restoration of civilian rule. The socio-economic aspirations of the latter were not too dissimilar from that of the former.

45 See M. Rahman, n. 37, p. 382.
Table 4

Occupational Background of the Members of Parliament Elected in 1991

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lawyers</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Businessmen and Industrialists</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Army Officers</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landholders</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctors</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching in School and Madrassa</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University and College Teachers</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Leaders</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalists</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Government Officers</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time Politicians</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>300</strong></td>
<td><strong>101</strong>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Total percentage exceeds 100 because of rounding

Source: See Maniruzzaman, n. 17, p. 214.

Table 4 indicates that the businessmen and industrialists comprised more than half (53%) of the total members of parliament elected in 1991. The urban middle class groups such as lawyers, doctors, school teachers, university and college professors, student leaders, journalists and former government officers who led the movement for the restoration of democracy in the late 1980s, constituted 36% of the newly elected members.

The BNP emerged as the single largest party in the 1991 parliamentary elections and formed a new government under the leadership of Khaleda Zia. The occupational background of the ministers of the BNP government in 1991 is given below:
Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lawyers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Businessmen and Industrialists</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Army Officers now Businessmen and Industrialists</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landholders</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University and College Professors</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Government Officers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time Politicians</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: See Maniruzzaman, n. 17, p. 217.

Table 5 also shows that the businessmen and industrialists had the largest representation (58%) in the BNP government.

An examination of the socio-economic background of the ruling elites in the post-1975 era reveals that they largely served the interests of the *nouveau riche* classes consisting of industrialists, businessmen and urban professionals. These groups had vested interests and linkages with civil and military bureaucracy and together they dominated the national decision making process.