

# Play and Parody of Democracy

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Watching the recurrent predicament of democracy in Bangladesh, Abraham Lincoln may be vexed whether his well-celebrated definition of democracy is going to be *Batil* (rejected). This article attempts to examine the theory of democracy, in rhetoric and practice, in context of contemporary Bangladesh through the experience of everyday life of mass people. Democracy is a much-talked about topic in present-day Bangladesh. Politicians, intellectuals, activists, businesspersons, entire media world, diplomatic personnel, reported foreign-friends and donor countries are lamenting for democracy in Bangladesh. Recurrent political catastrophe, of course, leaves adequate reasons for anyone to become the scientist of, and devotees for democracy. Subsequently, the country, in recent past, paid high price for the move towards achieving long-cherished reported democracy. In this turmoil of political reallocation, democracy is conceptualised, and reconceptualised, from different perspectives of different corners of the society. It's a classis symptom for political scientists for getting new topic for research, and the world of epistemology to expand its arenas. Meanwhile, *The Times* termed the contemporary political dynamism of Bangladesh as "Political Monsoon" (See, *The Times*, January 13, 2007). Admittedly, empirical data accelerate the drift of building theoretical scholarship. However, engendering definition of democracy, I think, through the everyday experience of mass people is more significant than giving birth to a theory by readings bulk of texts researching in library with air condition. The narratives derived from the talks and discussions in current Bangladesh pertaining to democracy create an underpinning ground for defining, and redefining, democracy. Mass people, alongside, are defining democracy from their experience of everyday life. My concern is how mass people view, and characterise, democracy through their everyday experience and what they demand from the state under democracy.

Things happening in Bangladesh seem that if we discontinue our reported democratic process by holding an election, the nation will loss its *Jaat* (character) and all we will be thrown in *Jahannam* (hell). The country will drive towards *Roshatole* (beneath the damage). If we critically look at the successive past events—dissolution of parliament, Justice Hasan Issue, Awami League's (AL) agitation, Justice Aziz issue with reforming election commission, Dr. Iajuddin issue, his resignation, state of emergency, and Dr. Fakruddin's assumption as the chief of CTG—for few months, we can easily postulate the underlying reasons of contemporary political catastrophe in Bangladesh. Simply saying, the reason is nothing but the political manipulation of every department of states including presidency and the *Kamrakamri* (ugly struggle) for power. The crisis has been generated by the political parties and of course not by mass people. The foremost factor is an ill-move and motive of the state-institutions for providing, or depriving from, the state-power to particular political elites of the society in the name of upholding constitutional continuity and restoration of democracy. From the perspective of political parties (BNP and AL) and their alliance, democracy is the process to bring them back to the power. If there is any impediment functioning on the way, they start *Ahajari* (shoughting) chanting, "democracy is *Gelo Gelo*" (about to finish). Intellectuals are, not necessarily all, divided into two segmented blocks to support these two major political

parties and their alliances. Their sense of democracy is stimulated and shaped by the move of their respective political party. Media world--print and electronic--and media personnel are apparently concerned with holding a free and fair election. It seems only holding election is democracy! Definition of democracy from their perspectives is associated with holding a free and fair election either. Democracy from the view of businesspersons is just ensuring favourable atmosphere so that they can maximize their profit. Envoys to different diplomatic zones are concerned with serving the interest of their respective countries very likely rather than well-being of Bangladesh. They pursue to bring western trademark of democracy to Bangladesh whether it fits, they less bother, within the socio-cultural setting of Bangladesh or not. They, as professional envoys, view democracy within the stereotype-framework of diplomatic interest of their respective countries. This style of thinking concerning with the democracy is also applicable to conceptualise democracy from the perspective of reported foreign-friends and donors countries. These are the series of definitions of democracy. However, the question is for whom we are crying for democracy. Is democracy for politicians, for businesspersons, intellectuals, and foreign envoys? Do the political parties really crave democracy or entail power to burgle the country in the name of democracy? Is election is effectively the only utensil of achieving democracy? Who are actual beneficiaries of this genre of democracy? For whom should we sought for democracy? These are the questions to be answered in the framework of defining and redefining democracy in Bangladesh. Basically, democracy is needed for those people of the country, who are always ignored in the paradigm of democracy in Bangladesh. We should try to reckon how the mass people define democracy through the experience of their everyday life. I think, Abraham-Lincoln actually defined democracy thinking of the plight of these mass people. Democracy is a government by the people, for the people and of the people. However, people don't know the theory of democracy. They even don't know what the contemporary predicament of democracy, state of emergency and constitutional crisis are. Because they remain encountering the crisis through the experience of their everyday life. I'm rather interested to address how a rickshaw-puller, a construction worker, van-driver, a tea-stall owner, a garments-worker, domestic servants, sex-worker, a slum-dweller, a street-hawker, carpenter, fisherperson, a farmer, sweeper, porter, blacksmith, a general public etc. define democracy. They don't define democracy using ambiguous narratives and diplomatic jargon regarding holding election, unveiling mechanism of political manipulation and de-politicising the administration etc. Their definition of democracy is automatically expressed through their experience of everyday life and minimum wants to keep alive their existence. Their definition is their narratives of everyday experiences.

Democracy to the mass people is, of course, not the procedure of holding election because election is, by all means, an elite game. It matters little to their lives whether it is free and fair election or under "election-engineering" and political manipulation. Election is, indeed, a system by which a body of elites, now mostly businesspersons, are mandated to rule, and loot, the country for five years. Electing a body of elites brings hardly any substantial changes to the life of mass people. The state functionally cannot provide them Lincoln-Brand of democracy, which is really desired for the betterment of mass people's live. They don't understand constitutions and therefore, talking about constitutional crisis is, by and large, a kind of elite and intellectual practice. They don't bother about theory

of democracy because theory is itself invented with elite languages and for the people who are culturally privileged (see, Homi Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, Routledge, 1994). The spirit of democracy, therefore, rests upon what and how the people characterise and conceptualise democracy through their everyday experience of life.

To a rickshaw puller, democracy is traffic-jam-free movement in the streets and relief from the harassment by traffic police. To a van driver, democracy means to have minimum guarantee to live from hand to mouth. To a tea-stall owner, democracy is to accomplish small business without any *Utpat* (disturbance) of local *Mastan* (illegal tax-taker). To a garments worker, democracy means getting proper wages, due honour in work-place, and relief from sexual assault in the streets. To a domestic servant, democracy is nothing but just to require good behaviour from *Bibi-shaheb* (house-lady). To street hawker, democracy is doing business without giving *Chada* (taxes) to police and *Mastan*. To sex-worker, democracy is a liberty to do their job with dignity and without interfere of state through police harassment. To slum dwellers, democracy is freedom to live at their own, but temporary, house. Meaning of democracy from the perspective of these people can be longer. To carpenter, fisherperson, farmer, sweeper, porter, blacksmith, a general public etc., democracy is simply getting an access to have two-meals a day. To all these people, who occupy more than 90% of total population of the country, democracy is to have an access to lead their lives as human beings. Connotation of democracy to all these people is to have assurance of at least *Vaat* (meal to meet the need of body) and *Kapor* (cloths to cover the *Lozza* or privacy). Still, people die in Bangladesh for the lack of a piece of cloth during winter. People die in Bangladesh for scarcity of two meals a day during *Monga* in north Bengal. What's the significance of democracy unless it can provide two meals a day to its people? What is an ultimate outcome of the political crisis for so-called restoration of democracy, if we cannot provide a piece of cloth to our people during winter? What will bring the democracy to the life of mass people through voting BNP or AL to back to *Khomotar Godi* (state-power)? All caricatures of democracy will be nipped in the bud unless we can take account into consideration the perception of democracy of these people of the country who frequently define and redefine the democracy through the experience of their everyday life thinking of how to keep alive their existence in the realm of democracy.