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CORRUPTION IN PAKISTAN AND BANGLADESH

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS



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Abstract

The dissertation focuses on how and to what extent religious orthodoxy, close family ties and male dominance in society have contributed to the high tendency of corruption in Bangladesh and Pakistan. Keeping in view the comparable social and behavioral norms in the two Muslim majority countries, the cultural dimensions identified by Hofstede (n.d.) and the cultural constructs formulated by House et al. (2002) have been employed as theoretical context to underscore how the religious domination of culture influences the behavior and values of people which in turn enhances the incidence of corruption. Since the social phenomenon is characterized by subjective human experience, values and behavioral patterns, it needs to be studied in its socio-historical context. Because of the issue's complexity, multi-method qualitative approach uses conceptual and social analyses to discover the meaning and context of justification. The key finding in the present study implicates that the orthodox religious belief system, unlike egalitarian religions, tends to produce habits, customs, and traditions conducive to corruption. It can be seen in the religious idealization of a joint family system and male dominance, which have contributed to corruption. Thus, Pakistan and Bangladesh's religious tradition has created a skewed attitude towards social hierarchy, familism, and patriarchy.

Key Terms: Hierarchical religions vs Protestantism, Collectivism, Gender Egalitarianism, Patriarchy, Joint Family System.



“It is discouraging how many people are shocked by honesty and how few by deceit.” **(Noel Coward)**



Introduction:

The central objective of this review article is to investigate why corruption is widespread in Pakistan and Bangladesh, drawing from a cultural perspective. Specifically, as I will outline, the thesis focuses on cultural and traditional perspectives, notably patriarchy, family kinship, and religious networks. But, first, this chapter begins by conceptualising and providing a working definition of corruption. Next, it outlines some of the negative effects of corruption and then rounds out by clearly stating the research question that will guide this study.

The most popular, though simplistic definition of corruption is the one used by the World Bank, restricting it to “abuse of public power for private gain” (Andvig, Fjeldstad, Weltzien, Amundsen, Sissener, & Søreide, 2001). However, it must not be taken to mean that the private sector is immune from the menace of corruption. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has expanded the scope of the influence of corruption beyond grand corruption and highlighted the social factors and behavioral changes. Thus, in many cases, abuse of public power is not exercised essentially for one’s private or personal gain. It is, rather, for the benefit of one’s family, friends, tribe, political party, religious sect, etc.

Similarly, corruption need not only be in the form of bribe payment. It can be in the form of special services, concessions, gifts, etc., for the near and dear ones of the politically exposed persons (PEPs). As pointed out by the UNDP Report (2008), the so-called “petty corruption” is



more widespread than the grand corruption and takes a greater toll on the poor from the human development index.

Corruption is so widespread and is attracting so much attention worldwide that it has become one of the most important issues of the 21st century. As corruption emerges in different, multiple forms, it also has various causes and effects. Besides political and economic reasons, governance issues cause corruption on a grand scale. However, the range and impact seem wider and deeper when we look at the professional ethics and moral values permeating a particular society. It is, therefore, imperative to focus on the demographics: attitudes, habits, belief systems, customs and traditions of a particular community to come to a more comprehensive view of corruption in a society. Furthermore, the socio-cultural landscape in societies dominated by orthodox religious faith is deeply and widely permeated by faith-based values and religious doctrines. Hence, the present study tries to comprehend attitudes, behavior, customs and traditions against the backdrop of the religion they profess.

The adverse effects of corruption on economic growth, business, employment, and investment are well known and well researched (Basem & Saeh, 2013) (Myint, 2000). The range of impact is further extended as it develops into what is generally termed ‘institutionalized corruption’ (Thompson, 2018) (Hellmann, 2015). Consequently, jobs and economic growth are negatively affected, causing the global economy to lose billions of dollars annually. The poorest segment of the world population suffers the most as the governments around the globe embezzle the public money that rightfully belongs to the working class, thus preventing them from rightfully benefitting from the revenue they generate. In addition, society, on a wide scale, suffers from a low trust in the rule of law, lack of proper educational facilities, health care, and infrastructure and lowering of standards of living in general. In such societies, the credibility of individuals and



institutions is at the lowest ebb, and even the government tends to lose its legitimacy as the society becomes corrupt to the core. By studying prevailing religion, community and family dynamics and gender bias, it is proposed to shed new light on the prevalence of otherwise of corruption in such societies.

1.1 Objective and Scope

Pakistan and Bangladesh are Muslim majority countries and have high population densities. In addition, they have a close demographic affinity as both societies are overwhelmingly dominated by joint family systems, religious orthodoxy and patriarchal tendencies. The extant literature on corruption points out that these and other demographic factors influence the prevalence of corruption in different countries. The discussion, however, remains mostly confined to a general statement of the problem.

Suppose joint family system, orthodox belief system and domination of patriarchy are treated as constants. In that case, it will provide a deeper insight into and help comprehend the diverse factors that impact corruption as a variable. Thus, the primary research questions that will drive the present research will be: how and to what extent religious orthodoxy, close family ties and male dominance have been instrumental in bringing about the high tendency of corruption in Bangladesh and Pakistan?



1.2 Methodology

The focus of the research question and the cultural and social context that characterize the main issue demand that a social phenomenon like corruption be located within the context of its peculiar linguistic, historical, and values standpoint. The complexity of the subject demands a multi-method qualitative approach including historical evaluation, conceptual analysis and interpretive understanding to generate meaning in the context of discovery and justification. Analysis of reports on corruption and happenings in the past will provide the backdrop, while conceptual analysis of theoretical terms will help build the required framework for understanding, thus providing meaning and justification to the argument. Interpretation of social phenomena will help reach a meaningful understanding of the phenomenon from the standpoint of those who have a stake in it. It enables one to see the world from their perspective.

Non-numerical, verbal data will be analyzed to gain insights (understanding, comprehension and vision) into problems being inquired into. By clarifying concepts, new data is also uncovered. Inferential techniques will be employed to determine and discover the specific meaning of factual data. Data analysis is an ongoing affair. Non-numerical data, i.e. words and concepts (terminology), are analyzed, including coding, criticism, and verbal synthesis production. The analysis is in the form of inference and argument in the context of the justification of the evolving tentative hypothesis. The analysis also helps determine the meanings of terms, facts and concepts, etc. and patterns of relationships, classifications, descriptions and definitions. Data evaluation is non-standardized, narrative and ongoing. It involves external criticism to assess the authenticity of the data (documents) and internal criticism to evaluate the



worth of the data, its accuracy and reliability (statements). The criteria for evaluation lie in the meanings, reliability and justifiability of the data. While interpreting the data, tentative conclusions will be drawn and reviewed ongoing. While undertaking analysis, synthesis and justification, the interpretation of data takes the route of recognition, description, application and explanation. The context of interpretation includes ends, values and meanings for a wider understanding of the educational, social and cultural interests of mankind.

A review of previous research

There is virtually no comprehensive or substantial research on the joint family system, religious orthodoxy and patriarchal tendencies as causes of corruption. Neither is there worthwhile scholarly work on corruption in Pakistan and Bangladesh in the comparative context? However, the extant literature on corruption points out certain social, cultural and other demographic factors as influencing the prevalence of corruption in different countries. But, the influence is seldom affirmed in unequivocal terms. For example, Rothstein, Bo & Broms, and Rasmus (2017) warn us of “the risks of assigning religious doctrine an outsized role in explaining social and political phenomenon” (p. 3). Therefore, they deny any empirically plausible argument to establish the compatibility or incompatibility of Catholicism and Protestantism with democracy. They have not made a close study of Islam which in Pakistan and Bangladesh is a real bulwark against liberal democracy. Democracy is treated as one of the major factors that inhibit corruption which is evident from the evidence available about many former British colonies. Interestingly, Rothstein & Broms agree that:



“Overall . . . the correlation between secularism and control of corruption is positive, that is the more secular the population, the lower is the level of corruption.” (Rothstein, & Broms, 2017,p 3)

One can very well conclude that ‘the more religious the population, the higher is the level of corruption. The existing research has highlighted the fact that orthodox religions tend to produce a highly doctrinaire population who equate secularism with atheism

Treisman (2000), for example, claims that “Religious traditions have often been thought to condition cultural attitudes towards social hierarchy”. Although he identifies “‘hierarchical religions’ — Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Islam ...where church and state hierarchies are closely intertwined” and family loyalties are strong (familism and nepotism), religion fails to play a positive role in fighting corruption (p. 403). For him, cultures shaped by more equality and individualistic religions, such as Protestantism, play a more positive role in preventing corruption (Treisman, 2000). Treisman, however, does not extend his analysis to include the influence of religion and the joint family system on the increasing incidence of corruption.

Several research studies hypothesize that religion can act as a barrier to corruption (Mutascu, 2010, Tian Ye-zhuang et al., 2017). There has, however, no light been shed on why predominantly religious countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh suffer from exponential incidents of corruption. “Global Corruption and Religion: An Empirical Examination” by S.D. Beets (2007) seems most relevant to the present research as he tries to build a relationship between religion and corruption as he addresses the high-religiosity, high-corruption paradox (Beets, 2007). He further provides evidence to counter the claim that if individuals are more religious, they will be less likely to engage in corruption.



On the other hand, North et al (2013) links the rule of law and corruption with a country's religious heritage. He has, however, recommended more research to understand the interplay of historical, cultural, institutional and religious factors (North, Orman, & Gwin, (2013). Zuhaira & Ye-zhuang (2017) consider corruption as “immoral behavior” (Zuhaira & Ye-Zhuang, 2017). Their findings conclude that religious beliefs and values are more efficacious than religious rituals in preventing corruption (Zuhaira & Ye-Zhuang, 2017). Indeed, religious rituals have increasingly been emphasized in many Muslim countries, including Pakistan and Bangladesh, while religious beliefs are also vehemently professed and guarded. What is surprising is that religious values like piety, virtuosity and religious observances fail to make a dent in the corrupt practices in these countries.

The existing research on corruption pays even lesser attention to the joint family system and patriarchy as causes. Stefan Sumah (2018) considers the issue in earnest and asserts that family functions as an “informal social security ... in less developed countries, where there is no legal regulation of formal social security.” He further claims that these “countries are known for nepotism, cronyism and patronage since the family, and the wider community provide social security” (Sumah, 2018). Sumah links the importance of family as social security with religion. “While the southern, predominantly Catholic, very hierarchically organized part of Europe encourages the cult of the family (also joint and several communities) and several liabilities, the northern, mainly Protestant part, emphasizes individualism and individual responsibility (which means fewer forms of corruption). Corruption also prospers better in countries where Islam and Orthodoxy are the main religions. The influence of the dominant religion in the country is thus important.” He also identifies patriarchal society as more prone to corruption, and women in high offices tend to bring the level of corruption down. (pp. 69-71). This conclusion has already been



highlighted by the World Bank's influential research in 155 countries of the world (1998) (Rivas, 2013), and the results are corroborated by Rivas (2013), Lee, & Guven (2013) and Litina & Varvarigos (2020). However, the issue needs to be analyzed further from the comparative perspective of Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The existing research reflects a certain ambiguity as it finds both negative and positive influences of the joint family system on corruption. However, Litina & Varvarigos (2020) have undertaken a highly rigorous study of the issue and distinguished between the impacts of 'conjugal' family and 'extended' family:

“Once we expand our view of family ties to the extended family, we can identify additional pertinent factors to corruption. One such factor is nepotism. For example, imagine a framework where the probability of securing employment in the public sector, and therefore having greater opportunities for rent-seeking through corruption, is increased when close ties with family members employed in the public sector. This is a framework that can certainly generate interesting mechanisms on the relation between (extended) family ties and corruption and the dynamics of preference transmission regarding the relative strength of these ties.” (Anastasia Litina, Dimitrios Varvarigos (2020, p. 29).

Countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh betray a slant towards collectivism, and the population is divided into groups based on religious, sectarian, tribal or caste affiliations. In recent years, grouping based on sectarian identity has become a decisive factor in affirming affiliations and identities. There is widespread pride in strong family ties that are commended on religious grounds. But, the family system becomes productive only when the joint family expands into an extended one. There is a widespread public perception in Pakistan and



Bangladesh that family ties are a major cause of unmerited appointments called nepotism for appointing nephews famous since the Catholic Church. Bending laws to help a cousin in excessive tax evasion promotion is the town's talk. It is a fact that societies with strong family ties have a large shadow or underground or undocumented economies. This is very much so in the case of Pakistan and Bangladesh.

A recent empirical study has highlighted the penetration of corruption in the culture of Bangladesh (Sakib 2019). He claims that “in getting public or private services, citizens must pay extra-unauthorized money in most cases. People who do not pay bribes are either harassed or must pursue their services through informal mechanisms such as lobbying, or . . . using their position.” (p. 359) . For this state of affairs, among other factors, he identifies patron-client relationships, low awareness and illiteracy and the use of religion as a tool. Sakib (2019) has an interesting answer: Why is Bangladesh such a corruption-prone country despite strong religious values? He claims” “One obvious reason for such an outcome is that many corrupt officials use religion as a veil to cover their fraudulent activities. For example, in many government offices, officials wear the Tupi (religious cap) and Panjabi (the traditional dress that provides evidence of Islamic ideology) and keep their beards long to carry on Sunna. Some of them practice genuinely, and others are doing it to disguise their corruption.” (p.363). In Pakistan, corrupt bureaucrats can also be observed displaying and using prayer mats in their offices to create an impression of piety and religiosity to cover up their corrupt practices.

In the case of Pakistan, the extant research literature on the joint family system, religious orthodoxy and patriarchal tendencies as causes of corruption is even scantier. This indeed is due to the fear that highlighting the negative role of religion may bring unsavory consequences for the unbiased researcher. University professors at Pakistani universities unashamedly claim that



they bend their social science research findings to bring them in conformity with the religious doctrines they profess. The fact of the matter is that Pakistan, an Islamic state, does not encourage research that involves and reflects religion in a negative context. However, it does not mean that these factors do not play a role in the incidence of corruption in Pakistan.

Padlam (1999), in a rigorously analytical research, points out that the more religiously divided a country is the less corrupt it is. For Pakistan, being a predominantly majority Muslim population, the findings are significant. In this regard, more exhaustive research by Chan, Y. et al (2021) claims that corruption remains a daunting problem for a majority of Muslim nations. They also assert that “with the large power distance, gender gap, and commitment to a predominantly collectivistic value system, Muslim nations experience high levels of corruption. According to the CPI by Transparency International, 8 out of 10 most corrupt countries are majority Muslim nations.” (p.56).

Referring specifically to Pakistan the study stresses that:

“... strict Islamic rules apply to people’s lives in Pakistan, where Islam is the official religion and all aspects of life must comply with the Islamic Law. Approximately 88% of the Pakistani population consider themselves religious. Blasphemy is strictly forbidden and is punishable by death (US Dep. of State, 2016). Teachings of Islam are enforced in Pakistan in all public schools. According to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) Annual Report (2015), Pakistan represented one of the worst situations as it pertained to religious freedoms with severe discrimination and physical violence towards many Shi’a Muslim, Christians, Ahmadi Muslims, and Hindus.”(p. 60)



This rather harsh indictment indicates the domination of one religion in Pakistan, underscoring one-dimensional religiosity, which propels corruption in contrast to egalitarianism and individualistic religions and is less likely to challenge corrupt officials. Besides a high rating on the religiosity index, Pakistan being a strict Islamic country, the above study also assigns her a high place in collectivism and gender inequality. (p. 69).

The extant literature has highlighted the relationship between corruption and religion across countries of diverse cultures. For example, although Pakistan and Bangladesh have lived under British imperialism for centuries, they have weak democratic traditions. Nevertheless, both countries have clear tension between fundamental religious doctrines and democratic norms. The study's central problem is seeking how and why the orthodox religious traditions, beliefs, and teachings are against the individualism that marks Protestantism. Another issue that needed to be resolved was the very stringent views in Islam about the status of women.

Orthodox religiosity in Bangladesh and Pakistan promotes collectivism, heightened in the idealization of a joint family system, leading to widespread nepotism and cronyism. The gender gap in these societies is also traced back to religion as a conservative belief system in all the Muslim majority countries tends to assign women a subordinate role in society.

To enjoy public or private services in Pakistan and Bangladesh, the common citizen must pay the extra money, which is unauthorized yet essential to get the file moving. It is dubbed “file on wheels’ in the commoner's language. Otherwise, the case is kept pending till the necessary price is paid. To avoid harassment, people either pay bribes or look for ‘effective’ connections among the family and friends to get the case moving. This informal lobbying mechanism, through personal ‘contacts’, is a routine matter in government offices of Pakistan and Bangladesh.



People who do not pay bribes are either harassed or must pursue their services through informal mechanisms such as lobbying or personal communication using their position.

Conceptual framework

A close assessment and evaluation of previous research highlights the prevalence of corruption in orthodox religious societies dominated by patriarchal tendencies, collectivist approach favoring joint family system, and cultural off shoots of extreme religiosity. Hofstede's cultural dimensions provide a highly appropriate theoretical context to the present study (Hofstede Insights, n.d.). Collectivism is a construct that underlies the collective action theory underscoring the relevance to individuals' decisions regarding group dynamics, including trust in others and the (actual or perceived) behavior of others. When corruption is seen as 'normal', people may be less willing to abstain from corruption or take the first step in implementing sanctions or reforms. Although, religion and other cultural variables play a crucial role in the spread of corruption, an individual's identity in a religious society is predominantly based on the identity of the group. Moreover, masculinity/ femininity construct signifies the extent to which a society tries to minimize the gaps between the roles of males and females. Nations that maximize the differences in roles based on gender might experience a high level of corruption as the gender disproportion may be exploited to justify corrupt practices (Wood, 2006).

While distinguishing between cultural values and cultural practices, Hofstede (1991) suggests that national cultural differences consist largely of differences in values and, to a small extent, differences in practices (Hofstede, 1991). To supplement Hofstede (1991), the present



research proposes to borrow two constructs, i.e. individualism/ collectivism and gender egalitarianism, from House et al. (2002, 2004) (House, Javidan, Hanges, & Dorfman, 2002) (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, and Gupta, 2004).

Cross-national studies like the Corruption Perception Index (Transparency International) and Control of Corruption Index (World Bank), flawed in that perception and fact may not tally, have highlighted potential causes of corruption, including traditions and cultural factors. In this theoretical context, the potential causes (designated variables of the present research) like religious orthodoxy, close family ties and patriarchy are analysed and assessed to correlate them with corruption in the comparative context of Pakistan and Bangladesh. By focusing on corrupt behaviour and the social context, corruption-related concepts will be analysed and interpreted. The study is likely to develop a culturally sensitive policy-relevant theory of corruption.

Result and Discussion

Corruption in Comparative Perspective

A comparative study of corruption is of value as it helps explore the issue of corruption, a pervasively prevalent behavioral phenomenon, especially in developing countries of the world. Such a comparative perspective on corruption furnishes insight into the growth and role of this white-collar crime in these countries' dominant political and legal systems, religions, and cultures. Comparison can be fruitful in countries with a high incidence of corruption but a weak democratic culture. Prevalence of corruption, for example, can be compared in countries having similar civil law traditions as were developed in former British colonies. The legal culture of a



country also includes the procedural aspect of law. The British obsession with the procedural aspect of law gave their erstwhile colonies the expertise to indulge in what may be dubbed as 'legal corruption. Low risk of being caught and even lower chances of being prosecuted and sentenced for corruption also affords a chance to compare countries for their higher and lower levels of corruption. The dominance of orthodox religion is another cultural dimension that can be compared to show how and why corruption prevails in some countries. Such religious traditions have been known to have skewed attitudes towards social hierarchy, familism and patriarchy.

Pakistan and Bangladesh are two developing countries where corruption is widespread. Svensson (2005) p.24, while answering the question: Which countries are the most corrupt? Claims that "All of the countries with the highest levels of corruption are developing or transition countries" (Svensson, 2005). With low income, poor education standards, and low human capital, these countries are comparable in having sub-standard institutions originally designed for colonisers' benefit (Transparency International, 2021) (Hofstede Insights). As part of the Indian sub-continent, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh have a common past. They have a long history of foreign invasions and occupations by the invaders who came from the Northwest, the mountain passes of the Hindu Kush or, in the case of Europeans, from the sea routes along the coasts. Before attaining independence, they had a long sojourn of colonial occupation by the United Kingdom. La Porta (2022) (García Portilla, 2022) specifically identifies colonisation and the legal system in the colonies as a major cause of comparable corruption in these countries.

Although they have some demographic similarities, Bangladesh and Pakistan have significant cultural disparities that count towards their national identities. Culture refers to societal ideas, customs and social norms and behaviour and enfolds the spheres of art, dress, language, food,



family structures, religious practices, festivals, traditions, values etc. Despite all other differences, there is empirical evidence that characterises all the three countries by their overwhelming tilt towards conservative mindset, religious orthodoxy, joint family system and patriarchal tendencies. The question that needs to be looked into is: Are these pervasive cultural indicators the real cause of pervasive and all-embracing corruption that bedevils the three societies. This is the core issue in the present research and a major cause of corruption in the South Asian region.

Although the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the People's Republic of Bangladesh are nomenclatures indicative of a religious or a secular tilt, both the countries went through a phase of Islamization starting in the seventies. The military took over Bangladesh by General Ziaur Rehman in 1975, and General Zia-ul-Haq in Pakistan in 1977 successfully used Islam to legitimise their authoritarian rule. Sheikh & Ahmed (2019) have precisely laid down the reason why Pakistan and Bangladesh are the two South Asian countries that should be compared for widespread adherence to religious orthodoxy across the two countries:

“Whereas ZH operationalised Pakistan's pre-existing Islamic identity from emblematic use to substantive application at both domestic and international levels, ZR revived Bangladesh's Islamic identity and reopened the political space to Islamists, including the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Bangladesh party, which was banned from politics under the secularism adopted in the 1972 constitution. Gen. Ershad continued to build Bangladeshi identity with an emphasis on Islam and relied on the support of Islamists. He amended the constitution to proclaim Islam the state religion of Bangladesh.” (Sheikh, & Ahmed, 2019)



The shift towards orthodox Islam in Pakistan and Bangladesh was never reversed. On the contrary, Pakistan openly and Bangladesh discreetly have continued to use religion for the power-seekers in the two countries. It has usually been employed to repress the opponents, undermine critical thinking, keep Western style liberal democracy in check, and promote inequality. Another similar feature growing out of the malaise, as mentioned earlier, is the slow socio-economic growth. A recent report by Kuru (2021) blames the Ulema-State Alliance in many Muslim countries (Kuru, 2021).

Transparency International provides another source to compare corruption in Pakistan and Bangladesh. During the last 20 years, the Berlin-based Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) has repeatedly placed Pakistan and Bangladesh at a low rank on a 0-100 scale. The CPI (2020) ranked Pakistan at 124 out of 180 countries with a 31/100. During the last nine years (2012-2020), Bangladesh has constantly earned a rank of 140/180 or above in the CPI and is rated second worst in South Asia after Afghanistan. Both the countries slipped by 1-2 points over their score in the previous year. The CPI surveys in the region indicated that three out of four people think corruption is rampant in these countries. It reports the overall experience of corruption by the public, with one out of five claiming to have paid a bribe to access public service and one in seven being offered a bribe to vote for the preferred candidate. Pakistan and Bangladesh are both South Asian Muslim majority countries. Following the end of the British colonial rule, they remained part of one state for 24 years before the latter was ceded in 1971 to become the People's Republic of Bangladesh. There are, indeed, cultural diversities due to geographical, racial and ethnic differences.

The formation of the Anti-Corruption Commission in 2004 has failed to make a dent in the widespread prevalence of corruption in Bangladesh. Government control over the Commission is



said to be responsible for thwarting any large scale impact and has proved ineffective in preventing corruption. The Chairman Anti-Corruption Commission himself admitted that corruption is rampant in Bangladesh, (Corruption in Bangladesh; New Age, 2020). National Accountability Bureau of Pakistan, established in 1999, has suffered a similar fate as the whole process has been politicised. Corruption in Pakistan is comparable to that of Bangladesh as it extends to all the government sectors. Transparency International (TI), Pakistan report (2021) reveals that “a majority of Pakistanis believe corruption in government sectors remains high. After the police and judiciary, 10.3% of respondents considered tendering and contracting as the most corrupt sector; survey results show 59.8% of respondents cited contracts of roads as the public service for which people have to pay bribes. Additionally, 13.3% cited access to water and 13.1% drainage systems as services that required bribes” (García Portilla, 2022). Bangladesh faces a similar indictment by the TI, claiming that it has made it difficult to do business.

Interestingly, Bangladesh and Pakistan are patriarchal societies dominated by close family ties and orthodox belief systems. This can be explained by looking at some more general behavioural norms that define the two societies. Hofstede Insights, a global cultural advisory, looks at the matter from a broader perspective and characterises the two as dominated by power distance, masculinity, collectivism, uncertainty avoidance and long term orientation (Country Comparison) (Hofstede Insights). The broader demographic indicators, directly or indirectly, implicate all the five research constants in the present research. Power distance reflects individual inequalities and the attitude of the specific culture towards these inequalities. “Power distance is defined as the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.” Gender inequality in such societies is taken as normal and natural. People in Pakistan and Bangladesh



generally think that this is how God has made this world, and they must accept it as providence. Glorifying masculinity, indeed, highlights male dominance as the society is driven and motivated by the male virtues of competition, achievement and success. Both societies shun individualism, and the people's self-image is defined in terms of "we" rather than "I", Loyalty is paramount in such a collectivist culture, manifesting itself in close long term commitment to the group, be that a family, extended family, caste, tribe or religious sect.

As the joint family system acts as informal social security in many developing south Asian countries, it also acts as an anti-dote for prevailing uncertainty due to unpredictability about the future. Ambiguity about the unknown situation leads people of these societies to maintain rigid religious beliefs and intolerant orthodox ideas. Long term orientation reflects how a society links the challenges of the present and the future with traditions. Societies which score low on this dimension remain hooked on their time-honoured traditions, glorify their past and look at societal change with suspicion and fear. One needs to comprehend these foundational characteristics to fully grasp the force and range of corruption prevalent in the societies of Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Discussion

The key issue in the present study is to analyse and understand the role of religion vis a vis corruption in Pakistan and Bangladesh – the two highly religious societies in the south Asian region. Morality and ethics, spirituality, and religiosity in countries are inextricably bound up with the system of religious beliefs that are adhered to on a wide scale. Differences in belief systems and religious doctrine play a crucial role in society's attitude towards transparency and



accountability, impacting the level of corruption in different societies. Religions that make individuals personally responsible for their sins promote attitudes that reduce corrupt practices. However, there is little emphasis on the dynamics of the decision to indulge in the act of corruption – the factors influencing the decision about what is right and what is wrong. Is it an individual or a collective decision? How does the organisational culture and close community (the family) colour one's idea of morality, and what role does religion and religiosity play in the affair.

Contemporary research has diversely looked at the effects of religion on corruption. One of these approaches highlights that adherence to religious norms promotes honesty, moral standards and ethical business choices (Callen & Fang, 2015; McGuire et al., 2012). On the other hand, Sommer et al (2013) argue that correlating religion and reduced corruption is conditional on how political institutions are democratic (Sommer, Bloom, & Arian, 2013). Still, another version highlights the nature and characteristics of religion that either act in promoting corruption or in mitigating it. Thus, Treisman, (2000) p.4, and Chan, Y. et al. (2021) have tried to prove that individualistic, egalitarian religions like Protestantism are more likely to undermine corruption than Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy and Islam (Treisman, 2000) (Chan, Kim, Popov, Ondracek, & Saeed, 2021). The implication is that some religions tend to produce habits, customs, and traditions conducive to corruption. In other words, it is the culture produced by a particular religion that strongly links corruption to a country's prevailing religion. Interestingly, Bo Rothstein rules out Protestantism as a doctrine producing cultural values conducive to high-quality institutions against corruption. Nevertheless, he finds the correlation between secularism and control of corruption as positive, affirming that the more secular the population, the lower the level of corruption. (p. 3) (Rothstein & Broms, 2017).



Instead of placing it in the more traditional Weberian postulate of ‘Protestant work ethics’ (Chan, Kim, Popov, Ondracek, & Saeed, 2021), the impact of Protestantism can be better understood in its emphasis on democracy (Woodberry, 2012) good education, human capital and economic prosperity (Becker & Woessman, 2009); (Becker et al. 2016). Protestantism grew out of the reformist roots of 16th-century reformist protest that came in the wake of the secularist Renaissance movement in Europe. Unlike the centralistic Roman Catholic church, it is marked by diversity, plurality and individuality, with ordained priests having little precedence over the laity. By contrast, hierarchal religions like Roman Catholicism, Islam, and orthodoxy adversely affect democracy, education, and human capital, thus promoting corruption in societies like those of Pakistan and Bangladesh. Consequently, low access to higher echelons of authority leads to acceptance of authoritarian rule. Public service officials are questioned seldom about their actions, and people, in general, are prone to be manipulated, thus substantially increasing the incidence of corruption in such societies. In this way, orthodoxy maintains an aura of ignorance against rationality to serve their ulterior motives, promoting corruption (García Portilla, 2022).

Hofstede’s cultural dimensions help narrow down some of the crucial factors that specifically emerge in a society dominated by religious orthodoxy, which impacts the corruption level in such societies. Extant research has found a significant “negative correlation between Hofstede individuals and the corruption index.” (Seleim & Bontis, 2009, p.171). It implies that higher levels of collectivist values and practices also tend to increase the level of corruption. As in the case of Muslim majority countries of Pakistan and Bangladesh, collectivist societies are unified into cohesive groups, and the individual’s identity is based on group identity. These countries are strictly bound up by their sectarian identification, and their values and actions are embedded within the sectarian boundaries. Individual decisions and who to trust and the actual and



perceived behaviour of others reflect the group dynamics. When corruption is seen as ‘normal’ or group behaviour, people may be less willing to abstain from corruption or take the first step in implementing sanctions or reforms.

In fact, in societies with no formal social security system, faith furnishes backup support at the community level, similar to the joint family system, which serves as an informal type of social security in these countries. Indeed, both Roman Catholicism and Islam promote and emphasise the cult of the family. Nepotism, patronage and cronyism are the most obvious consequences of the joint family system, which promotes ‘amoral familism.’. Religious traditions are well known for influencing the level of nepotism, loyalties, and the shape of cultural stances towards social hierarchy. In Pakistan, when a bright young man lands a highly prized placement in Pakistan's prestigious central superior services, everyone in the joint and the extended family starts figuring out how to get some benefit (illegal, of course) out of his position. In such religious societies, appointments in various institutions and organisations often follow the procedure dubbed patron-client relation (Sakib 2019, p.362). Family ties in these countries approve activities that serve as a proxy for corruption, such as helping a relative get a job, pay fewer taxes, or get an un-merited promotion.

Theoretical underpinnings furnished by House et al. identify gender egalitarianism as one of the indicators of corruption (House, 2002). Thus, the societies that minimise gender role differences as homes, institutions and communities tend to have more women in a position of authority, assign women a more active status in society, allow women to play a more substantial role in decision making, and are not discriminated against in pursuit of job opportunities and show no discrimination in providing education to males and females, show lower levels of corruption. It is common knowledge that women have a more acute sense of justice and fair play



and are less involved in corrupt practices like graft and bribery. Empirical research shows a lesser incidence of corruption where women hold a large share of senior positions in the bureaucracy and more seats in the parliament (Swamy et al., 2001). Interestingly, Dollar et al. (2001) also claim that “ the presence of women in the higher echelons of the hierarchical structures exercises an extremely positive influence on the behaviour of their male colleagues by restraining, disciplining and elevating the latter’s behaviour” (p.424) (Dollar, Fisman, & Gatti, 2001).

Unfortunately, a highly conservative and retrogressive interpretation of Islam has brought about this state of affairs in Pakistan and Bangladesh – the two dominantly Muslim countries. Domination of orthodox, hierarchical religion has devised a patrilineal and patriarchal kinship system, which enforces the social and economic dependence of women on men and prescribes the relatively low status of women. Consequently, the participation of women in different spheres of life has been quite low compared to their male counterparts. Gender inequality has appeared as the major stumbling block in reducing the incidence of corruption in these countries. Ahmad & Aman (2021)

“The contemporary anti-feminist and misogynistic attitudes and practices in Muslim societies are an outgrowth of historical processes. . . . A large work in the Quranic interpretations and the laws and traditions had been produced during the first few centuries of Islamic history, the classical age of Islam. It was assimilated into Islam through commentaries and super commentaries on the Quran (Tafsir) and the narratives of the life and practices of the Prophet (A hadith) that enabled the textualisation of misogyny in Islam. Thus, the blend of history, culture, and widely varied religious teachings distorted the more progressive image of women and degraded them to the status of incompetent, weak and unfitted creatures. Moreover, this belief



endorsed gender hierarchy because women are inferior and subordinate to men in every department of life, which led to women's secondary role in the overall decision-making process." (p.125) (Ahmad, & Aman, 2021).

In the above context, gender gap or gender inequality appears to be a major problem for the Muslim countries professing an orthodox, conservative brand of faith. Since it is a matter of Sharia law that dictates women's role in society, it is all the more difficult to apply remedies or bring about a substantial change. Hierarchically structured religions have very hard and fast doctrines and practices that do not allow individuals space to challenge the retrogressive practices. This is particularly so in countries like Pakistan, where a hybrid brand of democracy is practised, and there is a nexus between the clergy and the state.

Conclusion

The present study has been directed at analysing and understanding the role of religion vis a vis corruption in Pakistan and Bangladesh – the two highly religious societies in the south **Asian** region. The study underscores Social factors and behavioural changes that have taken place due to the dominating cultural dimensions of religious orthodoxy and have significantly contributed to the spread and magnitude of corruption in Pakistan and Bangladesh. In a broader perspective, both countries suffer from a widespread prevalence of features that reflect power distance, masculinity, collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation. Consequently, focus on the individual is missing, inequality is tolerated, gender discrimination is accepted as natural, and injustice is considered providential. Historically, the two societies have generally betrayed a conservative mindset's retrogressive features. The inherent conservatism has been further strengthened due to the stranglehold of religious orthodoxy that has permeated societies during



the last 50 years. Religious orthodoxy has further promoted gender bias and idealised joint family systems that have substantially increased the incidence of corruption. Unfortunately, religious orthodoxy, joint family system, and patriarchy prevailing in Pakistan and Bangladesh have also become a major hurdle in development and growth.

Academic and Policy Recommendation

First, beginning with the academic recommendation, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and other Muslim countries may consider replicating a reformative movement like Protestantism so that rationalism and secularism become the overarching norms for these retrogressive societies. Second, in terms of policy recommendations, Pakistan and Bangladesh need to design their polity based on liberalism, secularism and pluralism, the cardinal principles of genuine Western-style democracy. This is imperative for their sustained social, political and economic growth.



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