

CONSERVATISM-RADICALISM AS RELATED TO RELIGIOUS ETHNICITY AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS: A CROSS-NATIONAL STUDY

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The study examines the impact of religious-ethnic group membership and socio-economic status on subjects' conservatism-radicalism tendencies in Bangladesh and India. The measure of SES and religious-ethnic group membership were used for the classification of the subjects and the measure of Conservatism-Radicalism (C-R) Scale was used as dependent variable. Two samples, one from Bangladesh and the other from India were employed. Each sample was composed of 180 male Ss. A 2 x 3 factorial ANOVA involving 2 levels of religious-ethnic group composition (BM/BH) and 3 levels of socio-economic status (high/ middle/ low) were computed for Bangladesh and India separately. The results indicate that in India Bengali Muslims were significantly more conservative as compared to Bengali Hindus. In Bangladesh, social class emerged as a crucial factor as Bengali Muslims of low socio-economic background showed significantly more conservatism as compared to the Muslims of high and middle social class. Again, Bengali Hindus of middle socio-economic background expressed significantly more conservatism than the Hindus of high and low social background.

Since the publication of epoch-making work by Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, and Sanford (1950), the studies in the area of socio-political attitudes have been attempted in their diverse forms and contents. A number of studies have been conducted to measure the attitudinal constellation of political behaviour originating in ideological preferences of the individuals (Meyer, 1968; Ray, 1979, 1982, 1984; Wilson & Patterson, 1968). Parallel to these studies, several researchers (Eysenck & Wilson, 1978; Kerlinger, 1984; Loyal, 1977; Rokeach, 1960) have emphasized on the construct of political behaviour

which resulted in the development of two-factor theories of personality and political attitudes. The two factors are popularly identified as radicalism-conservatism and toughness-tenderness. The present study has reflected on conservatism-radicalism of socio-political attitudes as related to religious-ethnic group composition and social stratification in the sequel of cross-national perspectives.

The genesis of the study in conservatism- radicalism is closely associated with the work of Eyesenck (1954). Eyesenck showed that political attitudes are structured around two orthogonal dimensions of radicalism versus conservatism as well as tough-minded versus tender-minded leading to the development of two extreme ideological poles of communism and fascism, respectively. According to Eyesenck, communism was characterized by the least ethnocentrism and more radicalism while fascism was found highly ethnocentric and contained conservatism in greater intensity. Furthermore, Eyesenck (1975) conducted a factor-analytic study and distinguished between (1) general conservative-radical ideology, (2) socio-economic conservatism versus socialism and (3) tough mindedness versus tender-mindedness. Consequently, Eyesenck interpreted his findings by making a demarcation between philosophical conservatism and class consciousness conservatism. The philosophical conservatism is characterized by anti-progressive attitudes and look back to the past while second type of conservatism is aimed at increasing the financial rewards expected by the middle class. Accordingly, Eyesenck showed that middle class people are more radical on the first type and less radical on the second type in comparison to lower class people.

The present study investigates the conservatism-radicalism as related to religious-ethnic group composition and socio-economic status in Bangladesh and India. The design of the study is 2 x 3 factorial design consisting of 2 levels of religious-ethnic group composition (Bengali Muslim/Bengali Hindu) and 3 levels of socio-economic status (high/middle/low) were used.

METHOD

Sample

Two samples, one from Bangladesh and the other from India (West Bengal) were used for data collection. Each sample included 180 Bengali speaking male Ss equally divided between Muslims and Hindus. Each group was equally subdivided into high, middle and low socio-economic status.

Instruments

Socio-economic Status Scale (Huq, 1985) was used for sample selection. The socio-economic status scale was developed in the context of Bangladesh and was based on parental education, occupation and income. The minimum score of this scale was zero and maximum score was 39. Ss falling between 0 - 9, 10 - 20 and 21 - 39 were considered as belonging to low, middle and high SES, respectively.

The Conservatism-Radicalism Scale used was developed for the measurement of socio-political attitudes in the context of Bangladesh (Ara, 1988). It was a five-point scale ranging from strong agreement to strong disagreement. The scale contained both positive and negative statements. Its positive statements expressed conservative attitudes and negative statements indicated radical attitudes. Strong agreement with positive items was given a credit of one and strong disagreement a credit of five. Scoring was reversed for negative items. Thus low score indicated conservatism and high score indicated radicalism. Split-half reliability was found to be .84.

RESULTS

The data were analysed by calculating a 2 x 3 factorial ANOVA consisting of two levels of religious-ethnic group composition (BM/BH) and three levels of socio-economic status (high/middle/low). The ANOVA were computed for Bangladesh and India separately (tables 1 & 2).

Table 1

Two Way Analysis of Variance on Socio-economic Status (SES) and Religious-Ethnic Group Membership in Bangladesh

Source of Variance	SS	df	Ms	F	p
SES (A)	699.92	2	349.96	3.03	.05
Group Composition (B)	2.45	1	2.45	0.02	n.s.
AB	3803.20	2	1901.60	16.49	.01
Within Group	20058.72	174	115.28		

Table 2

Two Way Analysis of Variance on Socio-economic Status (SES) and Religious-Ethnic Group Membership in India

Source of Variance	SS	df	Ms	F	p
SES(A)	492.24	2	246.12	1.31	n.s.
Group Composition (B)	1868.89	1	1868.89	9.96	.01
AB	66.14	2	33.57	0.18	n.s.
Within Group	32618.04	174	187.46		

The results showed that main effect for SES was statistically significant in Bangladesh. While main effect for

religious-ethnic group composition was statistically significant in India. A two-way interaction involving SES and religious-ethnic group composition was statistically significant in Bangladesh only.

Main effect for religious-ethnic group composition was statistically significant in India ($F, 1/174 = 9.67, p < 0.01$).

An inspection of mean scores and religious-ethnic belongingness (table 3) indicated that regardless of SES, Bengali Muslim Ss expressed significantly higher conservative attitude ($M=68.28$) than Bengali Hindu Ss ($M=74.72$). Stated alternately, Bengali Hindu Ss were more radical and less conservative while Bengali Muslim Ss were more conservative and less radical.

Table 3

Distribution of Conservatism-Radicalism Mean Scores in Religious-Ethnic Group Composition in India

Bengali Muslims (BM)	68.28
Bengali Hindus (BH)	74.72

The main effect for SES was statistically significant in Bangladesh ($F, 2/174 = 3.42, p < 0.05$).

Table 4

Distribution of Conservatism-Radicalism Mean Scores on Socio-economic Status (SES) in Bangladesh

SES	C-R Mean Scores
High	72.82a
Middle	68.12b
Low	68.68b

Note: Similar subscripts do not differ significantly. $p < 0.01$.

The mean scores on socio-economic status (table 3) showed that in Bangladesh Ss belonging to high socio-economic status ($M=72.82$) exhibited significantly more radical attitudes as compared to Ss with middle ($M=68.12$) and low ($M=68.68$) socio-economic background. In other words, regardless of religious-ethnic group composition, middle and low status Ss were more conservative and less radical while high status Ss were more radical and less conservative.

Interaction between SES and religious-ethnic group composition was statistically significant in Bangladesh ($F_{2/174}=16.47, p < 0.01$).

Table 5

Distribution of Conservatism-Radicalism Mean Scores on Socio-economic Status (SES) and Religious-ethnic Group Composition in Bangladesh

SES	Religious-ethnic Group Composition	
	BM	BH
High	72.27a	73.37a
Middle	74.17a	62.07b
Low	63.53b	73.83a

Note: Similar subscripts do not differ significantly. $p < 0.01$.

The comparison of mean scores (table 5) shows that high ($M=72.27$) and middle ($M=74.17$) status Ss of Bengali Muslims express significantly higher radicalism as compared to low status Ss ($M=63.37$) and low ($M=73.83$) status Ss exhibited significantly more radicalism in comparison to middle status ($M=62.07$). The findings indicate that low status Ss of Bengali Hindu tended to lay greater importance and higher value on radical ideological stance and exerted considerable influence in effecting interaction. This interaction is graphically presented in figure 1.

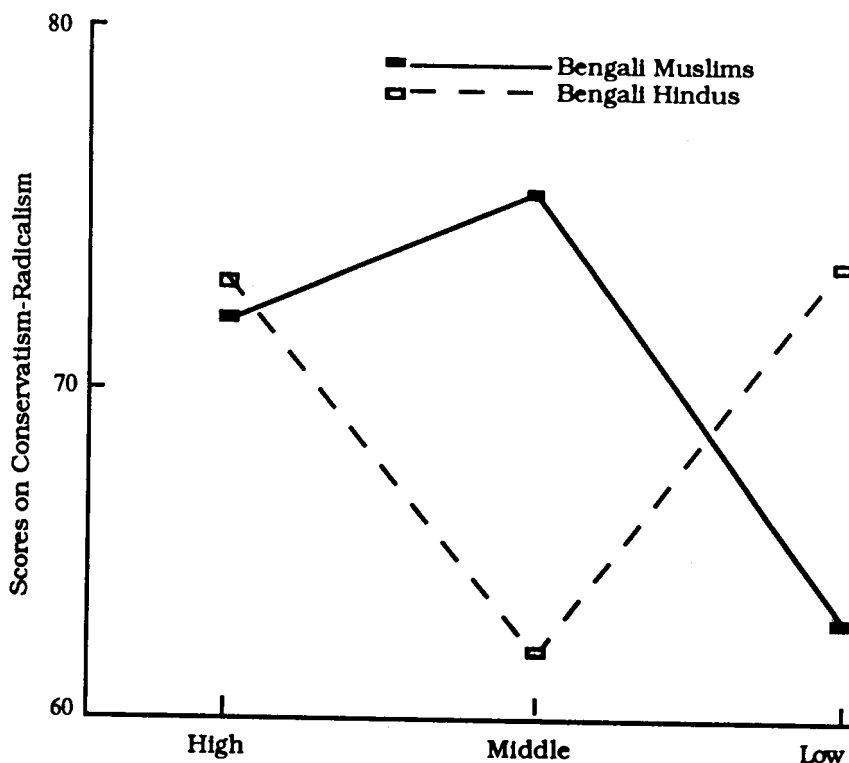


Figure 1. Two-way interaction between SES and ethnic group composition on Conservatism-Radicalism Scores

DISCUSSION

The study on conservatism-radicalism has been attempted in its multi-facet aspects in different countries covering manifold associative variables (Goertzel, 1987; Huq & Ara, 1985; Ward, 1986). The present investigation reflects on certain issues like religious ethnicity and social class as structural components responsible for differentiating in ideological orientation on conservative-radical poles. The findings showed that inter-cultural differences in terms of religion is a crucial factor for structuring the ideological preference in India. Thus, Indian Bengali Muslims were found more conservative as compared to Indian Bengali Hindus. However, social class does not appear to influence the cognitive structure for ideological preference in India. Thus, the utilization of religious-ethnic identity on religious dimension appeared as a

prominent factor for the growth and development of conservative or radical ideology. Furthermore, the radical position of Indian Bengali Hindus is indicative of the factor that they are supporters of social change. Indian Bengali Muslims, on the other hand, did not advocate for social change to the extent of their counterparts and showed respect to the tradition and maintained status quo instead of disparaging the inherited values, culture, belief-system and religious practices. One plausible explanation for this conservative stance of Indian Bengali Muslims is perhaps due to their feelings of 'Islamic brotherhood' leading to the development of positive social identity (Majeed & Ghosh, 1982). Thus, the efforts for maintaining group distinctiveness on the part of Indian Bengali Muslims have led them to hold conservative ideological viewpoints. Perhaps Indian Bengali Muslims emphasise religious distinctiveness and they do not think on linguistic lines in their group composition.

In Bangladesh, the results showed virtually no effect of religious ethnicity on the attitudinal differences in ideological frame of reference. Instead, social class emerged as crucial factor in the development of conservative or radical ideology. Thus, Bangladeshi Bengali Muslims of low socio-economic background were found more conservative as compared to the Muslims of high and middle social class. Again, Bangladeshi Bengali Hindus of middle social background were found more conservative than the Hindus of high and low social background. In other words, Muslims of low socio-economic background and Hindus with middle social class emerged as conservative groups who show adherence to orthodox way of life, maintain status quo and appear to resist social change. On the other hand, both Muslims and Hindus of high social class were found more radical. Again, middle status Muslims and low status Hindus were also found more radical. Thus, high status Muslims and Hindus, middle status Muslims and low status Hindus supported social change for the betterment of the people and progress of the nation.

One probable reason that accounts for the impact of social influence on conservative or radical ideology may be the growth of Bengali nationalism that has diminished religious ethnicity in favour of language. Language being the common denominator in Bangladeshi Muslims and Hindus, it has, to a considerable degree, helped to maintain an equilibrium in

religious-ethnic preference on religious matters. Consequently, social stratification in terms of high, middle and low status appeared as dominating factors in the constellation of ideological frame of reference on conservative or radical poles.

In conclusion, it may be said that the study has revealed and identified factors responsible for differential orientation in ideological preference across national boundary. The findings indicate that Bengali Muslims and Bengali Hindus used different strategies in their ideological orientation depending on national history to which they are exposed.

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