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- 3. W.H. Morris-Jones, "Pakistan Post-Mortem and the Roots of Bangladesh", *Political Quarterly*, Vol. 18 (April-June), 1972, pp. 187-200.

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# AN APPRAISAL OF CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION IN BANGLADESH: PROCEDURE AND PRACTICE

Hussain Mohmmad Fazlul Bari\*

#### **Abstract**

In absence of a separate investigating agency in Bangladesh, the investigating officers who belong to the police force are at times lagging behind the professionalism in wrapping up investigation of crimes for a plethora of reasons. In many instances the investigating officers are alleged to be discharging their duties in a casual manner. Though separate judicial magistracy started its journey about eight years ago, delayed, defective and biased investigation of crimes is one of the major stumbling blocks that haunt our crippling criminal justice system. Colonial rules, too much reliance on confession of the accused rather than evidence oriented way of investigation and heavy workloads of law enforcing agency are major causes for lackadaisical investigation. Many officers also tend to be conveniently indifferent to the modern trends and technical developments of investigation techniques and human rights of the accused. It is also critical that the investigating officers are well-versed with the essential ingredients of the offences they are investigating. The investigators are also often handicapped in undertaking effective investigation for want of modern gadgets and equipment etc. In this age, the crime detecting members can also in no way sideline the core human dignity of the accused. In this backdrop, this article explores the stumbling-blocks in criminal investigation and also offers a host of suggestions with the argument that reforms in the criminal justice system should be initiated first at the investigation stage.

#### I. Introduction

Apart from maintaining law and order by engaging themselves in prevention of crime and enforcement of laws in some petty offences, detection and investigation of crime, arrest of accused and collection of evidence are delicate duties of the members of the law enforcing agencies in Bangladesh. In absence of separate investigating agency, members of the police force who are rather busy in a myriad of issues, in general tend to investigate the criminal offences in a casual manner. In many cases the investigating officers are alleged to be inefficient,

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negligent and biased in discharging their duties. However, with the mammoth workload and poor working condition, members of the law enforcing agency especially elite force like Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) at times deserve kudos in detecting serious and organised crimes. Though separate judicial magistracy started its journey about eight years ago, defective and biased investigation of crimes is one of the major stumbling - blocks that haunt our crippling criminal justice system. Further, colonial rules, corruption, too much reliance on confession of the accused rather than evidence oriented way of investigation, alleged discourteous attitude towards public etc. are often alleged to be major causes for lack of confidence in the police force.

This article explores both primary sources including legislations, rules and regulations; and secondary sources including books, journals, law reports, periodicals and other resources from internet. Accordingly, an attempt has been made to explore the current procedure and practice of criminal investigation in Bangladesh. In particular, the challenges in the practice of investigation in Bangladesh are assessed. A host of suggestions are also offered with the assumption that the reforms in the criminal justice system should be initiated first at the investigation stage.

#### II. Development of police organisation in Bangladesh

Following direct control of the Indian subcontinent by the British Crown in 1858 which followed the abortive *sepoy* mutiny in 1857, massive legislative endeavours in the field of criminal justice took place; and Penal Code 1860 and Code of Criminal Procedure 1861 were enacted.<sup>2</sup> In tandem with the above Codes, Police Act 1861 was enacted for the implementation of the criminal laws. Under s. 12 of the Police Act 1860, Inspector General of Police (IGP) is empowered to frame orders and rules relating to organisation, classification and distribution of police force and also regarding the efficient services to be performed by them. Such orders and notifications issued by IGP got approval of the Provincial Government and those were incorporated into Police Regulations

In Bangladesh separate judicial magistracy started its journey on 1 November 2007 following pro-active intervention of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh in compliance of constitutional obligation of separation of judiciary from the executive organs of the state as enshrined in Article 22 of the Constitution. Also see, *Ministry of Finance v Masdar Hossain* 52 DLR (AD) 82. For a brief historical overview, see, Hussain M. F. Bari, "Separation of judiciary: How long will it take?" *The Daily Star*, 4 August 2004, available at http://archive.thedailystar.net/law/2004/08/04/vision.htm.

<sup>2</sup> S. M. A. Qadri, *Criminology*, (Eastern Book Company 1997), p. 304.

of Bengal in 1943.<sup>3</sup> Despite many political upheavals including achievement of our glorious independence in 1971, police organisation and functional activities even today largely revolve round above stated Police Act and PRB.

#### III. Purpose of criminal investigation

The central goal of a criminal investigation is to identify, gather and preserve evidence. Criminal investigation is a search for witnesses and evidence to support the charge in court by proving beyond any reasonable doubt that the crime was committed by the accused. To be more precise, a criminal investigation is an applied science that involves the study of facts, used to identify, locate and prove the guilt of a criminal. It necessarily encompasses searching, interviews, interrogations, evidence collection and preservation and various methods of investigation. Our apex court has rightly observed that law enjoins upon a police officer the duty of investigation into a crime. In discharge of the said statutory duty he has to embark upon a quest for the discovery of truth.<sup>4</sup> In fact, investigation is an official effort to uncover information about a crime. In criminal cases, the judge relies on the information presented to determine how the crime occurred and whether the person accused is guilty.

#### IV. Investigation of Crimes

#### (a) Initiation of criminal proceeding

A criminal proceeding is set in motion by filing a First Information Report (FIR) concerning commission of cognisable offence<sup>5</sup> to the officer-in-charge of a police station.<sup>6</sup> This is commonly known as GR case or police case.<sup>7</sup> An FIR may be lodged by any person, for it is meant just to set the machinery of law in action. <sup>8</sup> Further, a complaint may be instituted before a competent judicial Magistrate.<sup>9</sup> A police officer may investigate any cognisable offence without the order of the

5 Cognisable offence is one in which police may arrest the accused without warrant: Code of Criminal Procedure (V of 1898), s. 4(1)(f).

<sup>3</sup> See, Md. Hamidul Haque, "About First Information Report", Judicial Administration Training Institute Journal, Volume VII, 2008, pp. 7-15.

<sup>4</sup> Khorshed Alam v State 27 DLR 111.

<sup>6</sup> Code of Criminal Procedure (V of 1898), s. 154.

<sup>7</sup> GR cases are those cognisable cases which are entered in the General Register in Form No. (R)3 (as found in Criminal Rules and Orders Volume II, p. 44) in accordance with Rule 381(4) of Criminal Rules and Orders (Practice and Procedure of Subordinate Courts) 2009, Volume I.

<sup>8</sup> Shah Alam v State 42 DLR (AD) 446.

<sup>9</sup> Code of Criminal Procedure (V of 1898), s. 200,

Magistrate.<sup>10</sup> An officer-in-charge is legally bound to reduce an information of cognisable offence into a FIR and to investigation onto the case.<sup>11</sup> If he does not investigate the case as such, some reasons must be recorded and with such reasons he should notify the informant that he would not investigate into the case.<sup>12</sup>

#### (b) What is investigation?

According to Code of Criminal Procedure, 'investigation includes all the proceedings under the Code for the collection of evidence conducted by a police officer or by any person (other than a Magistrate) who is authorised by Magistrate'. Any step thus taken by a police officer or a person authorised by a Magistrate towards collection of evidence in regard to an offence falls within the ambit of investigation. An investigation follows the commission of such an offence and does not precede it. There is clear distinction between investigation and inquiry. Inquiry may be conducted by any person while investigation is always done by the members of the law enforcing agency.

#### (c) Who can investigate?

Generally, a police officer not below the rank of Sub Inspector (SI) is the investigation officer of a cognisable offence. Police has the statutory right to investigate into a cognisable offence whether a report is made to that effect or not and if reported, irrespective of the authority of the reporter. It may be noted that members of the Detective Branch (DB), Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) are also entrusted with the investigating power. Furthermore, members of the Metropolitan Police are engaged in criminal investigation in respective metropolitan area. Likewise, newly created Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) is entrusted with the investigation of crimes.

#### (d) Basic laws on investigation

Investigative officers must adhere to the Constitution of Bangladesh, <sup>17</sup> Code of Criminal Procedure (Code in brief), <sup>18</sup> concerned special laws, <sup>19</sup> Evidence Act, <sup>20</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, s. 156.

<sup>11</sup> Yasmin Sultana v Bangladesh 54 DLR 269.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Code of Criminal Procedure (V of 1898), s. 4(1)(*l*).

<sup>14</sup> Sajedul Hossain Chowdhury v State 7 BLC 635.

<sup>15</sup> Ghulam Abbas v State 20 DLR (WP) 48.

<sup>16</sup> Md. Hayat v Chief Settlement Officer 23 DLR (Lah.) 34.

<sup>17</sup> Constitution was adopted in 4 November 1971 and came into force on 16 December 1972.

Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act,<sup>21</sup> Criminal Rule and Orders,<sup>22</sup> Police Regulations of Bengal (PRB),<sup>23</sup> Convention against Torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment<sup>24</sup> and the judicial precedents.

#### (e) Supervising Court

Concerned Judicial Magistrate and other special tribunals and courts established for specific purposes are the supervising Courts to see how the investigation is done. There is no denying that an investigator enjoys an unfettered discretion while investigating a case and interference from any quarter is simply unwarranted, save any specific legal direction from the supervising court.<sup>25</sup> It is also settled that a court is not bound by the investigation report.

#### (f) Investigation steps

The Supreme Court of Bangladesh summarised the following steps which are included in the criminal investigation:<sup>26</sup>

- Proceeding to the spot;
- Ascertainment of facts and circumstances of the case;
- Discovery and arrest of suspected offender/s;
- Collection of evidence relating to commission of the offence alleged which may require examination of various persons including the accused and the reduction of their statements into writing if the officer thinks fit,
- The search of places or seizure of things considered necessary for the investigation and to be produced at the trial.
- Formation of opinion as to whether on the materials collected there is a case to place the accused before a court for trial and if so, taking necessary steps for the same by filing of a police report under section 173;
- 18 V of 1898.
- 19 For example, Nari o Shishu Nirjaton Domon Ain (Act VIII of 2000).
- 20 Act I of 1872.
- 21 Act of 2013.
- 22 Criminal Rules and Orders (Practice and Procedure of Subordinate Court) 2009.
- 23 Police Regulation of Bengal 1943.
- 24 Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (commonly known as CAT), 1984; Bangladesh ratified CAT on 5 October 1998. Available at http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ ProfessionalInterest/ Pages/ CAT.aspx. Last accessed 01 November 2015.
- 25 Abdul Salik v State 35 DLR 425; Bangladesh v Tan Kheng Hock 31 DLR (SC) 69; 1 PLD (Lah.) 87.
- 26 Mosharraf Hossain v State 30 DLR (SC) 112.

- Making a case diary (CD) containing the record of facts ascertained by the officer during investigation and action he has taken showing the time and date against every action he has taken.

After recording the police case<sup>27</sup> the officer-in-charge may himself/herself investigate the case or instructs a police officer not the below rank of sub inspector (SI) to investigate the same.<sup>28</sup> In practice, an investigating officer inspects the place of occurrence, prepares the sketch map along with the index of the spot, records the statements of the witnesses who are supposed to be acquainted with the facts and circumstance of the occurrence,<sup>29</sup> seizes the seized articles (*alamat*) and thus prepares the seizure lists in presence of witnesses,<sup>30</sup> arrests or tries to apprehend the accused and suspects and forwards them to the nearest Magistrate within 24( twenty four) hours of their arrest,<sup>31</sup> detains and interrogates them in his custody, prays for detention in his custody (remand),<sup>32</sup> produces the accused or victim before the Magistrate to have his confession/statement recorded,<sup>33</sup> sometimes conducts the inquest of the deceased victim,<sup>34</sup> conducts Test Identification Parade (TIP), sends the deceased for autopsy, collects medical certificates and other expert reports, maintains diary of proceedings of investigation,<sup>35</sup> and finally submits the police report.<sup>36</sup>

Following points will also highlight the investigation - procedure in greater details:

(i) Maintaining case-diary: The case-diary is a pen picture of facts, circumstances and other related activities and observation of the investigating officer in respect of alleged crime. It furnishes a ready reference on the premise of which police report is finally drawn up. Further, it is of greater use to refresh his/ her memory when the police officer testifies during trial. A court may call for case-diary from time to time and may use it as an aid to such inquiry or trial; however, it can

<sup>27</sup> FIR is written in BP form no. 27. Every occurrence which may be brought to the knowledge of the officers of police shall be entered in a book which is called General Diary. GD is recorded in BP Form no. 65 as referred to Police Act 1861, s. 44 and as detailed in Police Regulations of Bengal 1943, Regulation 377.

<sup>28</sup> Code of Criminal Procedure (V of 1898), s. 156.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, s. 161.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, s. 103.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, s. 61, Constitution, Art. 33.

<sup>32</sup> Code of Criminal Procedure (V of 1898), s. 167.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, s. 164; Nari o Shishu Nirjatan Daman Ain ((VIII of 2000), s. 22.

<sup>34</sup> Code of Criminal Procedure (V of 1898), s. 174.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, s. 172.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, s. 173.

never be used as evidence. Laws mandate the investigating officer to maintain a case-diary.<sup>37</sup> A case-diary is to be written in accordance with the instructions laid down in PRB and it has to be written in BP Form.<sup>38</sup> A case-diary generally contains the following:

- The time at which the information reached him;
- The time at which he started and wrapped up his investigation;
- The place/s visited by him;
- A statement of the circumstances ascertained through his investigation.

According to PRB, names of the witnesses, place and time of arrest of the accused and every step and clue of the case require to be mentioned in the case-diary.<sup>39</sup> It may be specifically pointed out that a case- diary maintained by the police cannot be treated as substantive evidence; however, it may be explored for the purpose of ascertaining the truth or otherwise of the evidence appearing in the case.<sup>40</sup>

(ii) *Inspecting the spot and preparing the sketch map*: According to Code, upon receiving the FIR, the concerned police officer is to send a report to the concerned cogisance Magistrate and shall proceed in person or depute his subordinate officers to the spot to investigate the occurrence. PRB also provides for similar guidelines for the investigating officer. However, inspection of the place of occurrence *per se* is not indispensable in a case where the offence alleged is not of a serious type and information is furnished against any person by name. According to PRB, a sketch map of the spot is to be prepared in the cases involving murder, dacoity, serious riot, mail robbery, highway robbery, extensive burglary, theft of value Taka 600 (six hundred) and above. Though a sketchmap of the place of occurrence is not legally required to be drafted in other offences, the investigating officer usually may prepare it at his discretion. Importance of sketch-map lies with its proximity with the spot of occurrence. It essentially gives a fair idea about the place of the occurrence to understand the evidence of the witnesses involving the alleged offences.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, s. 172.

<sup>38</sup> Police Regulations of Bengal 1943, Regulation 264, BP Form 38.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, Regulation 263.

<sup>40</sup> Abdus Sukur Mia v State 48 DLR 228.

<sup>41</sup> Code of Criminal Procedure (V of 1898), s. 157(1).

<sup>42</sup> Police Regulations of Bengal 1943, Regulation 258.

<sup>43</sup> Code of Criminal Procedure (V of 1898), s. 157(1)(a).

<sup>44</sup> Police Regulations of Bengal 1943, Regulation 273(a).

(iii) Recording of the statements of the witnesses: While investigating a police case (GR case), the investigating officer (IO) may require the attendance of any person who is supposed to be acquainted with facts and circumstances of the occurrence. 45 Investigating officer may examine orally such persons who are legally bound to answer his queries in connection with the occurrence, except those which may expose their criminal implications thereby. Oral examination of the witnesses as such requires to be reduced into writing. This is known as statements of witnesses recorded under section 161 of Code. Such statements of witnesses made before the police do not require to be signed by the persons making them. It is a settled principle of criminal jurisprudence that no statement made to a police is admissible as substantive evidence unless something definite is recovered or collected in connection with the previous statements of the accused. 46 The maker does not take any oath before making such statements. The statement recorded as such is no evidence in law.<sup>47</sup> It cannot be used by the prosecution to corroborate or contradict the statements of its maker. In other words, 'the statements of witnesses thus recorded under section 161 cannot be used by the prosecution, but can be used by the defence alone under section 162 of Code of Criminal Procedure 1898 to contradict the prosecution witnesses in the manner provided by section 145 of the Evidence Act 1872'.48

(iv) *Arrest of the accused:* A police officer may arrest an accused concerned in a cognisable offence without the permission of the Magistrate. A concerned police officer may take measures to arrest the accused. Even a police can arrest a person on mere suspicion. An investigating officer is to produce the arrestee within 24 hours of such arrest to the nearest Magistrate save the time spent in the journey.

(iv) *Search and seizure:* A police officer may conduct a search by observing the provisions as laid down in the Code.<sup>53</sup> An investigating officer should prepare a seizure list in BP Form in accordance with the provisions as laid down in PRB.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Code of Criminal Procedure (V of 1898), s. 160.

<sup>46</sup> See details, Evidence Act (I of 1872), ss. 25 -- 27.

<sup>47</sup> Ekabbar Ali v State 22 DLR 620; 53 CWN (DR. 1) 66.

<sup>48</sup> Hussain M. F. Bari, "To explore the statements of witnesses", *The Daily Star*, 28 October 2014, available at http://www.thedailystar.net/to-explore-statement-of-witness-effectively-47669. Last accessed on 1 November 2015.

Any reference to a Magistrate, without any qualifying word, shall be construed to be Judicial Magistrate: Code of Criminal Procedure (V of 1898), s. 4A(1)(a).

<sup>50</sup> Code of Criminal Procedure (V of 1898), s. 157(1).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, s. 54.

<sup>52</sup> Code of Criminal Procedure (V of 1898), s. 61; Constitution, Article 33.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, Ss. 102, 103,165, 166.

- (v) Reports of experts: Ante mortem, post mortem, chemical examination, DNA, Viscera, handwriting or fingerprint reports by the experts is an important step by which the investigating officer may ascertain the truth or otherwise of the allegations brought against the accused.
- (vi) *Inquest:* When the officer-in-charge of a police station or other authorised officer receives an information that a person has committed suicide or has been killed by another or by animal or by accident or has died under circumstances raising reasonable suspicion that someone has committed an offence and none is accused in the information, the officer starts an Unnatural Death (UD) case and after giving information to the nearest Executive Magistrate regarding the unnatural death proceeds to the place where the body is lying. He is required to hold an investigation, draws up a report of the apparent cause of the death describing the nature and marks of injuries found on the dead body stating what weapons or instruments were used to inflict such injuries.<sup>55</sup>
- (vii) *Autopsy:* Autopsy or post mortem examination is done by a forensic expert according to the direction of a Civil Surgeon. At least three doctors will append their signatures in the report. Concerned doctor will collect the relevant part of the body of the deceased for viscera examination. The investigating officer may seize the wearing apparels of the deceased for DNA test. Post mortem report is prepared in triplicate in BP Form.<sup>56</sup>
- (viii) *Exhume*: According to Code, an Executive Magistrate may cause the body of the deceased to be exhumed and examined for ascertaining the cause of his death.<sup>57</sup> However, in a case of serious nature concerned Judicial Magistrate should give the directions to the District Magistrate for taking necessary arrangements and further order thereto.<sup>58</sup>
- (ix) Dying declaration: A police officer, a Magistrate, a doctor or any person may record the statement of the person who is in imminent danger of death. A dying declaration made to a police officer shall be signed by the person making it and

<sup>54</sup> Police Regulations of Bengal, 1943, BP Form 44, Regulation 280.

<sup>55</sup> Code of Criminal Procedure (V of 1898), s. 174.

<sup>56</sup> See details, Police Regulations of Bengal 1943, Regulations 304-- 307 & BP Form

<sup>57</sup> Code of Criminal Procedure (V of 1898), s. 174(2).

<sup>58</sup> Abdullah Al Mamun, "Investigation and Inquiry at a glance under Code of Criminal Procedure 1898", *Judicial Administration Training Institute Journal*, volume 13, 2014, pp. 155- 167.

same must be attested by witnesses.<sup>59</sup> At the time of recording the dying declaration, provisions as laid down in section 164, 364 of the Code should be followed.

(xi) *Remand and examination of accused:* A police officer can retain the accused in his custody upto 24 (twenty four) hours for interrogation. The investigating officer may keep the accused into his custody beyond this period only with the permission of the Judicial Magistrate.<sup>60</sup> This is popularly known as remand. However, use of third degree method like torture for investigation is not legally tenable in the eye of law. While investigation in general and conducting interrogation in particular, the investigating officer should adhere to the detailed guidelines as declared by the Apex Court.<sup>61</sup>

(xii) Test Identification Parade (TIP): Importance of conducting TIP rests upon the ascertaining the person or property connected with the occurrence. The person or property under TIP should be mixed with similar kind of person or property whatsoever, preferably with 8 (eight) to 10 (ten) persons or property selected at random. It should be also be ensured that each identifying witness should be brought up singly and identification of such witness shall be conducted out of sight and hearing of the other witnesses. There must be a certificate to the effect that no previous communication has been possible between the police and the identifying witnesses.<sup>62</sup>

#### V. Police Report

Police report is the initial backbone of the criminal prosecution process. It is a record of the accusation and of the facts and events upon which the Court decides whether to take cognisance or not. After the investigation is wrapped up, the investigating officer is required to submit either the charge-sheet or the final Report. Words "final report" or "charge-sheet" are hidden in section 173 of the Code. Under this section the police can submit a police report either for prosecution or release of the accused persons. The investigating officer

<sup>59</sup> Police Regulations of Bengal 1943, Regulation 266.

<sup>60</sup> Code of Criminal Procedure (V of 1898), s. 167.

<sup>61</sup> BLAST v Bangladesh 55 DLR 363.

<sup>62</sup> For detail guidelines, see generally, Criminal Rules and Orders (Practice and Procedure for Subordinate Courts) 2007, Rule 77; Police Regulation of Bengal 1943, Regulation 282, BP Form no. 45.

<sup>63</sup> Code of Criminal Procedure (V of 1898), s. 173.

<sup>64</sup> Abdus Salam Master v State 16 DLR (AD) 58; Md. Zillur Rahim v Nazmul Karim 28 DLR 1.

necessarily enjoys the unfettered right on an investigation within the periphery of law, to submit either a charge-sheet or a final report in a particular case, without any interference from the court. It requires to be prepared in the prescribed form in accordance with PRB. Names of the informant, accused persons, suspects, nature of the accusation and names of the persons who appear to be acquainted with the facts and circumstances of the case should be mentioned in the report. Result of the investigation is informed to the informant in BP Form. Police Report requires to be submitted through superior officer appointed under Code.

Charge-sheet: Charge-sheet is a formal accusation against the accused to the court concerned for proceeding against the accused. It is submitted by following the laws and regulations as laid down in Code and PRB.<sup>68</sup> It is prepared in BP Form.<sup>69</sup> A charge-sheet filed before the court shall contain the matters as laid down in Code. 70 The police can file supplementary charge-sheet even after acceptance of the previous charge-sheet. There is neither any limitation nor any taboo in this regard.<sup>71</sup> The police may make further investigation in respect of an offence after submission of a report and submit a further report or supplementary charge-sheet in respect of any accused against whom evidence has been collected during further investigation, but Magistrate has no power to direct further investigation in respect of any accused persons against whom the police has once submitted a charge-sheet just to obtain a final report, nor can the police, after further investigation, submit final report in respect of a person against whom a charge-sheet was once submitted.<sup>72</sup> Police report cannot be used as evidence in the prosecution case.<sup>73</sup> Pending investigation by police the prayer for quashment of the matter under section 561A Code of is impermissible.<sup>74</sup>

*Final report:* Final report is also prepared in special form.<sup>75</sup> An investigating officer shall furnish a clear statement of the case and of the materials collected by

<sup>65</sup> Khorshed Alam v State 27 DLR 111.

<sup>66</sup> Police Regulations of Bengal 1943, BP Form 40, 40A.

<sup>67</sup> Code of Criminal Procedure (V of 1898), s. 158.

<sup>68</sup> Police Regulations of Bengal 1943, Regulation 272, Code of Criminal Procedure (V of (1898), s. 173.

<sup>69</sup> Police Regulation of Bengal 1943, BP Form 39.

<sup>70</sup> Code of Criminal Procedure (V of 1898), s. 173(1)(a).

<sup>71</sup> Sultan Ahmed alias Sentu v State 46 DLR 535.

<sup>72</sup> Golam Mostafa v State 47 DLR 563.

<sup>73</sup> State v Mofizuddin 10 BLC 93.

<sup>74</sup> Sheikh Ali Asgar v State 8 BLC 729.

<sup>75</sup> Police Regulations of Bengal 1943, BP Form 42.

him with the reasons for not sending up any person for trial. <sup>76</sup> Informant should be intimated about the outcome of the investigation through BP Form. <sup>77</sup> A police report in which an accused is recommended not to be prosecuted is ordinarily known as final report. There is no term specifically written like final report in the Code. However, this term is used in PRB to denote a report in which the investigating officer after investigation does not propose to prosecute any accused person even if he/ she had been implicated in the FIR. It is nevertheless well-decided that if the Magistrate is satisfied that a particular person has been improperly excluded from the charge-sheet, he may take cognisance against him on the basis of the same police report even if it is a final report. <sup>78</sup>

Final Report may be of five types:

FRT (Final Report True): Final Report True is filed when the offence or occurrence is true, however, there is no evidence available to implicate the accused.

FRF (Final Report as False): Such report is submitted when the version of the case is found totally false. In such a case, the investigating officer is to seek permission from the court to prosecute the informant under section 211 of the Penal Code 1860.

FRMF (Final Report as Mistake of Fact): This is filed where informant filed different version of the case than what was actually occurred.

FRML (Final Report as Mistake of Law): This is filed when a case is instituted in a totally wrong sections of laws.

FRNonCog: Such reports are filed when the investigating officer after investigation finds that only non-cognisable offence was committed. Obtaining the permission of concerned Judicial Magistrate is required for filing a prosecution report in such a case.

#### VI. Loopholes in criminal investigation

This part mainly deals with the functional discrepancies apparent in the investigation of crimes. Investigation of crime is quite frequently encumbered with the following major challenges in Bangladesh:

<sup>76</sup> Criminal Rules and Orders (Practice and Procedure of Subordinate Courts) 2009, Rule 76(1); Code of Criminal Procedure (V of 1898), s. 173(1)(b); Police Regulations of Bengal 1943, Regulation 278.

<sup>77</sup> Police Regulations of Bengal 1943, BP Form 43, 43A.

<sup>78</sup> Abdul Awal v Abdul Mannan 6 BCR (AD) 174; Munshi Lal Meah v Khan Abdul Jalil 1985 BLD 24.

(a) Duration of investigation: Code of Criminal Procedure does not provide for any specific time limit within which investigation is to be completed. However, there is a statutory indication in section 167(1) of Code that investigation is to be completed within 24 (twenty four) hours. Police Regulations also state that even most difficult criminal investigation should not take more than 15 (fifteen) days if the investigation goes at a stretch.<sup>79</sup> Justice Md. Azizul Hoque opined that the investigating officer should specifically pray for extension of time if the investigation could not be completed within time fixed by Magistrate. 80 Further, Code empowers the cognisance taking Magistrate or Sessions Judge to grant bail to the accused if investigation is not completed within 120 days and 180 days respectively.<sup>81</sup> However, such bail cannot be claimed as of right.<sup>82</sup> Code also specifically states that every investigation is to be completed without unnecessary delay.83 According PRB, investigating officer will complete investigation without break of continuity.<sup>84</sup> One may find those provisions illusory as police personnel are busy with myriad types of works for which investigation is prolonged for years. 85 Further, there is a trend in special legislations for providing particular time- frame for wrapping up the investigation. 86 However, in practice, such timeframe for conclusion of investigation appears to be mere directory.<sup>87</sup> In practice, delay in completing the investigation is a perennial challenge which buries the enthusiasm of the justice- seekers. Quite strangely, Criminal Investigating Department (CID), Detective Branch (DB) or even Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) usually takes longer period in completing investigation than the regular police force does. However, such specialised departments generally conduct investigation into complicated and clueless crimes. The upshot is that delayed investigation leads to delayed trial. Such a situation may prolong incarceration of

<sup>79</sup> Police Regulation of Bengal 1943, Regulation 261.

<sup>80</sup> Md. Azizul Hoque, *Todontokari Kormokorta ebong Magistrater Aashu Koronio*, (Universal Book House 2012), p. 35.

<sup>81</sup> Code of Criminal Procedure (V of 1898), s. 167(5).

<sup>82</sup> Major (Rtd.) M Khairuzzaman v State 3 BLC 344.

<sup>83</sup> Code of Criminal Procedure (V of 1898), s. 173(1).

<sup>84</sup> Police Regulation of Bengal 1943, Regulation 261(a).

<sup>85</sup> Abdullah Al Mamun, Op. cit., p. 155.

<sup>86</sup> For instance, s. 18 of the *Nari o Shishu Nirjaton Domon Ain* (VIII of 2000) contains that the failure of the investigating officer to wrap up the investigation within statutory time limit may be termed as inefficiency and misconduct of the investigating officer. However, such discretion is rarely exercised by the judges.

<sup>87</sup> Alhaj Mamtaj Meah v State 38 DLR (HCD) 152.

the accused persons pending their trial which may ultimately hit the constitutional guarantee of procedural fairness as well as their right to speedy trial.<sup>88</sup>

- (b) Delay in starting investigation: It is often alleged that the investigating officers are subjected to influence by the accused sides and thus make inordinate delay in starting the investigation. As a result, many clues and articles disappeared in the meantime. They also tend to make delay in questioning and thus recording statements of the witnesses. Likewise, they deliberately omit to record the relevant statements of the witnesses impleading the accused.
- (c) Non -recording of information on cognisable offence: In Bangladesh crime records are immensely increasing at an alarming rate. However, official recorded crime is a mere tip of ice berg as many of the crimes go unrecorded.<sup>89</sup> Though the rate of offence relating to violence against women has arisen consistently, such incidents largely remain unreported or substantially underreported.<sup>90</sup>
- (d) Lackadaiscal recording of statement of witnesses: In practice, investigating officers are not in the habit of recording the statements in black and white while examining the witnesses, but subsequently make a summary of what the witnesses said at the time of examination. They are alleged to prepare the record of those statements at their 'free time'. As a result, many vital points are found to be missing in their recorded statements. Many investigating officers appear to be oblivious to the importance of statements made under section 161 of Code. It also appears in many cases that accused persons are acquitted in view of sheer discrepancies in the statements of witnesses before and during trial.

It is not expected that investigating officer is required to record the statement of witnesses in minute details. It is also now decided that minor omissions in the statements of witnesses do not materially affect the merit of the prosecution case. It is also settled by the precedents that recording of witnesses' statements in some

<sup>88</sup> Ridwanul Haque, "Criminal Law and Constitution: The Relationship Revisited", Bangladesh Journal of Law, Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs, Special Issue, 2007, p. 45.

<sup>89</sup> Hussain M. F. Bari, "Plight of Victims of Crimes", *The Daily Star*, 6 May 2014, available at: http://www.thedailystar.net/ print\_post/plights-of-the-victims-of-crimes-22877. Last accessed 1 November 2015.

<sup>90</sup> Sharmin Jahan Tania, "Special Criminal Legislation for Violence against Women and Children: A Critical Examination", *Bangladesh Journal of Law*, Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs, Special Issue, 2007, p. 201.

<sup>91</sup> Md. Zakir Hossain, "Investigation and Trial of Criminal Cases: Challenges and Remedies", *Judicial Administration Training Institute Journal*, Volume XIII, 2014, p. 60

boiled form is quite irregular. If such form of statements causes substantial prejudice to the accused, the trial may be vitiated. Likewise, recording of joint statements of several persons is not proper in the eye of law. In delving into delicate right of accused, occasionally our apex Court skewed the evidence of witnesses out of consideration because they were examined by the investigating officer after long time. Recording of statement of witnesses after a long lapse of time positively casts serious doubt if no explanation is given for such inordinate delay. There is also chance of concoction and embellishment of prosecution story if the investigating officers are not vigilant enough to record the statements of the witnesses on time.

Apart from myriad of loopholes apparent in the investigation, lackadaisical and delayed recording of statements of the witnesses during investigation is a sure recipe to acquit the accused while discernable inconsistencies creep in between the statements of witnesses during investigation (before trial) and during trial.

- (e) Hazy sketch map of the spot: Sometimes sketch map and index of the place of occurrence are prepared without clear specification. In practice, the provisions of Police Regulation of Bengal 1943, Regulation 273 is hardly followed. It may put the trial court at bay to gauge the real facts and circumstances of the occurrence.<sup>95</sup>
- (f) Faulty search and seizure: Sometimes, alamat are seized in the police station long after the occurrence which is produced by the informant. It is the duty of the police officer to seize alamat at the place of occurrence or hospital immediately after the occurrence. Delayed seizure at some other place other than the relevant place of occurrence surely invites doubt. Sometime, seizure list witnesses are not local witnesses of the spot in contravention of provisions of section 103 of Code. Further, many a times the members of the police force intentionally obtains signature of the witnesses of the seizure list in blank pages at the spot and fill up the same in Police station after reaching there. Therefore, testimony of seizure list witnesses of such nature seriously casts a shadow over the veracity of the prosecution case. Further, cases involving murder, grievous hurt or sexual violence logically require some alamat like blood -stain wearing apparels/articles

<sup>92</sup> Sarafat v Crown 4 DLR 204; Md. Israfil v State 9 DLR 92.

<sup>93</sup> Alauddin alias Md. Alauddin v State 12 BLC 137; Sarafat Mondol v State 11 BLC 1; Moin Ullah v State 40 DLR 443.

<sup>94</sup> State v Al Hasib 59 DLR 653.

<sup>95</sup> Md. Zakir Hossain, Op. cit., p. 62.

etc. to be seized. In case of non- seizure of such vital articles, the investigating officer should assign explanation as to why such *alamat* was not seized.

- (g) Delay in collecting expert report: Criminal investigation is the process of determining the events that happened before, during and after a crime was committed. Multiple law enforcement officials are involved in the investigation including the investigating officers, forensic experts and laboratory analysts. The primary goal in a criminal investigation is to find evidence to bring the criminal to justice. There is also delay in collecting medical certificates and other expert reports which ultimately procrastinate the proceeding.
- (h) Less-explored forensic science: Criminal investigators now commonly employ many modern scientific techniques known collectively as forensic science. A criminal investigation is an undertaking that seeks, collects, and gathers evidence for a case or specific purpose. Criminal investigators undertake several scientific techniques in order to find the necessary evidence for a case. However, such avenue still remains largely unexplored in Bangladesh.
- (i) Remand: In many instances, investigating officers do not send a case diary along with remand prayer. As a result, accused is sent to the jail custody pending hearing of the remand prayer for some other date. In this way accused becomes acquainted with hardened criminals in jail custody and makes deliberate attempt to dodge the investigating officer even he is in remand in a subsequent date. Further, there is wide speculation that the many officers often resort to third degree method with a view to divulging the facts and accusation involving the accused. High Court Division observed that the very system of taking an accused on 'remand' for the purpose of interrogation and extortion of information by application of force is totally against the spirit and explicit provisions of the constitution.<sup>97</sup> In CPLA (Civil Petition Leave to Appeal) 498 of 2003, the Leave to Appeal was granted with the direction that the respondents be directed to observe and implement the directions in its letters and spirits till disposal of the appeal. Copy of the order of the superior court is transmitted to all Sessions Judges, Inspector General of Police, Chief Judicial Magistrates and Chief Metropolitan Magistrates for implementing these directions. 98 Furthermore, Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act 2013 has already been passed in

<sup>96</sup> See, Shahdeen Malik, "Arrest and Remand: Judicial Interpretation and Police Practice", *Bangladesh Journal of Law*, Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs (BILIA), Dhaka, Special Issue, 2007, pp. 259--292.

<sup>97</sup> BLAST v State 55 DLR 363.

<sup>98</sup> Vide no. Bichar-4/1 M-11/2010 dated 23/08/2010.

the Parliament as the first concrete step on the part of the government towards addressing impunity for police torture and custodial death.<sup>99</sup>

- *(j) Confession:* Keeping the accused for long in police custody before being forwarded to the Magistrate for recording his confession under section 164 of Code obviously destroys the veracity of such confession. <sup>100</sup> In this regard directions as laid down by the apex court have to be carefully followed. <sup>101</sup> A good investigating officer is one who is capable to sort out the person who desires to confess the occurrence. <sup>102</sup>
- (k) Plea of allibi: Sometimes the investigating officer submits the final report on the plea of alibi of the accused. However, section 169 of Code has not empowered the police officer to judge the credibility of the witnesses and to decide the plea of alibi. 103
- (1) Investigation by informant: Informant and investigating officer being the same officer is also fatal to the prosecution case if the reason is not plausibly explained.
- (m) Lack of legal perception about offence: It is also critical to a successful investigation that the investigating officers know the essential ingredients of the particular crime(s) they are investigating, otherwise they do not know what evidence to look for to support each of those crime's essential ingredients.
- (n) Use of third degree method and too much reliance on confession: It is widely believed that the investigating officer frequently resorts to the 'third degree method 'as investigation technique.<sup>104</sup> There is also tendency to compel the accused to make confessional statement stating his involvement to the alleged occurrence. In doing so, the investigating officers are at times oblivious to human rights and fundamental freedoms of the accused.

<sup>99</sup> See, Anirudha Nagar, "Putting the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act to the test", *The Daily Star*, 3 August 2014, available at http://www.thedailystar.net/ putting-the- torture-and- custodial-death-prevention-act-to-the-test- 35487. Last accessed 1 November 2015.

<sup>100</sup> A confessional statement is to be recorded in view of rules contained in ss. 164, 364 of Code of Criminal Procedure 1898 and rule 78, 79 of Criminal Rules and Orders (Practice and Procedure of Subordinate Courts), 2009. Form no (M) 45 is to be used for recording the statements of accused.

<sup>101</sup> State v Lalu Mia 30 DLR (AD)117.

<sup>102</sup> Saira Rahman Khan, "The Use and Abuse of the Laws of Confession in Bangladesh", *Bangladesh Journal of Law*, Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs (BILIA), Special Issue, 2007, pp. 79-106.

<sup>103</sup> Abdur Rouf v Jalaluddin 51 DLR (AD) 22.

<sup>104</sup> Shahdeen Malik, *Op. cit.*, p. 288.

- (o) Media parade: In many instances, the arrested accused or suspect is paraded with some obnoxious tagging before the media personnel to make confessional statement. In this way, there appears a substantial risk of serious prejudice to the administration of justice and consequently, right to fair trial of the accused is liable to be jeopardized.<sup>105</sup>
- (p) No effective conference of prosecutor and witnesses: There is no pre-trial conference between the investigating officer and the public prosecutor, and most the investigating officers have no knowledge on law of evidence. Investigating officers also feel reluctant to give testimony during trial though court issues all possible processes. Sometimes, during trial there is no trace of investigation officer who has been transferred to some other places. Further, victim and other prosecution witnesses also have no idea as to what have been written during investigation as their statements because such statements are never read over to them. It also appears that investigating officers are conveniently indifferent to the importance of statements made under section 161 of Code. It practice, there is no effective pre-trial meeting between the prosecutor and the prosecution witnesses which put the witnesses at bay during trial.
- (q) Plight of the victims of crimes: Our criminal justice system is quite often oblivious to the concerns of the victims of crime. Restorative justice paradigm requires that their needs are addressed sincerely and empathetically by the justice sector agencies. It is imperative that criminal justice professionals working with crime victims have a complete and thorough understanding of the devastating effects of crime on its victims.<sup>106</sup>
- (r) Lack of modern equipment: Police are quite handicapped in undertaking effective investigation for want of modern gadgets such as cameras, audio- visual surveillance equipment. Forensic science laboratories are scare.
- (s) *Illegible writing:* In practice, statements of the witnesses, First Information Report, seizure lists, Police Report are written in illegible shapes and patterns by the commercial scribes (popularly known as *Munshi*).

<sup>105</sup> Hussain M. F. Bari, "Media Trial in Bangladesh: Free Press vs. Fair Trial", *Media Asia*, Asian Media Information and Communication Centre & Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, Volume 41, Number 2, 2014, pp. 124-127.

<sup>106</sup> See, Abdullah- Al Faruque et al., "Victim Protection in Bangladesh: A critical appraisal of legal and institutional framework", *Bangladesh Journal of Law*, Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs (BILIA), Volume 13, Nos. 1&2, 2013, pp. 33-- 48. See, Hussain M. F. Bari, "Plight of Victims of Crimes", *The Daily Star*, 6 May 2014, available at: http://www.thedailystar.net/print\_post/plights-of-the-victims-of-crimes-22877; Last accessed 1 November 2015.

- (t) Wrong quotation of laws: Wrong quotations of title and sections of offence in the police report may create confusion.
- (u) Lack of efficient officer: Paucity of efficient and committed officers haunt our investigating agency. There is dearth of forensic and cyber experts in Police force. The investigation of crime is a highly technical specialised art requiring a lot of patience, expertise, training and clarity about legal position of the specific offences and subject- matter of investigation and socio- economic factors. It obviously requires specialisation and professionalism of a type not yet fully perceived by our agencies. 107
- (v) Lack of proper supervision: Lack of proper and effective supervision by senior police officers is also a contributing factor for lackadaisical investigation. 108

#### VII. Recommendations

The following measures are suggested to deal with the stumbling blocks in criminal investigation:

- (a) The concerned Judicial Magistrate should maintain professional supervision over the investigating functions of the investigating officers.
- (b) Judicial Magistrate should call for the case- diary from time to time to review the pen- picture of the development or otherwise of the investigation, if required.
- (c) Colonial enactments including Police Act, PRB, even Code of Criminal Procedure and Evidence Act require review so far as provisions relating to investigation of crime, evidence and trial are concerned.
- (d) It is expected that the investigating officers write down the versions of the witnesses without delay by their own hands or by some computer compose.
- (e) Sound recording of the speech of the witnesses in some compact disc form etc. should be introduced. This sound recording will accordingly form part of the police report.
- (f) Suggestion for appending the signatures of the witnesses in the recorded statements may be under consideration. Accordingly, relevant provisions of laws may be amended.
- (g) Recourse should be had to scientific study of crimes and involvement of the offenders by resorting to techniques of forensic science, rather than too much reliance on lackadaisical recording of oral testimony by the investigators.

<sup>107</sup> Ehsanul Haque Shomaji, Final Report on Proposed Amendments for The Code of Criminal Procedure 1898, unpublished paper, Dhaka, p. 8.

<sup>108</sup> According to Code of Criminal Procedure (V of 1898), s. 158, a superior police officer may be appointed to instruct the investigation through the officer-in- charge.

- (h) In case of investigation of heinous crimes, investigating officer may place the star prosecution witnesses before the concerned Magistrate to have their statements recorded.
- (i) Victims' rights should be high in the agenda of criminal justice reforms. Informant/ victim should be sensitised about their rights and duties.
- (j) Deliberate media parade of the accused requires to be reviewed in the sense that there is a subtle distinction between media activism and media trial.
- (k) Effective pre- trial conference of public prosecutor and prosecution witnesses is a must so that witnesses are well- supervised as to what exactly they will depose during trial.
- (l) Regular Police- Magistracy conference as contemplated in Criminal Rules & Orders is a must.  $^{109}$
- (m) National dialogue should be initiated regarding the plausibility of creation of an autonomous investigating agency.
- (n) Permanent and well- equipped prosecution office will help develop the professionalism and quality of criminal justice in the long run.
- (o) The development of infrastructure of criminal courts with the innovative exploration of modern technology is indispensable for proper administration of criminal justice.
- (p) The delinquent investigating officers should be admonished while efficient officers should be rewarded.
- (q) The judges, investigators, prosecutors should be well versed with modern practice, procedure and techniques of the investigation. Accordingly, they require to be trained- up and educated at home and abroad.

#### VIII. Concluding remarks

The dual role of the police for crime detection vis-a-vis maintenance of general law and order is not yet separated in Bangladesh. The members of the police force necessarily perform criminal investigation in addition to their day to day functions of maintaining law and order, which often result in poor investigation. In absence of a separate investigating agency coupled with other challenges apparent in their working conditions and procedure, our investigating officers are at times awfully lagging behind professionalism in wrapping up investigation. Many investigators save themselves from tedious task of collection of tiny and minute clues. Investigating officers heavily lean towards oral evidence, instead of concentrating on scientific and circumstantial evidence. Further, inherited

<sup>109</sup> Criminal Rules and Orders (Practice and Procedure of Subordinate Courts) 2009, Rule 481 mandates monthly police -magistracy conference.

<sup>110</sup> Md. Zakir Hossain, Op. cit., p. 60.

colonial mentality, too much reliance on confession of the accused rather than evidence oriented way of investigation, discourteous attitude towards public etc. are major causes for lack of confidence in police force which in turn, undermines the process of criminal justice. Factors such as heavy workload, insufficient time for rest and recreation, low pay structure, low public esteem of the profession, inadequate scope of promotion, frequent transfer, political-interference are also responsible for low morale of police force. Investigating agency is yet to gain the full confidence of the public as the investigating officers, in many cases, are found to be not discharging their duties to their full potentials. A service oriented, propeople and human rights oriented police force is considered as equally important for effective functioning of criminal justice system. There is no denying that proper investigation is *sine qua non* for a balanced criminal justice system.

The prime object of investigation is to detect the accused persons who have committed the offence. In this way the investigating officer has to collect evidence to be used during trial. Likewise, a faulty investigation leads to miscarriage of justice when there is faulty evidence. It is worth mentioning that investigation is the basic substratum upon which criminal trial is founded. There is no gainsaying that unsolved crimes, unsuccessful prosecutions, unpunished offenders and even wrongful convictions are indicative of perennial fallacy that our criminal justice system suffers from. I am of firm view that reforms in the criminal justice system should be initiated first at the investigation stage. In conclusion, I would like to quote the observations of Honourable High Court Division:

We have come across many cases in which due to faulty investigation accused get benefit of reasonable doubt in spite of consistent and uniform evidence of prosecution witnesses about the occurrence. As a result, people of our country have been losing faith in the present system of administration of justice mainly due to the failure of the police to properly investigate the case and collect the evidence. It is high time that the system of the investigation of the criminal cases by the police alone should either be abandoned or completely reformed. 114

<sup>111</sup> See, Abdullah Al Faruque, "Goals and Purposes of Criminal Justice", *Bangladesh Journal of Law*, Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs (BILIA), Special Issue, 2007, pp. 1-32.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Md. Zakir Hossain, Op. cit., p. 59.

<sup>114</sup> Ali Akbar v State 4 MLR 87.

# EXPORTABLE INDIAN COMMODITIES IN THE ACCOUNTS OF EARLY ARAB WRITERS

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#### Abstract

Trade relations between India and Arabia were extensive in the period before the advent of Islam. These commercial relations increased after the rise of Islam. With the spread of writing tradition among the Arabs some voyagers started to preserve their experiences in the form of books. These books contain description of trade routes, sea-ports and commercial commodities. In this paper an attempt has been taken to present a brief account on Indian (including Bengal) commodities according to the description of early Arab geographers and travellers. The paper will explore the position of India and Bengal in international trade in those early days.

#### Introduction

This is well-known that commerce of Arabia with India and Bengal is time-worn. Commercial ships had been frequenting between Arabian ports and southern coast of India. With the advent of Islam Arabs' seafaring got a new dimension, as a new purpose was added in seafaring that was preaching of Islam. Gradually the Arabs took the control of sea trade of Indian Ocean in their grip. Their sway continued until the arrival of the Europeans in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century. With the emergence of the Portuguese ships in the 15<sup>th</sup> century the dominance of the Arabs over Indian Ocean started to decline.

During the period of their dominance some Arab writers registered experiences of their voyages in their books. The first of its kind was written in the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century by a famous traveller, named Sulaiman the Merchant (851), who made a two-way sea journey from Arabia to China touching the Indian coast. In later periods more accounts of voyages appeared regularly. Those writings were not merely travelliterature. The writers intended to make their books guides for traders; so,

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they furnished them with the information of ports, trade-centres and commodities found there. Obviously, the description of Indian (also Bengal) ports and their commodities found place there.

This paper offers a list of goods and commodities traded by India and Bengal. The writers on which we depend are of three categories: a) travellers such as Sulaiman, whose accounts were sheer descriptions of his navigational experiences; b) geographers such as al-Mas'udi (896-956), who was also famous as a traveller, and a historian; and c) geographers such as Ibn Khurdzbeh (820-912). The paper will reveal contribution of India and Bengal to international trade in those early days. I have gathered scattered information of Arab writers and presented it in a combined fashion. The items of products will be presented in alphabetical order.

- 1. Aloe (العود): Aloe was the most attractive Indian product which drew the interest of Arab geographers and travellers. They described it elaborately including its types and qualities. It came from post-equator islands; however its tree, leaves or plantation system were not known to the Arabs. The water brings aloes in the direction of the north. There are several types of aloes, among them seven types are mentionable:
- 1.1. Hindi Aloe (العود الهندي) dried in the sea and was thrown ashore in a withered condition. It was strong and thick. To put it to test, it was filled and tossed upon water; if it did not submerge in water, it was not of ideal quality. If it submerged in water, it was of immaculate quality and there was nothing superior to that. Hindi aloe was found in Rahma and Tayuma.
- 1.2. Mandali Aloe (العود المندلي): This is only Qazwini (1203-1283) who mentions a type of aloe named *Mandali aloe* which was obtained in Mandal; however it did not grow there and its origin was not known to anyone. Yet, people related it to islands beyond the equator. It came to

3 This is the unanimous *Opinion* of the historians that Rahma or Ruhmi (رهمي) should be identified with Bengal. (Elliot & Dowson, *Op. cit.*, p. 361.

<sup>1</sup> H. M. Elliot & John Dowson, *The History of India as told by its own Historians*, (London: Trubner & Co. 1867) p. 96; S Muhammad Hussayn Nainar, *Arab Geographers' Knowledge of Southern India*, (Madras: The University of Madras, 1942), p. 184.

<sup>2</sup> Nainar, *Op. cit.*, p. 185.

<sup>4</sup> Ibn Khurdzbeh (ed. M. J. De. Goeje), *Kitab al-Masalikwa al-Mumalik* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), pp. 67-68.

<sup>5</sup> Location of this place has not been identified in modern map.

the north by sea-stream. It was heavy and hard after becoming dry. People tested it by throwing it in water, if the aloe submerged in water that was of the best quality and nothing was superior to it.<sup>6</sup>

- 1.3. Qāmaruni Aloe (العود القامروني): Qāmarun<sup>7</sup> was a neighboring kingdom of Ruhmi (Bengal). Its hilly areas produced aloes of superior quality and of pleasant fragrance. Qāmaruni aloe was imported to Samandar<sup>10</sup> from a distance of fifteen to twenty days' journey through a river of which the waters were sweet. This species drew the attention of traders from all over India and outsides. Some pilgrims conveyed Qāmaruni aloe as an offering to the idol of Multan and donated it to the clerics for the purpose of incensing the idol. From the priests, generally, the merchants purchased this quality of aloe which costs about two hundred dinars per mann. It often received the imprint of seal like wax to preserve its quality. The seal of the purpose of price its quality. The purchased this quality of aloe which costs about two preserve its quality.
- 1.4. Qumari Aloe (العود القصاري): Qumari aloe, which was full grown and well-soaked in plentiful water, was produced in and exported from a place named Qumar. This quality was dried in its growing place and was torn in the sea. The Kingdom of Multan earned huge amount of revenue from Qumari aloe although it did not produce this plant. Al-

<sup>6.</sup> في الماء فه و غايـة جـدا لـيس فوقـه خيـر منـه Qazwini (ed. Ferdinand Wüstenfeld), 'Ajaib al-Makhluqat wa Garaib al-Maujudat (Göttingen: Druck und Verlag der Dieterichschen Buchhandlung, 1848). 2:71

<sup>7</sup> There is no doubt that Qāmarun is a corruption of Kamarupa, the mediaeval term for Assam.

<sup>8</sup> Ibn Khurdzbeh, Op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>9</sup> وهناك من جبال قامرون. Al-Idrisi, *Nujhah al-Mushtaq fi Ikhtiraq al-Afaq* (Cairo: Maktaba al-Thaqafa al-Diniyyah, 2002) p.192-93.

<sup>10</sup> Karim claims firmly that Samandar should be identified with Chittagong and the sweet water, referred by Al-Idrisi and Ibn Khurdzbeh, is nothing but the river Brahmaputra. Abdul Karim, Social History of the Muslims in Bengal (Down to A.D. 1538) (Chittagong: BSIRC 1985), p. 31

<sup>11</sup> يحمل إليها العود من مسيرة خمسة عُشر يوما وعشرين يوما في ماء عذب من كامرون الله Ibn Khurdzbeh, Op.cit., pp. 63-64.

يحمل الرّجل منهم العود الهندي القامروني، حتى يأتي به إلى هذا الصّنم فيدفعه إلى السدنة 12 منه مائتي دينار، فالتجار يبتاعونه من هؤلاء البخور الصنم، ومن هذا العود ما قيمة المنا Al-Sirafi, Rihla al-Sirafi, (Abu Dhabi: Al-Mujamma' al-Thaqafi 1999). p. 85

القمار وهي الأرض التي يجلب ,Ibn Khurdzbh, *Op. cit.*, p. 68 وبقمار العود القماري Ibn Khurdzbh, *Op. cit.*, p. 68. The identification of Qumar is not certain; however, Nainar thinks that the term may be associated either with Khumayr (Cambodia) or Cape Comorin. Nainar, *Op. cit.*, 187.

Mas'udi says: 'the greatest part of the revenue of the king of Multan is derived from the rich present brought to the idol of the pure aloe-wood of Kumar, which is of the finest quality, and one *mann* of which is worth 200 dinars, for it is so genuine that it receives the impression of seal like wax.' According to Mas'udi and Qazwini *Qumari aloe* is the best variety.

- 1.5. Qaqulli Aloe (العود القاقلي): The reference to this genus of Indian aloes appears only in Ya'qubi's (897) *Fragmenta*, but he provides nothing other than the name. 15
- 1.6. Şanfi Aloe (العود الصنفي): Ṣanfi aloe was obtained in Ṣanf, a land towards the direction of China. There are two contrasting views on Ṣanfi aloe. Ya'qubi refers to few traders who hold that 'Ṣanfi aloe is better than Qaqulli aloe, and it has more delicious fragrance, clinging and safe from attracting others by its odor. There are also some who rank it above Qumari aloe for it sinks in water because it is good and heavy. 18

By contrast, Qazwini regards Ṣanfi aloe as the most ordinary quality. According to him there is very little difference between it and normal wood.<sup>19</sup>

**1.7. Saymuri Aloe** (العود الصيموري): Yaqut (1179-1229) and Qazwini mention a species of aloe which is obtained in Saymur<sup>20</sup> and they donot provide any details.

We want to make one thing clear that the aloe mentioned by the Arab writers is not aloe vera (NZKgVi i); rather this is agarwood, which is also known as oud, oodh, aloeswood and agar (AMi MO). The resin of this tree had been used to produce perfume and aromatic smoke in ancient and

و أكثر أموال صاحب الملتان مما يحمل إلى هذا الصنم من العود القماري الخالص الذي يبلغ ثمن الأوقية 14 Al-Mas'udi, Muruj al-Dhahab, (Beirut: Al-Maktabah al- 'Asriyyah, 2005), v. 1, p. 130.

<sup>15</sup> Nainar, Op. cit., p. 183.

<sup>16</sup> Sanf is identified with Champa.

<sup>17</sup> Nainar, Op. cit., p. 183.

<sup>18 .</sup> قالماء لُجودته وثقله. 18 Ibn Khurdzbeh, Op. وبها العود الصنفي وهو أفضل من القماري لأنه يغرق في الماء لُجودته وثقله. 18 . cit., p. 68.

<sup>19.</sup> العود الصنفي و هو أردأ أصناف العود ليس بينه وبين الحطب إلا فرق يسير Al-Qazwini, Op. cit., 2: 64.

<sup>20</sup> Qazwini, Op. cit., 2:64. Saymur may be identified with Shirur, a municipal council in the Pune district of the Indianstate of Maharashtra, which is located on the banks of the River Ghod.

medieval ages (also in modern age). The account of Arab travellers indicates that aloe wood is produced in many Indian kingdoms. This product occupies a prominent place in international trade and acts as an important source of revenue for kings as has already been mentioned by the authority of al-Mas'udi. This fact is endorsed by Yaqut who tells that the kings alongside the seashore take a tenth of the amount of aloes from the individuals who gather them on the shorelines.<sup>21</sup>

2. Ambergris(عنبر): Arab writers mention detailed information on ambergris including its growing place, types and processes of its collection.

Ambergris or 'anbar is a substance, which grows in mountains in the bottoms of the sea. It is as big as the size of a camel or of a big rock.<sup>22</sup> 'Anbars are of different colours such as white, black and dark bay colour. They are uprooted by the wind and violence of the waves during the winter season and thrown on the shore. They will be boiling ferociously and none could approach them because of the severity of heat and boiling. After a break of time wind beats on them and they become solidified. Then the people in the adjacent littoral land collect them.

*Anber* is of different types<sup>23</sup> depending on its resin. One of them is *anbar-hindi*, which is also branded as Karbalus, associated with the community known as Karbalus. The collectors carry it to some place near Oman where the captains buy it from them. This is also exported to Basra, Siraf and other places.<sup>24</sup>

**3. Bamboo** (خبزران):<sup>25</sup> Arab writers merely mention that bamboo grows in abundance in some Indian lands such as Kulam<sup>26</sup> and Sandan.<sup>27</sup>

This is told by Ya qubi; according to Abu Zaydits size is like a house. ويقع في هذه الجزائر عنبر عظيم القدر، فتقع القطعة مثل البيت ونحوه، وهذا العنبر ينبت في قعر البحر نباتا، فإذا اشتد هيجان البحر قفه من قعره مثل الفطر والكمأة Abu

Zayd, *Op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>21</sup> Nainar, Op. cit., p. 185.

<sup>23</sup> Other types include a) 'Anbar Shuhri (the best quality) produced on the coast of Shuhr; b) 'Anbar samaki – obtained through a fish; c) 'Anbar manakiri – obtained through khattaf a kind of sparrow; d) 'Anbar-zanji – that which comes from the Zanj to Aden; e) 'Anbar-Shalahit and f) 'Anbar-ququlli. See Nainar, Op. cit., p. 188.

<sup>24</sup> Al-Mas'udi, *Op. cit.*, pp. 117-18.

<sup>25</sup> Al-Idrisi, Op. cit., p. 182.

<sup>26</sup> There is no doubt that Kulam is associated with Kollam, an old seaport and city on the Laccavide sea coast in Indian state of Kerala.

- **4. Banana (حون**): Bananas are produced in many kingdoms and islands of India namely in Bullin, <sup>28</sup>Sandan and Saymur. <sup>29</sup>
- 5. Brazil Wood (بقم): see logwood.
- 6. Canna Indica (Lia): Canna Indica, a native plant of India, is grown all over this country especially in hilly areas of Utkin, Sindan, Mulai, Barus, Tana and Kuli. 31
- 7. Camphor (کافور): Camphor is obtained on the incline of a mountain between Kulam (Kollam) and Mandurqin (Madura). However, the best quality is obtained in and exported from Faysur.

Camphor is the kernel of the tree. The tree is cleft and camphor is taken from inside. Sometimes it is soft, sometimes hard, for it is the resin in the heart of the tree. If the rind is injured the camphor will flow from inside; if it is split, great pieces may be obtained from the interior, but it forces the tree to dwindle and to die.<sup>32</sup>

As indicated by Qazwini, the camphor acquired in Faysur is the best quality. It is said that camphor is found in substantial amounts in the years when there is much thunder, lighting and tremor. In less stormy years the camphor is found in less amounts.<sup>33</sup>

8. Chalk (طباشير): *Tabashir* (chalk) is not a plant; rather it is a product extracted from cannas and bamboos. The extraction procedure of *tabashir* is as follows:

The real article of *tabashir* is extracted from the roots of Indian canna. In the forest when cannas and bamboos become dried up, and the wind

<sup>27</sup> Sandan is identified with Sindhudurg, an administrative district in the state of Maharashtra in India. Nainar, Op. cit., p. 68

<sup>28</sup> Professor Minorsky suggests on the authority of Dr Barnett that Bullin is Baliapatam in Chirakkal Taluk, Malabar District. (*Hudud al-'Alam*trans. by V. Minorsky, p. 243, qt. in Nainar, *Op. cit.*, p. 31.)

<sup>29</sup> Al-Idrisi, Op. cit., p. 182; Nainar, Op. cit., pp. 66, 70.

<sup>30</sup> Utkin and Kuli lay in the Gulf of Cambay (Nainar, Op. cit., p. 53).

<sup>31.</sup> أو تكين، وهي أول أرض الهند ينبت القنا في جبالها. ..وبمُلي الفلفل والقنا ( المنافل الفلفل والقنا ). ( Jbn Khurdzbeh, Op. cit., p. 62;

الديبل وهي أول أرض الهند... وفي جبالها تنبت القنا الهندية. سندان...وبها تنبت القنا والخيزران. Al-Idrisi, Op. cit., pp. 181-82.

<sup>32</sup> Nainar, Op. cit., p. 195.

<sup>33.</sup> وذكروا أن الكافوريكثر في سنة فيها رعود وبروق ورجف وزلازل وإن قلّ ذلك كَان نقصاً في وجوده Al-Qazwini, Op. cit., 2:68.

blows on them, they abrade against one another, extreme heat is formed by friction, and they burst into flames and blaze. Sometimes the fire consumes an area of around fifty parasangs or more of the timberland.<sup>34</sup> Then the article of *tabashir* is taken from the roots of burnt bamboos. Sometimes it is adulterated by mixing it with the burnt bones of elephants.<sup>35</sup> As the raw material of *tabashir* comes from the roots of the above mentioned plants it is produced in areas where cannas and bamboos grow.

The sum drew out every year is three or four *mann*. One *mann* of this precious and much-needed stuff may be sold for five thousand *dirham* to one thousand *dinars*. It has strong demand in the international market as it is exported to all countries in the east and the west.<sup>36</sup>

- 9. Cardamom (القاقلة): Cardamom grows in the mountain north of Fandarina.<sup>37</sup> From there it is exported to all countries of the world. It grows like the grains of hemp and the grains are encased in pods.<sup>38</sup>
- 10. Cinnamon (دارصینی): Cinnamon is not a native to India. Only Qazwini and Yaqut speak of it. It is found in a place named Jajulla and exported to the rest of the world. The cinnamon tree is a free tree and not considered as individual belonging.<sup>39</sup>
- 11. Clove (هُنفْل): The clove is not also a commonly found product of India. Traders report that it is exported from Sufalat al-Hind and further regions. Some of it is zuhr (زهر); some of it is thamr (ثهر). The zuhr is small and looks like the branches of black hellebore. This is the most exceptional kind, for it is strong, dry, sharp-tasting and sweet to smell. The thamr of it is thick and looks like the seed of the date or the olive. It is said that it is the product of a big tree looking like the lote tree. (السدر).

وبجبالها (أعني تانة) وأرضها تنبت القدّا والطباشير يتخذ فيها من أصول القدّار والطباشير يغش بعظام 35 (Al-Idrisi, Op. cit., p. 191.)الفيل المحرقة والصافي منه ما كان من أصول هذا القصب الشركي.

37 Fandarina is associated with Pantalayini Kollam, one of the most historic places of Malabar (Nainar, *Op. cit.*, p. 35).

<sup>34</sup> Nainar, Op. cit., p. 192.

<sup>(</sup>Al-Idrisi, Op. cit., p. 191.) ومنها يحمل إلى سائر البلاد من المشارق والمغارب. 36

قندرينة... وتنبت في حوافيه القاقلة ومنها تحمل إلى سائر أقطار الأرض، ونبات القاقلة تكون أشبه 38 الشبدانج وتنبات الشهدانج ولها مزاود فيها بزرها Al-Idrisi, Op. cit., p. 191-92; translation is taken from Elliot, Op. cit., p. 90.

<sup>.</sup>Qazwini, 2:53 جاجلي... وبهذه المدينة شجرة الدارصيني، وهي شجر حر لا مالك له. 39

<sup>40</sup> Nainar, Op. cit., pp.196-97.

12. Coconut (בול באבל): Coconut is native to India. It grows all over India especially in Bullin, Kanja, Lulu, Sandan, Saymur, Subara and in the islands of *Harkand* sea. Abu Zayd narrates a startling story on making a whole ship with the coconut tree:

There are people, at Oman, who cross over the (Indian) islands that produce the coconut, carrying with them carpenters and such like tools; and having felled as much wood as they want, they let it dry, then strip off the leaves, and with the bark of the tree they spin a yarn, wherewith they sew the planks together, and so build a ship. Of the same wood they cut and round away a mast; of the leaves they weave their sails, and the bark they work into cordage. Having thus completed their vessel, they load her with coconuts, which they bring and sell at Oman. Thus is it that, from this tree alone, so many articles are convertible to use, as suffice not only to build and rig out a vessel, but to load her when she is completed, and in a trim to sail. 41

- 13. Costus (فسط): Among the Indian agro-products is Cost us which grows in Sandan, Subara and the island of Thara.<sup>42</sup> No other information about this item is found in the early Arabs' writings.
- **14.** Crystal (بلور): None other than Ibn Khurdzbeh speaks of Crystal. It is a very rare Indian product, which is obtained from Mulay and Sandan.<sup>43</sup>
- 15. Date Tree (النخيل): Sulaiman and Ibn al-Faqih al-Hamadani clearly affirm that there are no date trees either in China or in Hind.<sup>44</sup> However; Al-Idrisi differs from them to affirm that date tree grows in the island of Sandan.<sup>45</sup>
- 16. Fabrics (الثوب): Reference to Indian textile occurs very rarely in the writings of early Arab geographers and travellers. Though, some are very surprised with a type of textile found in Ruhmi (Bengal). Sulaiman, Al-Mas'udi and Ibn Khurdzbeh, all talk about this stuff; yet the account of the former is adequate: 'There is a stuff made in his country (Ruhmi)

<sup>41</sup> Abu Zayd, *Op. cit.*, pp. 85-86; See also Eusebious Renaudot, *Ancient Accounts of India and China by two Mohammedan Travellers* (London: Sam Harding, 1733), p. *a*: 89.

<sup>42.</sup> من نارجيل و الموبارة) جزيرة ثارة و هي صغيرة وفيها قليل من نارجيل و المطل عليه و Al-Idrisi, Op. cit., p. 182.

<sup>43.</sup> البحر الشرقي من الصين... ومن مُلي وسندان الفلفل و البلور و البلور الشرقي من الصين... ومن مُلي وسندان الفلفل و البلور Op. cit., p. 71 with fn.a.

<sup>44.</sup> وليس بالبلدين جميعا **نخل** 16 Ibn al-Faqih, *Kitab al-Buldan*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), p. 14. This fact is also endorsed by Istakhri, Ibn Hawqal and Maqdisi. Elliot and Dowson, *Op. cit.*, p. 38. Nainar, *Op. cit.*, pp. 66, 70.

<sup>45</sup> Al-Idrisi, Op. cit., p. 182.

which is not to be found elsewhere; so fine and delicate is this material that a dress made of it may be passed through a signet-ring. It is made of cotton and we have seen one of it. Obviously the writers point to *muslin cloth* for which Bengal was well-famed in pre-British era. Later writers like Minhaj-i-Siraj (1193-1259 C.E.), Ibn Battutah and almost all European travellers offer similar information about Bengal. It is widely believed that the British cut the hands of *muslin* artisans that resulted in perishing this industry.

17. Fruits (ثمر/فاکهة): Only Sulaiman and al-Idrisi talk about the fruits. As it has already been mentioned earlier that Sulaiman views that India and China did not have any date trees. They have other kinds of fruits in abundance. But in Hind pomegranate is the commonest. Al-Idrisi mentions some fruit-producing places such as Kaylkan, Lawa and Kanja. 48

We may affirm that Indian fruits draw little attention from the Arabs. This is probably due to their interest in exportable products and it is known to all that most of the fruits are putrescent, thus not suitable for export to distant lands.

18. Gold (فعب) and Silver (فضة): Both Sulaiman and Al-Masudi affirm that gold and silver are found in *Ruhmi* (Bengal). Ibn Khurdzbeh confirms that gold is also found in *Qamarun* (Assam). They do not furnish detailed information with respect to accessibility of gold and silver in these two kingdoms. These precious metals were found in plenitude in many rivers of Assam. The Tezpur grant of Vanamala affirms that the river Lauhitya (Brahmaputra) carried down gold-dust from the gold-bearing boundaries of the Kailasa Mountain. The dust of this prized metal is still found in the Brahmaputra and its tributaries. So

48 كنجة.. نارجيل و**فاكهة** كثيرة Al-Idrisi, *Op. cit.*, p. 192. These three are inland towns between Alimukam and Conjeevaram. Nainar, *Op. cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>47</sup> A. Karim, Op.cit. p. 29.

<sup>49.</sup> وفي بلاده ا**لذهب والفضة**. Abu Zaid, *Op. cit.*, p. 36; Al-Masudi, *Op. cit.*, v. 1, p. 132; وفي بلاده ا**لذهب** الكثير التناه (الذهب الكثير) Ibn Khurdzbeh, *Op. cit.*, p. 67.

<sup>50</sup> S L Baruah, *A Comprehensive History of Assam* (New Delhi: Munshiram Monoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd. 1985), p. 163; B C Allen, *Assam District Gazetteers* (Calcutta: City Press 1905), v. VIII, p. 198; See also my paper..

- 19. Honey (عسل): Istakhri (957), Ibn Hawqal (988) and Maqdisi (940-991) affirm that a large quantity of honey is obtained in Sandan (Sindhudurg) and Saymur (Shirur).<sup>51</sup>
- 20. Horn of Rhino (فرن الكركان): Watching rhino was an unprecedented experience for the Arabs. Both Sulaiman and al-Ma'sudi claim that the rhino was accessible in *Ruhmi* (Bengal). Ibn Khurdzbeh asserts that it was also found in *Qamarun* (Assam). All of them were so excited with this animal that they portrayed it in full details. The horn of this animal was sold and belts were made of it on the model of gold and silver ornaments; the kings of China would wear them (i.e. belts) and elites of this country contended to wear them and exaggerated their prices to the point that they sometimes paid up to two to four thousand dinars. The interest or greed for utilizing materials made of rhino-horns had pushed this rare animal to extinction in such degree that it has become a past memory in Bengal; however, Assam still has the glory of rhino although in limited numbers.<sup>52</sup>
- 21. Ivory (أورنشين): Generally the elephants were found all over the Indian kingdoms; mainly in Abina (أورنشين), Aurnashin (أورنشين), Kanauj (قنوج), Mansura (المنصورة), Ramini (المنصورة), Ramini (مانكير) and in Mankir (مانكير), the kingdom of the great Indian king Balhara. However, they were found in large number in Aurnashin from where elephants had been exported to all Indian territories. The kings of India competed in the acquisition of elephants and exaggerate in their prices and they looked at them with preserving eye. Elephants were used for several purposes including war and carrying loads and goods. 56

<sup>51</sup> Elliot and Dowson, Op. cit., p. 38. Nainar, Op. cit., pp. 66,70.

<sup>52</sup> Abu Zaid, *Op.cit.*, p. 35;EusebiousRenaudot, *Op. cit.*, p. *a*:17; Al-Mas'udi, *Op.cit.*, pp. 132-33; الذهب الكثير والكركدن Ibn Khurdzbeh, *Op. cit.*, p. 67; see also this article.

According to Nainar (1942) Abina (أبينـه) is Tamluk of Midnapore in West Bengal (85), while M A Rahim (1963) identified it with Burma. (1: 37).

<sup>54</sup> The majority of history researchers agree that Aurnashin (أفرنشين) is modern day Orissya (De Goeje, 1967: 43). However, M A Rahim alone tries to identify it with Arakan. Muhammad Abdur Rahim, Social and Cultural History of Bengal (Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society 1963), Vol. 1, p. 37.

<sup>55</sup> Ibn al-Faqih al-Hamadani (1967) places Ramini (الرامني) after Ceylon in the Sea of *Salahit* i.e. Malacca Strait. Thus, Ramini may be identified with Sumatra

<sup>56</sup> IbnRusta, Op. cit., p. 134; Al-Mas'udi, Op. cit., 129.

Elephants were so friendly with the people; however, this attitude was unable to save them from the avarice of the hunters. Being hunted by voracious persons, numerous elephants lost their lives. Ivories could be purchased all over India. The hunters would sell them to brokers who would distribute this valuable and appealing material among the global dealers. Al-Idrisi refers to an experienced trader that huge amount of Indian ivories (أنياب الغيل) had been exported to Aden and other ports of Arabia and Persia. 57

22. Logwood (بقتم): Many Indian lands, mainly Lulua, Kanja, Kulam would produce logwood tree or *Baqqam tree*. The plant of this tree looked like oleander. *Baqqam tree* was of two kinds; substandard quality, the other named amrun is excellent. Its fruit resembled that of carob and it posed a flavor like colocynth, thus it was not to be eaten. It is said that the root of *Baqqam tree* was utilized as an antidote for snakes' poison. 58

Here we would like to draw attention of the readers to the translation of Arabic term baqqam (بقم). All translators including Elliot and Nainar prefer to choose Brazil wood as English term for this tree. In contrast to their view we rather prefer the term logwood for the Arabic word Baqqam. Our writers inform that baqam tree resembled oleander tree, whereas Brazil wood did not have any resemblance with oleander. On the other hand, modern dictionaries give logwood as the English term for the Arabic word baqqam. The Arabic term, chosen by the lexicographers, for Brazil wood is Khashab al-Barazil (خشب البرازيك). So, we think, 'logwood' is a more accurate English term for baqqam.

- 23. Mango (أنجج): According to Istakhri, Ibn Hawkal and Maqdisi mangoes grew in Sindan and Saymur.<sup>61</sup> Other writers do not provide any information about this fruit.
- 24. Mines: Some mineral resources -mainly sulphur and copper- have been mentioned by the Arabs. In Kullam there was a mine of yellow

58 اللولوا و كنجة...وينبت بأرضهما البقم كثيرا ونبات البقم شبيه بنبات الدفلى Al-Idrisi, Op. cit., p. 192; وفيها بقم يغرس Al-Qazwini, Op. cit., 2:70; وكولم...وبها البقم يغرس غرساوحمله شبه الخرنوب وطعمه مثل العلقم ولا يؤكل ويقال إن عروقه شفاء من سم غرساوحمله شبه الخرنوب وطعمه مثل العلقم ولا يؤكل ويقال إن عروقه شفاء من سم غرساوحمله شاعة. المالة على الما

<sup>57</sup> Al-Idrisi, Op. cit., p. 54.

<sup>59</sup> Ruhi al-Ba'labakki, *Al-Mawrid* (Beirut: Dar al-'ilm li al-Malayeen, 1997), p. 244.

<sup>60</sup> Munir al-Ba'labakki, Al-Mawrid, (Beirut: Dar al-'ilm li al-Malayeen, 1997), p. 125.

<sup>61</sup> Elliot and Dowson, Op. cit., p.38.

sulphur (معدن الكبريت الأصفر) and of copper (معدن الكبريت الأصفر). The coagulated vapour of copper makes excellent *tutiya* (zinc). <sup>62</sup>

25. Myrobalan (الاهليج): It is only Yaqut who speaks about myrobalan and its kinds. A little amount of myrobalan was acquired in Kulam. But this was inferior to myrobalan obtained in Kabul, as the latter was a land-locked city and far from sea and a wide range of myrobalan was found there.

The kind of myrobalan which was dropped by the wind from ripe tree was yellow in colour, sour and cold; that which was picked up from the tree in appropriate season was called *kabuli*; it was sweet and hot; that which was left in tree during winter till its shade changed to dark was called *al-aswad*, it is bitter and acrid.<sup>63</sup>

- 26. Pearls (اللؤلو): Only Dimishqi and al-Idrisi talk about pearls. The former notes that the city of Fufal<sup>64</sup> comprised a large area which includes diving places for small pearls (مخاص اللؤلو). <sup>65</sup>Another diving place for pearls was Subara; al-Idrisi informs that some inhabitants of this city would fish for pearls here. <sup>66</sup>
- 27. Pepper (الفافان): Pepper is the second most attractive Indian product (after aloewood) which allures the Arabs. Most of the early Arab geographers and travellers speak of pepper.

Pepper grew in many Indian lands, mainly in Barus, Fandarina, Jarbatan, Manjarur, Malibar, Manibar, Mulai, Mali, Kawlam and Sandan. Mulai or Mali (Kollam in modern Kerala) was famous as *the land of pepper*, for this plant grew there in abundance. And there pepper was loaded in ships. To

<sup>62 .</sup>وبها معدن الكبريت الأصفر ومعدن النحاس ينعقد دخانه توتباء جيدا. Qazwini, Op. cit., 2:70; Elliot and Dowson, Op. cit., p. 96.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p. 200.

<sup>64</sup> Fufal has been identified with Bekal.

<sup>65</sup> Nainar, Op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>66</sup> وبها مصايد ومغايص اللؤلؤ Al-Idrisi, Op. cit., p. 182; Elliot and Dowson, Op. cit., p. 84.

وبجزيرة مَلِي ينبت شجر الفلفل ولا يكون إلا بها أو بفندرية أو بجرباتن ولا يوجد شيء إلا بهذه البلاد 67 Al-Idrisi, Op. cit., p. 182-83.

<sup>68</sup> Malibar and Manibar are corruptions of Malabar.

<sup>69</sup> Mulai (کولم ملي), Mali (کولم), Kawlam (کولم) and Kwlam Mali(کولم ملي) are different corruptions of Kollam.

<sup>70</sup> Abu Zayd, Op. cit., p. 48; Nainar, Op. cit., p. 47, 57.

Yaqut and Qazwini leave the following description about pepper. The pepper plant was a common one in Malibar. It was a free plant without a processor. Water was always under it. The crop dropped and shrunk as the wind blew. Then the fallen pepper was gathered from above water and the king imposed an excise on it. It would always bear a crop both summer and winter. The fruit was in bunches. When the sun was hot, a number of leaves shroud the bunch so that it might not be burned by the sun. When the sun would go off it, these leaves would also go off. This is evident that Yaqut and Qazwini give wrong information about the action of the leaves with the heat of the sun.

Ibn Khurdzbeh leaves much debatable description as he writes, "The navigators state that the leaves curl over the bunches to protect them from the rain and that they return to their natural position when the rain is over." Apparently this unusual description is not factual. Al-Idrisi terms it as a surprising fact. Nainar, however, tries to give a rational explanation. 74

The *Malabari pepper* holds a strong position in international market; it is exported to the far-east and the last point of the west. And the people that gain most from pepper-trade are the Franks who carry it in the sea of Syria to the farthest west.<sup>75</sup>

- 28. Perfume (النبات العطن): Al-Idrisi tells that the mountains of *Saymur* produce many aromatic plants, which are exported to the rest of the world. According to Dimishqi, many brands of perfumes are found in Kulam. Kulam. 77
- **29. Rhubarb** (الروائد): Rhubarb was a gourd obtained in Kulam. It was inferior to China Rhubarb. Its leaves were the *sadaj al-Hindi* and were held in great reverence as a medicine for the eyes. 78

وذكر البحريون أن علي كل عنقود من عناقيد الفلفل ورقة نكنه من المطر فإذا انفطع المطر 27. Ibn Khurdzbeh, Op. cit., pp. 62-63.

<sup>71</sup> Qazwini, p. 82

<sup>73</sup> Al-Idrisi, Op. cit., p. 183.

<sup>74</sup> Nainar, Op. cit., p. 202.

<sup>75.</sup> وأكثر الناس انتفاعا به الفرنج يحملونه في بحر الشام إلى أقصى المغرب. 75. Qazwini, Op. cit., 2:82.

<sup>76.</sup> صيمور.. وبجبالها كثير من النبات العطر المحمول إلى سائر الأفاق . Al-Idrisi, Op. cit., p. 182; Elliot an Dowson, Op. cit., p. 85.

<sup>77</sup> Nainar, Op. cit., p. 47.

كولم...وبها الرواند وهو قرع ينبت هناك ورقه الساذج الهندي العزيز الوجود لأجل أدوية 78 كولم...وبها الرواند وهو قرع ينبت هناك ورقه الساذج الهندي العزيز الوجود لأجل أدوية 78 كولم...وبها الرواند

- 30. Rice (غر): Rice was the most common Indian paddy which grew all over the country, particularly in Babattan, Bullin, Jabartan, Kanja, Kaylkan, Kuli, Samandar, Sinjili, Sandan, Saymur and other areas. Rice, not wheat, was their main food.
- **31. Sandal Wood** (الصندل): Sandal wood was not a common Indian plant. It grew only in the plains and mountains of Mandari and Najaba. 80
- **32.** Sandarac (سندروس): A little amount of Sandarac, a rare product of India, was found in Kulam. This was of inferior quality, while the better quality was found in China.<sup>81</sup>
- 33. Sandals (النعال): Al-Mas'udi mentions a brand of sandal known as *Kanbayan* made in a city of the same name and in the neighbouring towns like Sandan and Subara. 82
- **34. Magnet stone** (مغناطیس): Magnetized stone was found in Kulam. When it was heated by scraping, it magnetized things.  $^{83}$
- **35. Teak (سناج)**: India was famous for its high quality teak tree, which grew in many areas particularly in Kulam and Sandan. However, it was produced in such quantity in Kamkam<sup>85</sup> that this land was known as *the land of teak* (بلاد الساح). And the species grown in Kulam was huge and tall, exceeding even a hundred cubits. However, it was produced in such quantity in Kamkam<sup>85</sup>.
- **36.** Vases (غضاير): Vases were manufactured in Kulam and sold in Arab countries in the name of Chinese brand, but they were not Chinese, for the Chinese clay was harder than Kulam clay and more fire-resisting. And the Kulam vases were blackish, while those of China were white and of other colours.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Ibn Khurdzbeh, *Op. cit.*, p. 63, Al-Idrisi, *Op. cit.*, pp. 181, 189, 191-95, 197. ما الأرز فقط. Al-Hamadani, *Op. cit.*, p. 14

<sup>80 .</sup> Ibn Rusta, Op. cit., p. 135. نجابة ...ولهم الصندل الأحمر في بلادهم وغياضهم.

<sup>81</sup> Nainar, Op. cit., p. 205.

<sup>82</sup> Nainar, Op. cit., p. 205-06.

<sup>83</sup> Nainar, Op. cit., p. 206.

وهو إنه ملك ملوك الهند وهو "Ibn Khurdzbeh, Op. cit., p. 67 اسندان. بها سُعاج وقنا الهرا إنه ملك ملوك الهند وهو "Ibn Rusta, Op. cit., p. 134 في بلاده يقال له الكمكم.. وبلاده بلاد الساج ومنها يجلب

<sup>85</sup> Kamkam has been identified with *Konkan*. The ancient and medieval Konkan has been distributed in modern map among some coastal districts of western Indian states of Maharashtra, Goa and Karnataka, namely Mumbai, Palghar, Raigad, Ratnagiri, Sindhudurg, North Goa and South Goa. Nainar, *Op. cit.*, 41; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Konkan.

<sup>...</sup>وبها منابت الساج المفرط الطول ربما جاوز مائة ذراع وأكثر ...وبها منابت الساج المفرط الطول ربما جاوز مائة ذراع وأكثر ...86

كولم.. وتعمل بها غضاير تباع في بلادنا على أنه صيني وليس كذلك لأن طين الصين أصلب 87 من طين كولم وأصبر على النار وغضاير كولم لونها أدكن وغضاير الصين أبيض وغيره Al-Qazwini, Op. cit., p. 2:70; Nainar, Op. cit., p. 206.

**37. Wheat (حنطة)**: Wheat grew in Kaylkan, Lawa and Kanja; but Indians did not normally eat wheat; their main food was rice.<sup>88</sup>

#### Conclusion

In this paper I have described exportable India commodities as narrated by the early Arab geographers and travellers. It has been observed that ancient India and the Bengal region had many products which commanded immense demand in the international markets. It has also been reflected here that our writers' interest was confined to the exportable goods of India; thus their writings became guidebooks for the traders. Those accounts are still considered important registers of information about ancient and early mediaeval India.

<sup>88</sup> Ibn Khurdazbeh, Op. cit., p. 63; Al-Hamadani, Op. cit., p. 14.

# ATTRIBUTING VOICE TO THE MUTE IN *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*: A SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE SUBALTERN OTHER

Md. Hafijur Rahman\*

#### Abstract

Arundhuti Roy's *The God of Small Things* is primarily a portrayal of social evil, political and religious tension, an exploration of cultural alienation and an analysis of innumerable dislocations and conflicts in a traditional society under the impact of neo-colonial advancement and industrialization. It may be called a modern classic for its realistic fabrication of political malpractices, personal relationships, caste and class conflicts, and traumatic experience of family feuds, shattered faith, love, marriage, conjugal discord and sex. At the microlevel it is also a story of alienation, loss of identity and subalternization of women with irresistible male dominance. The subalternization of women and the 'dalits' in *The God of Small Things* results in the protest of the mute, a protest of the voiceless. The novel becomes a vehicle of protest for the subaltern other—the marginalized and the voiceless. The study analyzes the nature and dynamics of subaletrnization in post- independent Indian society. It also incorporates the possibility of the emergence of a new society out of the rebelliousness of women in voicing their rights and identity.

#### Introduction

Arundhuti Roy's *The God of Small Things* is a penetrating story of resistance of the subaltern "other" projected through the narrative of Ammu-Velutha and Rahel-Estha relationships. An engaged study and in-depth analysis of the novel will reveal that male subjugation, patriarchy, colonial legacy, gender discrimination, class conflicts, political hegemony and economic discrepancy have greatly contributed to relegate women and untouchables or 'dalits' to the position of the subaltern "other". More importantly, Arundhuti Roy attributes voice to the subaltern "other", the untouchable and the voiceless in her fiction *The God of Small Things*. The novel articulates the protest of the subaltern "other" against the patriarchal system of oppression and exploitation, communist establishment, misdemeanor of public administration, the legal union of two

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sexes called settled marriage, the role of Christian maternal system, Christian priests and so on. Roy's bias for the revolutionary zeal and resistance mentality of the subalterns becomes obvious from her comments made now and again throughout the novel. Her intentions in presenting Ammu and Velutha as the protagonists of the novel and as her spokespersons also bear the testimony of her support for the cause of subalterns. Roy has attributed voice to them. She wants them to speak, speak up and speak out to secure their rightful place in society. Her mission is to see or help build up a society free from gender discrimination, contentions of power between the powerful and the powerless, racial prejudice, class conflicts and economic disparity.

Arundhuti Roy dives deep into the root of subalterns' problems by excavating the factors active behind their germination, growth and expansion in Indian society. The practice of subalternization has been advanced by vested groups in society to ensure the status quo of the same. 1 By using social, political, religious and state apparatuses, the vested groups which stand at the top of the ladder of social hierarchy, always aspire to perpetuate their interests through the subalternization of women, untouchables and the underprivileged. In this regard the vested groups are united and they are accomplices of each other to maintain their status quo as they are scared of the rise of the subaltern other and of losing their power. Psychological factors such as "Feelings of contempt born of inchoate, unacknowledged fear-civilization's fear of nature, men's fear of women, power's fear of powerlessness" have made subalterns condition more vulnerable. Besides, the colonial mentality of controlling 'the second sex' through gender discrimination; the capitalistic attitude of maximizing economic gains and controlling a society or a nation through consumerism, financial exploitation, and cultural subjugation; the materialistic attitude of monopolizing political hold through suppression, oppression by applying a divide and rule policy and by using state apparatuses like civil administration and the judiciary in the name of establishing law and order or "civilizing the uncivilized" results in the subalternization of women, the weak and untouchables in Indian society. Male egotism, religious bigotry, the capitalistic culture of treating women as merely sex objects and colonial legacies have also greatly contributed to the intensification of the process of subalternization. Indian women's sensibility is also no less responsible for the problem of subalternization as majority of women in India, on an average and with few exceptions are in possession of an inherent

<sup>1</sup> Vinay Bhal, "Relevance (or irrelevance) of Subaltern Studies." Reading Subaltern Studies. Ed. David Ludden. Delhi: Permanent black, 2001, pp. 45-57

<sup>2</sup> A. Roy, The God of Small Things, New Delhi: India Ink, 1997, pp. 308

belief that women are inferior both physically and intellectually to their male counterparts. They are caught in the net of the male-made image of women whom the scholars call *Sati Parvati, Sati Savitri, Sita, Gandhari* and so on. These names are the victimized image of women who are generally viewed by the majority of Indians as delicate in nature, soft at heart, submissive in attitude, mild in behavior and meek and mute in asserting their identity or entity, needs or rights<sup>3</sup>. Simone de Beauvoir<sup>4</sup> has stated in her book *The Second Sex* that 'Women are not born, they are made, woman is an invention of man.' So, the question of power comes, it is found that women are oppressed, restrained, subordinated, molded, used and abused by men.

Roy has also expressed her deep concern in many a place in the novel about the consequences and the socio-psychological impact of subalternization. Subalternization has immensely, in a negative way, affected the feminine sensibility and the individual psyche at the micro-level and Indian society at the macro-level as well. Arundhuti Roy's *The God of Small Things* has ruthlessly but faithfully exposed these dark aspects of Indian society.

### Literature Review

The term 'subaltern' owes its origin to the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci,<sup>5</sup> who used the word as a surrogate for the term "proletarian class" in order to counter Fascism in the 1920s and 1930s. The term 'subaltern' underlines a subordinate position in terms of caste, class, gender, race and culture. Subsequently, subaltern studies derived its force as postcolonial criticism from a catachrestic combination of Marxism, Post-Structuralism, Gramsci and Foucault, the modern west and India, archival research and textual criticism.<sup>6</sup> Subaltern Studies is viewed by many as a postcolonial mode of criticism and postcolonial issues. Subaltern Studies also borrows postmodern ideas and methods for textual analysis.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> S.K. Sharma, *Redefining the Self: Women in Postcolonial Indian English Literature: An Indian Approach.* In: Malati Agarwal (Ed.), Women in Post-colonial Indian English Literature: Redefining the Self, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2011, pp. 1-15

<sup>4</sup> S. de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Trns. MM. Parshely, New York: Bantom,1964, pp. 156-190

<sup>5</sup> A. Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, Trans. and edited by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. New York: International Publishers, 1973

<sup>6</sup> Gyan Prakash, "Subaltern Studies as Post Colonial Criticism", *American Historical Review*, Vol. 99(5), December 1994, pp. 27-38

<sup>7</sup> F. Jameson, "Third World Literature in the Age of Multinational Capitalism", *Social Text*, Vol. 15, 1986, pp. 65-88; Arif Dirlik, "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism", *Contemporary Post-Colonial Theory*. Ed. Padmini Mongia, Delhi: OUP, 1997, p. 230.

Subaltern Studies began its journey in England at the end of the 1970s. In India, the term was popularized in 1982 by a small Subaltern Studies group with the publication of several volumes of a journal which were published under the title *Subaltern Studies: Writings on Southern Asian History and Society*. In the Preface to *Subaltern Studies*, Vol. I, Ranajit Guha, the editor, propounded the following working definition of 'subaltern'. "The word 'subaltern'... stands for the meaning as given in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* that is of inferior rank. It will be used as a name for the general attitude of subordination in South Asian Society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way."

In the postcolonial studies the 'subaltern other', the 'marginalized other', the 'colonized other', the 'oriental other', and the 'cultural other' have been used interchangeably to mean the backward and the subjugated who stand at the last level of the social and economic ladder and who fall prey to prevalent political practices and class conflicts. By 'Other', postcolonial critics like Edward Said<sup>9</sup>, Gayatri Spivak<sup>10</sup>, Homi K. Bhaba<sup>11</sup> refer to the marginalized or the colonized subject. The terms 'marginality', 'subaltern' and the like refer to colonized people in Asia, America or Africa during the colonial period when they were marginalized by the colonizers. The colonizers came to build their colonies in Asia, Africa and America and colonized the native people, who became the 'Other'. The concept of 'Other' is found in a number of approaches to epistemology and cultural identity.<sup>12</sup> Originally, the treatment of 'Other' as a concept is to be found in the writing of Sartre, Derrida and Lacan. Lacan<sup>13</sup> states that the 'Other' refers to both the colonizer and the colonized. According to him

<sup>8</sup> R. Guha, Subaltern Studies. Writing on South Asian History and Society, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982, pp.122

<sup>9</sup> Said Edward, *Orientalism*, London and Henley: Routledge and Kegal Paul, 1978, pp. 15-48, 190

<sup>10</sup> G. C. Spivak, "Can the subaltern speak?" Marxism and Interpretation of Culture. Eds. C. Nelson and I., Grossberg. Basing Stoke: Macmillan Education, 1988, pp. 308

<sup>11</sup> H. K. Bhaba, "The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse." Twentieth Century Literary Theory: A Reader. Ed. K.M. Newton. London: MacMillan, 1997, pp-211

<sup>12</sup> B. K. Das, "Homi K. Bhaba's the Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse", A Note in *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism*, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers Ltd., 2012, pp. 376-382.

<sup>13</sup> J. Lacan, 'A Theoretical Introduction to the Function of Psychoanalysis in Criminology'. Trans. M. Bracher, R. Grigg and R. Samuels, *Journal of the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society*, 1996, pp. 1-25.

the 'Other' can be compared to the master, the lord, the colonizer, the empire or the imperial centre which makes the colonized subject conscious of his/her identity as they are somehow 'Other' and 'dependent'. Spivak<sup>14</sup> argues that the colonizing 'Other' gets established when the colonized 'Others' are treated as subjects.

Edward Said<sup>15</sup> in his *Orientalism* identifies the culturally inferior, politically subjugated and economically exploited and geographically colonized people of Asia and Africa as the 'oriental other'. The term 'subaltern' was popularized further by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. In her essay titled, "*Can the subaltern speak?*" She suggests: "The subaltern cannot speak." Subaltern means the colonized and oppressed (people) whose voice has been silenced. "By 'subaltern' Spivak meant the oppressed subject, the members of Antonio Gramsi's 'subaltern classes' or more generally those 'of inferior rank', the working class, the blacks and women". According to Spivak, colonialism and patriarchy both oppressed women and it is difficult to articulate their point of view as there is hardly any space from where they can speak. Spivak laid stress on the 'gendered subaltern'—that is, women who are doubly oppressed both by colonialism and patriarchy in Third World countries. Spivak further states that in some contexts contesting representational systems violently displace and silence the figure of the 'gendered subaltern.' 18

Although Spivak's silencing of the 'subaltern' refers to women in colonial India, her contention equally covers the history of women in the post-independent India as well. Benita Parry<sup>19</sup> along with Homi Bhabha in asserting the discourse of silencing the subalterns opines that the colonialist's texts contain a native voice which means that the subaltern has spoken. To prove her points true, Benita Parry initiated exploring the traces and testimony of women's voice from the texts and

<sup>14</sup> G. C. Spivak, "Post-Structuralism, Marginality, Postcoloniality and Value", *Literary Theory Today*, Ed. Peter Collier and Hegla Geyer-Ryan, New York: Cornell University Press, 1990, pp. 220

<sup>15</sup> Said Edward, Orientalism, London and Henley: Routledge and Kegal Paul, 1991

<sup>16</sup> G. C Spivak, "Can the subaltern speak?" Marxism and Interpretation of Culture. Eds. C. Nelson and I., Grossberg. Basing Stoke: Macmillan Education, 1988, p. 35

<sup>17</sup> B, K Das. "Homi K. Bhaba's the Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse", A Note in *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism*, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers Ltd., 2012, pp. 376-382

<sup>18</sup> G. C. Spivak, "Can the subaltern speak?" Marxism and Interpretation of Culture. Eds. C. Nelson and I., Grossberg. Basing Stoke: Macmillan Education, 1988, pp. 306

<sup>19</sup> Benita Parry, "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse", *Oxford Literary Review*, Vol. 9, 1987, pp. 1-12

sites of colonized societies. Citing examples from a text based on Caribbean culture of Jean Rhys's *Wild Sargasso Sea*, where women have inscribed themselves as healers, ascetics, and singers of sacred songs, artisans and artists, she argues that the subalterns have not lost their voices forever. They have spoken. Both the colonized and the women have now spoken. Roy who has already earned a reputation as a humanist-feminist has designed *The God of Small Things*, a postcolonial novel, in such a way that it becomes a very powerful medium/vehicle to voice the rights of the common people, especially of those who have been subalternized and silenced by numerous social, political, and religious agencies.

However, with the passage of time, the subaltern studies group of South Asian Studies (1990) concentrated more and more on how subalternity was constituted rather than finding out their voices. Members of subaltern studies group felt that colonialist, nationalist and Marxist interpretation of Indian history had robbed the common people of their agency. Thus the subaltern studies announced a new approach to restore history to the subordinated with a view to rectifying the elitist bias characteristic of much academic work in South Asian Studies. As a result, South Asian subaltern studies differed from approaches of the Western historian's attempt to write history from the elitist's point of view. British workers and administrators left diaries behind for British historians to find their voices in, but Indian workers, labourers and peasants did not leave behind any 'original authentic' voices. So Subaltern Studies had to use different methods of reading the available documents.<sup>21</sup>

The mission of the Subaltern Studies group in India was to promote "a systematic and informed discussion of subaltern themes in the field of South Asian Studies". Further, its members described their project as an attempt to study "the general attributes of subordination in South Asian society (Quoted in Das)". The subaltern studies group sketched out its wide-ranging concern both with the visible "history, politics, economics, and sociology of subalternity and with the occluded attitudes, ideologies and belief systems." In other words, 'Subaltern Studies' defined itself as an attempt to allow the people to speak finally within the

<sup>20</sup> B. K. Das, "Homi K. Bhaba's the Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse". A Note in *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism*, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers Ltd., 2012, pp. 376-382

<sup>21</sup> D. Ludden (Ed.), Reading Subaltern Studies, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001, pp. 51-80

<sup>22</sup> B. K. Das, "Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism ...", In: *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism*, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers Ltd., 2012, pp. 45-53

jealous pages of elitist historiography and in so doing, to speak for or to sound the muted voices of the truly oppressed.<sup>23</sup>

The term 'subaltern' has a relevance to the study of Third World literature, especially to Indian literature. Subaltern Studies has acquired a new dimension as literatures in English by the Third World writers have gained acceptance among the Anglo-American intellectuals. The subalterns in the postcolonial period became intellectuals in the postcolonial era. In postcolonial discourse both the colonized and the women have now spoken. Postcolonial literature in English written by the sub-continental writers has become vibrant as they are written in the language of the people and because of their focus on gender and subaltern issues.<sup>24</sup> Now Subaltern Studies may be viewed as postcolonial criticism.

#### Patriarchy and Subalternization of Women

The demonic influence of patriarchy has pushed the 'gendered subaltern other' to a fragile and vulnerable state. Subalternization and silencing of women go on at different levels and in different forms and colours in India and are perpetuated by different forces in society. Age-old tradition of patriarchy, social and religious practices, and political and administrative agents, coupled with knowledge and power have contributed greatly to the subalternization and silencing of women. Hence Ayemenem, the fictional village of *The God of Small Things*, located in Kerala, a miniature of India, presents events frequently occurring all over India. Reverend Ipe, the oldest member of Ayemenem, was always conscious of his family reputation and the concept of love and sexual morality. As a representative of the dominant patriarchal culture Ipe always tried to control the female members of his family. His wife, Aleyooty Ammachi, became an early victim of patriarchal culture. Aleyooty Ammachi, Rahel's great grandmother's submissiveness and dissatisfaction are clearly suggested in one of the portraits hung on the wall of the Ayemenem house:

Aleyooty Ammachi looked more hesitant. As though she would have liked to turn around but couldn't. Perhaps it wasn't as easy for her to abandon the river. With her eyes she looked in the direction that her husband looked. With her heart she looked away.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Leela Gandhi, *Post Colonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 53

<sup>24</sup> B. Ashcroft et al., The Empire Writes Back: Theory and practice in Postcolonial Literature. London: Routledge, 1989, pp. 174-75

<sup>25</sup> A. Roy, The God of Small Things, New Delhi: India Ink, 1997, pp. 30

The description of the portrait shows how Ammachi's life was to the dominant patriarchal culture, a basic agency of female oppression, exploitation and subalternization. Ammachi wanted to see the beauty of the world with her own eyes but she could not move her eyes because of her husband's moral rigidity. The portrait explains how patriarchy dominated their lives and exercised tremendous influences on taste and choice, likes and dislikes of women in India. Pappachi, Ipe's worthy successor, imposed rules, regulations and restrictions on the female members of the family and controlled their lives. He always thought about the family's reputation and preserved the discriminatory values. Mammachi too became a victim of male domination. Mammachi's entomologist husband, Pappachi, tortured her mentally and physically. "Every night he beats her with a brass flower vase. The beatings weren't new. What was new was only the frequency with which they took place". 26

Arundhuti Roy's The God of Small Things is a remarkable indictment of patriarchy and the injustice and oppression inflicted upon women in this andocentric society. Mammachi, Ammu, Baby Kochamma, Margaret Rahel are cases in point. Mammachi's pickle-making job earned Pappachi's frantic frowns instead of favour. He was greatly offended at the attention she gets in society for her skills in it. Far from assisting her in buying, weighing, salting and drying limes and tender mangoes, he beats her black and blue.<sup>27</sup> Pappachi's egoism put Mammachi's talent for music to an end. A few words of praise from the music teacher provoked him to put an end to her lessons abruptly. He deprived Ammu of her rights to shine whereas he himself had failed to excel in his career as an entomologist. Pappachi was "making an effort to be civil to the photographer when he was plotting to murder his wife—alone with his wife and children he turned to be a monstrous, suspicious bully with a streak of vicious cunning"<sup>28</sup>. Being jealous of his wife, Pappachi often beat her and finally gave up speaking to her until his death. The God of Small Things thus deals with male prejudice, antagonism and sadism.

Chacko, the Oxford avatar of the old zamindar mentality, a self-proclaimed Marxist, misses no chance of exploiting his women employees. He exploits women workers sexually in his pickle factory. He pays them less than what they deserve. He calls pretty women who work in the factory to his room, and on the pretext of lecturing them on labour and trade union laws, flirt with and seduce

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, pp. 47-48

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 47

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, pp. 7, 91

them outrageously.<sup>29</sup> He pretends to be a Comrade, a preacher of equality, but in reality he is a lecher, a vile manipulator of women. Nobody objects to Chacko's exploitation of women because he is a member of an upper-class Syrian Christian family. Due to poverty, women workers silently and passively tolerate Chacko's sexual harassment.

Chacko's room is stacked with books. He has read all of them and quotes long passages from them only to impress and woo the pretty women working in his factory. This self-proclaimed Marxist demolishes the basics of Marxism though socialism and communism do not encourage sex exploitation. Rights for life, liberty, property, and pursuit of happiness are inalienable rights endowed on human beings by their creator. Roy's *The God of Small Things* has raised objections against the misinterpretation and misuse of power, politics, social system, traditions, norms, culture, custom, religion and knowledge exercised by male predators. Roy's voice of protest appears significant in decrying religious and social institutions such as the church, family traditions, civil administration for doubling the menace and predicament of both the female folk and the untouchables.

#### Feminine Sensibility and Subalterinization

Women's psyche and feminine sensibility have also enormously contributed to intensify the problems of subalterns in Indian society. Indian women naturally remain committed to their family and social traditions and religious values all through their lives. Carrying the burden of patriarchal legacy and placing husbands in a superior position have become a very normal practice in the day-today life of Indian women. As a representative of the old generation Mammachi suffers her husband's male chauvinism and brutality. Though Pappachi beats her ruthlessly, she tolerates him and avoids clashes in the family. As a silent sufferer, she seems to believe in male chauvinism and never raises a finger against his Both Mammachi and Ammu are victims of mental and physical degradation. But whereas Mammachi submits herself to the patriarchal values, Ammu rebels against Patriarchy. The root cause of mental as well as physical sufferings is perhaps embedded in the unequal distribution of power between men and women. Perhaps, as a Christian, Mammachi believes in the western views that man is the central to this universe and to all actions and activities and that man is the best being that God has ever created and everything is for man. Or perhaps Mammachi believes, as an Indian woman, that husbands are gods to

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 55

wives; they are their lords and masters. Therefore, they are to be obeyed, adhered, deified, and not to be defied. Dominant patriarchal culture has bestowed low value on women and girls which results in their harassment and exploitation. Indian patriarchal cultures do not recognize female identity (assertion of their identity) because of the age-old and traditional misconceptions about male-female relations. Gender identity is socially embedded whereas sexual identity is biological. Mammachi represents the older generation whereas Ammu is the representative of new one. Mammachi's passivity which does not retreat from patriarchal ideologies is a sign of changelessness. Ammu's rebellious spirit, on the other hand, inaugurates a feminist move to ensure equal rights and self-respect to all, irrespective of caste, creed, colour, community and gender.

The pride, envy and caste consciousness of the Aymenem house are reflected in the character of Baby Kochamma. Baby Kochamma becomes a victim of female submissiveness to patriarchy. Her position in the house of Aymenem is neither prestigious nor assertive. She simply gloats over the name and reputation of the Ipe family. She fell in love with Father Mulligan, an Irish monk, at the age of eighteen. She attempted to seduce him during the weekly exhibition of stage charity but Mulligan did not respond to her love lure. Undaunted, she went on playing different tricks to trap him but soon realized the futility of her efforts. When all attempts at creating a love affair failed, she surrendered to the standards of the Aymenem house. Over the years, she persuaded herself into thinking that she had done the right thing by accepting her fate. Being frustrated and having failed in her own love affairs, she now permits no love affair. She reacts jealously to Ammu because Ammu does not accept her fate; rather she challenges it. In spite of her 'wrong doing' Ammu has the satisfaction that she has not yielded to the laws of the family.

Baby Kochamma cannot appreciate the courage that Ammu demonstrated in defying the family tradition by marrying the untouchable Paravan, Velutha. She does not have the guts to trespass the age-old family tradition of patriarchy. She is trapped in the family's value system. She misrepresents Ammu-Velutha affair at the Kottayam Police Station. Hiding her own sexual weakness, failure and egotism, she humiliates and troubles Ammu and her children. As the narrator comments,

<sup>30</sup> S. K. Sharma, *Redefining the Self: Women in Postcolonial Indian English Literature: An Indian Approach,* In: Women in Postcolonial Indian English Literature: Redefining the Self, Malati Agarwal (Ed.). New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2011, pp. 1-15

Baby Kochamma disliked the twins, for she considered them doomed, fatherless waifs. Worse still, they were Half Hindu hybrids whom no self respecting Syrian Christian would ever marry.<sup>31</sup>

Mammachi is an accomplice to Chacko's exploitation of women. She exploits the female workers economically and gives Chacko the scope to build up sexual relations with them. She consciously assists her son in developing inappropriate relations with the factory women. She had a back door built for Chacko to enter in and meet his "man's" needs. For this she even distributes tips among working women to keep them in good humor:

She secretly slips them money to keep them happy. They took it because they needed it. They had young children and old parents. Or husbands who spent all their earnings in toddy bars.<sup>32</sup>

Unlike Nora in Ibsen's *Doll's House* though Ammu rebels against her family traditions, the latter feels homesick. She returns to her root, at Ayemenem, after separation from her husband. Again, Ammu rushed to extend her helping hand to Velutha when he is arrested and taken into police custody. An Indian woman cannot altogether forget and desert her ex-husband. This incident shows that the women are no less responsible for the pains and plight they experience at the hands of their male counterparts. She was molested by Thomas Mathew, the Police Inspector, in the Kottayam police station and later on meets a sad end of her life.

### Treating Women as Sex Objects and Subalternization

All women "live in an 'imperialist' situation in which men are colonialists and women are native... some basic relations of inferiority and superiority, of powerlessness and power... prevail between women and men in all countries"<sup>33</sup>. The "Sati-Savitri" image of women, projecting them as soft and submissive, mild and mute, weak and meek, has given way to the prospect of using women as a baby doll. The phallocentric attitude of considering women as the object, the capitalistic view of treating women as a commercial item, the carnal attitude of treating women only as sex object have reduced them to the subaltern other. Though Ammu married Velutha by defying her family values and throwing a challenge to the caste-committed society, she becomes a victim of her drunken husband's routine violence. Soon after marriage, Ammu discovered herself in the same net of male exploitation. Her alcoholic husband tortures her physically and

<sup>31</sup> A. Roy, The God of Small Things, New Delhi: India Ink. 1997, pp. 169

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, pp. 76

<sup>33</sup> Susan Sontag, "The Third World of Women", *Partisan Review*, Vol. 40. No. 2, 1973, pp. 55

harasses her mentally. The repellent man even presses Ammu to gratify the sexual desires of his English boss, Mr. Hollick, who tried to misuse Veluth's slavish dependence on him. Her husband asks Ammu to sleep with him. Ammu's instant refusal infuriates Velutha and he thrashes her black and blue. The attempt of using her as a commodity and physical assault inflicted upon her by her husband prompts Ammu to leave her husband for good. Ammu's physical exploitation by her husband indicates the typical Indian male's inherited assumption of superiority.

Inspector Thomas Mathew's tapping of Ammu's breast with his police baton is an Indian perversion of sex perpetuated by an Englishman—the colonizer Mr. Hollick did it with the native Indian women; Chacko, the Anglophile, did it with factory women and Inspector Thomas Mathew with Ammu. Ammachi's spits on Vellaya Pappan displaying of her anger on Velutha, Chacko's illicit affair with the factory women and exhibition of cruelty to Ammu and Velutha, Pillai's conspiracy in punishing Velutha, Mathew's lecherous glance at Ammu's breast and hurling foul comments on Ammu by addressing her a 'Veshya', the Fathers' playing of sublimated sexual games with their nubile teens daughters are a sign of commonality among the powerful and the ruling class.

#### Widowhood and Divorce-hood and Subalternization of Women

Roy has scrutinized the troubles of divorcees and widows in *The God of Small Things*. Comrade Pillai's pronunciation of the word as "Die-vorced" confers mortality to Rahel. Divorcee Margaret is no more than a whore in Mammachi's eyes. Though Mammachi and Baby Kochamma are her close relatives they are not sympathetic to Ammu and her children. Baby Kochamma's attitude towards deserted Ammu is typically Indian. Indian society sometimes accepts widowhood graciously, but not a divorced girl. A widow does not have any status either in her parents' house or in the society. The narrator has articulated the fact vividly through the delineation of Baby Kochamma's resentment towards Ammu:

She (Baby Kochamma) subscribed wholeheartedly to the commonly held view that a married daughter had no position in her parent's home. As for a divorced daughter –according to baby Kochamma, she had no position anywhere at all. And as for a divorced daughter from a love marriage, well, words could not describe Baby Kochamma's outrage. As for a divorced daughter from an intercommunity love marriage—Baby Kochamma chose to remain quiveringly silent on the subject.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> A. Roy, The God of Small Things, New Delhi: India Ink, 1997, pp. 45-46

Roy's point of view is that even in a relatively literate society like Kerala, women's sufferings have been multiplied by members of their own family and own gender. Ammu's arrival at her parents' house in Ayemenem with the twins creates a very unpleasant situation. It greatly disturbs family members. Everybody is reluctant to offer a space for a divorcee. It is not apparently beyond their ability to provide her with a respectable means of survival in her own family. Her unwelcome return to Ayemenem offers the members of the family and society the opportunity to subdue her. Kochamma expresses her resentment on their faces. Her own parents neglect her and insult her on various occasions using different excuses. Locals also start avoiding her. Nobody sympathizes with her and thus socially she is treated as an outcast. Although she should have a right to her share, she is driven out of her own parents' house. She becomes a subaltern in her own family. She develops a sense of alienation. For a time, Ammu digests the insults hurled by her brother, Chacko, and the vicious remarks of the local moralists as she has the burden of bringing up her children single-handedly. She can neither forsake them nor can rear them up in a healthy environment. They are like milestones round her neck for the sin she committed by violating the 'love laws'. Being a divorcee and mother of two children, Ammu has no "Lucus Standi" in society. She and her kids are parasites at her own house. Thus male domination within her family and social prejudice against a divorcee doubles Ammu's sufferings and distress and ultimately pushes her into the pit of isolation, and frustration.35

The concept of subalternization and silencing of women had been there in the psyche of Indian people from time immemorial. In the Vedic period many Indian women had to sacrifice their lives in the *Chita* (funeral pyre) after the death of their husbands. Widows used to believe that they had no existence of their own and therefore, after the decease of their husbands, many women thought that it was meaningless to survive alone. If anyone survived and tried to lead a normal life, she had to face various troubles and vexations and had to lead an utterly miserable life as a socially outcast and religiously untouchable undergoing patriarchal subjugation, social condemnation and economic discrimination.<sup>36</sup> Generally, marriages of widows were considered (mostly by women) a taboo.<sup>37</sup> So, widows were deprived of the rights to have a second husband after the demise

<sup>35</sup> A. Chaskar, "Multiculturalism in *The God of Small Things*", in *Multiculturalism in Indian Fiction in English*, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers Ltd, 2010, pp. 127-162

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 170

<sup>37</sup> S. Tharu and K. Lalita (Ed.), *Women Writing in India*, Vol. 1, New Delhi: 1991, pp. 23-43, 359-63.

of the first. Thus, in the male-centric society, women were rendered destitute in many ways. Though the situation of women has improved a lot in the post-independent India, there are many problems yet to be addressed and resolved.

#### Gender Discrimination and Subalternization

Indian women are subject to various forms of discrimination both in the family matrix and in the social periphery in India. In her childhood a girl is given less food than a male baby. When she is grown up she is deprived of the rights of property. She does not have the freedom of expression and even the right to choose her life partner of her own. In *The God of Small Things* Roy has analyzed the plights and predicaments of women in detail. Chacko, another patriarchal voice in the Ayemenem house, enjoys all privileges, which are deliberately denied to his sister, Ammu. Their partnership with Paradise Pickles further illustrates the status of women in India. Though she worked as hard as Chako, she could not obtain that much credit as that of Chako's:

Though Ammu did as much work in the factory as Chacko, whenever he was dealing with food inspectors or sanitary engineers, he always referred to it as *my* factory, *my* pineapples, *my* pickles. Legally, this was the case because Ammu, as a daughter, had no claim to the property.<sup>38</sup>

Chacko's intellectual superiority and masculine vanity is concretized in his speech. "What is your is mine, and what is mine is also mine<sup>39</sup>." The problem of gender disparity still looms large in Indian society. Ammu becomes a 'gendered subaltern other' in her family and a marginalized other in the factory. Though Ammu is presented in the novel as an all round woman, she is not allowed to pursue her education because of perverted patriarchal notions against women's education. Ammu is deprived of the opportunity to continue her education like her brother, Chacko, who enjoys all the privileges of studying abroad. He goes to Oxford to pursue higher education. Violating the principles of equal opportunity, Pappachi deprives Ammu of higher education. Pappachi is a typical orthodox Syrian Christian patriarch who believes that college education for a girl is of no use. Benan's conservative outlook does not allow Ammu to attain higher education. "A college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl"."

Pappachi's denial of Ammu's right to higher education is an act of sidetracking 'the second sex' from basic human rights. Pappachi also neglects and escapes his fatherly duty of seeking marriage proposals from eligible grooms for his

<sup>38</sup> A. Roy, The God of Small Things, New Delhi: India Ink, 1997, p. 57

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 58

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p. 38

daughter, Ammu. Ammu's parents cannot give much dowry and so there is a marriage that is unreported and proves a failure. She has been mentally harassed and physically tortured by her own father, ill-treated and betrayed by her husband, insulted by the police, and rendered destitute by her brother. After separation from her husband, she comes back to the colony, her father's house, her brother's house only to live like a colonized slave, a subaltern other, and exile in her own land. He father's house in which she was born and brought up is a prison to her. There is nobody who would really feel for her. She is unwanted, yet she takes refuge there with two more dependents and with the social disgrace of being a divorcee, a man less woman.<sup>41</sup>

#### Casteism and Class Feeling and Subalternization

Caste and class systems still rock and shock Indian society. Political parties use the caste and community card to reap maximum benefits. Even progressive democrats, irrespective of their political ideology, unwittingly perpetuate social inequality, religious intolerance and racial discrimination. The cross-cultural encounters involve the Indian and settlers, Hindus and Christians, the latter being largely a legacy of the British Empire. In Kerala both the natives and the settlers live with the consciousness of being once colonized and the colonizers respectively. The cross-cultural encounters during the British Empire still disturb society even though India emerged as an independent state in 1947. The only difference that becomes obvious that those evils have returned in a new mould<sup>42</sup>. Roy demonstrates an acute sense in presenting and unfolding the whole scenario with discrete correctness. In India the higher caste people enjoy more wealth and opportunities than the lower caste people who perform manual jobs. Among lower caste people, untouchables have the lowest standing and usually the lowest economic position. Velutha, the prodigal Paravan, becomes Roy's spectrometer to show that Indian society is profoundly influenced by caste and class feelings. The 'touchable' workers at Paradise Pickles sniff at him because Paravans were not meant to be carpenters.<sup>43</sup> Velutha receives less wage than even the female workers though he is more skilled and competent than any other worker in the factory on the ground that he belongs to the untouchable community. The guardian of Law and Justice, Inspector Mathew and the 'crusader of the oppressed' Comrade Pillai, willfully shake hands with each other to favour the

<sup>41</sup> R. Kundu, "Redefining the Margin: Arundhuti Roy", in M. Rajeshwar (ed.), *Post-Independence Indian English Fiction*, New Delhi: Atlantic, 2001, pp. 148, 132

<sup>42</sup> S M Hossain, "Cross Cultural Encounter in *The God of Small Things*" in *Musing the Post Colonies*, Maswood Akhter (Ed.), A Chinno Publication, 2012, pp. 107-33

<sup>43</sup> A. Roy, The God of Small Things, New Delhi: India Ink, 1997, pp. 77, 159

false FIR lodged against Velutha by schemy Baby Kochamma, merely for the reason that while all of them are touchables, Velutha is an untouchable. Comrade Pillai does not even mention that he is a member of the Communist Party. At another place comrades are seen discussing with Chacko, the owner of the Paradise Pickles, Velutha's dismissal from his job:

But see, comrades any benefits that you give him, naturally others are resenting it. They see it as a partiality. After all, whatever job he does, carpenter or electrician or whatever, it is for them he is just a Paravan. It is a conditioning they have from birth.... Better for him you send him off.<sup>44</sup>

The basic principles of the communist party – equality and social justice for all — appear to be a means to satisfy their libidinous desire and other personal needs, leading to civil strife in the state. The socio-political atmosphere of Ayemenem is completely polluted with chicanery, deceit, injustice and shameful human behaviour and result in a nightmarish scenario. When Chacko came to know the relation of Ammu and Velutha he threatens her to oust her from the house and break all her bones<sup>45</sup>. Chacko's anti-women attitude and his false faith in the values of patriarchy are exposed by Roy. In the eyes of upper-class Christians, Veluthas and Vellaya Pappans are not human beings; they are untouchables. They are no more valuable than the lowly beasts. To the former the latter are Pariahs, the 'Pariah dogs' only.

Caste feeling is so pervasive in Indian society that the pure and the high try all sorts of tactics to flaunt their superiority. The maid-servant Kochu Maria puts on Kunukku in her sewn-up earlobes just to impress others about her touchableness:

Kochu Maria couldn't stop wearing her kunukku because if she did, how would people know that despite her lowly cook's job (seventy five rupees a month) she was a Syrian Christian, Mar Thomite? Not a Pelaya, or a Pulaya, or a Paravan. But a Touchable, upper- caste Christian (into whom Christianity had seeped like tea from a tea bag). Split lobes stitched back were a better option by far.<sup>46</sup>

Baby Kochamma talks to Sophie Mol of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* "...to announce her credentials to Margaret Kochamma. To set herself apart from the Sweeper Class". <sup>47</sup> Even religious conversation fails to promote her position to an estimable status. Irrespective of religious affiliation, the underdog remains as fallen as ever in the dog-eat-dog society.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 279

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 225

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p. 170

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 144

Ammu's response to Velutha is unacceptable to the caste-bound Indian traditional social system. Vellya Paapen, Velutha's father, could not get his sons admitted to an English medium school because of poverty and his low social standing. In India there are separate schools for touchables and untouchables. Velutha is deprived of the opportunity of developing his innate engineering skills to full fruition due to his social inferior position. The narrators comment, "--- that if only he hadn't been a Paravan, he might have become an engineer," highlights the concept of Untouchability. Vellya Paapen is always ready to carry out the orders of the members of the house of Aymenem. He is at their beck and call. His activities prove that he was born to be a slave. He can never assume an individual identity. It does not matter much which caste he is born in or which ladder in the social hierarchy he lives in. But Vellaya Pappan, who stands for tradition and bears in his psyche the burden of the socio-cultural history of Kerala, fears reversal of social system through revolution. 48

Thus Roy gives a graphic description of the suffering and miserable condition of untouchables or subaltern others in *The God of Small Things*. Like all other untouchables, the Paravans also were not permitted to walk on public roads. They were not allowed to cover the upper part of their bodies. They were not allowed to carry umbrellas. They had to put their hands on their mouths when they spoke to divert their polluted breath away from those whom they addressed. Because of the low status in society they were not even allowed to enter the house of any respectable Syrian Christian in Kerala<sup>49</sup>. They were not allowed to touch anything that the Touchable touched. Still Vellya Paapen remained loyal to them like a faithful dog who never betrays. When Vellya Paapen reached the Aymenem house to disclose the 'unfortunate' news of Ammu and Veluth's marriage, Mammachi spat on him. In a harrowing description Roy portrays the helpless condition of the subservient Paapen:

Baby Kochamma, walking past the kitchen, heard the commotion. She found Mammachi spitting into the rain, THOO! THOO! THOO! And Vellya Paapen lying in the slush, wet, weeping, groveling. Offering to kill his son. To tear him limb from limb. <sup>50</sup>

Even when Velutha went to Mammachi to plead innocence against the fake charge of murder and abduction, Mammachi treated him like a subaltern other. Mammachi spat on Velutha, hurling inaudible abusive language at him:

49 Ibid, p.74

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p.76

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 256

If I find you on my property tomorrow I'll have you castrated like the pariah dog that you are! I'll have you killed!... Mammachi spat on Velutha's face. Thick spit. It spattered across his skins. His mouth and eyes. He just stood there. Stunned.<sup>51</sup>

When Baby Kochamma detected Ammu's relationship with Velutha, she was profoundly shocked and expressed her caste and class consciousness to Mammachi saying, "How could she stand the smell? Haven't you noticed? They have a particular smell, these Paravans". 52

Velutha is a victim of power politics. Pillai plans to kill Velutha by joining his hand with Chacko and Thomas Mathew, the police officer, because he is afraid of Velutha's popularity in the communist party. Velutha is a devoted and emerging Marxist leader. Pillai considers him a formidable enemy. Comrade Pillai insults Ammu in the police station because she breaks the rules of love. Thus, different forces like judiciary, patriarchy, and the law and order agencies meet to punish Ammu and Velutha, the rebels who have formed their own rules of love. They consider Ammu and Velutha as threats to patriarchy, family traditions and to the social, political and economic establishment. Irrespective of caste and creed, ideal and ideology, time and space, the powerful are always the oppressors; they are continually exploiting the weak and the marginalized. They are united in perpetuating their material gains. Another similarity which is commonly found among the power hunters is that the powerful people mis/uses their knowledge to gain control over sex and society. There is a deep relation between power, knowledge and sex. Belsey's (1997)<sup>53</sup> theorization of the relation between patriarchal power and the controlling of female sexuality is pertinent to Roy's *The* God of Small Things. She observes that patriarchal discourse has excluded women from the "discourses defining power relations in the state as well as from the family". According to her, patriarchy considers female sexual autonomy a threat to its power and authority. Power is male-oriented and excludes women.

In the postcolonial society, parallels are often drawn between colonialism and the position of women. The 'he' is deemed to be the colonizer and the 'she' the colonized<sup>54</sup>. In many societies women and lower class people have been relegated to the position of 'subaltern other', or the marginalized other. They share with colonized race and people an intimate experience of the politics of coercion and

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 284

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p. 257

<sup>53</sup> C. Belsey, *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*, Paperback London, Palgrave Macmillan; 2nd edition, 1997, pp. 152-182

<sup>54</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Trans. MM. Parshely, New York: Bantom, 1964, p. 122

despotism. 55 Michael Foucault (1980) in his concept of 'discourse' shows how different discourses in society contend for power using knowledge. He states that power controls sexuality and uses knowledge for its own interest, they regulate by the knowledge of sexuality to ensure a knowledge-based administration of power. Mr. Hollick, Chacko, Pillai and Mathew know that the weak do not have a say and they cannot protest. So they dare to regulate the Paravans, untouchables or subalterns as they wish. Mr. Hollick uses his colonial status; Mr. Chacko his 'Oxford'/capitalistic knowledge; Pillai his knowledge of communist ideology and Inspector Mathew his knowledge of criminology in exploiting Ammu and Velutha. Colonizers, capitalists and upper-class people fear the rise of subalterns and consider them threats to their interests. They also treat them their enemies who sympathize with the colonized and subalterns. Whoever tries to protest is labeled as an anti-social or terrorist. Therefore, they have to be annihilated or suppressed. They should not have any voice. If they want to speak they have to speak the language of the faithful servant.

After Velutha's death Ammu is forced to leave Ayemenem as Sophie Mol's death is followed by Velutha's death. Thus Ammu is made to suffer in all possible ways and she dies anonymously with nobody to shed a drop of tear for her, not even her own daughter Rahel.

Ammu died in a grimy room in the Bharat Lodge in Allepy... She died alone. With a noisy ceiling fan for company and no Estha to lie at the back of her and talk to her. She was thirty-one. Not old, not young, but a viable, die-able age.<sup>57</sup>

Ammu's suffering does not end with her death. The church now plays its role by refusing to bury her.

#### **Colonial Legacy and Subalternization**

Subalternization is a colonial phenomenon.<sup>58</sup> India inherited the problem of the subaltern other from its ex-colonial masters. The colonialists subalternized the native people during the colonial period by using their state apparatuses, education system, clergymen and by giving the impression that colonialists are the master class who are born to rule while natives are the slaves—born only to be ruled.<sup>59</sup> Subalternization of native people went on creating political and cultural

<sup>55</sup> B. Ashcroft et al., Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts, New York: Routledge, 2000, p. 28

<sup>56</sup> M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*. (Ed.) Collin Gordon, London: Harvest Wheatsheaf, 1980, p. 67

<sup>57</sup> A. Roy, The God of Small Things, New Delhi: India Ink, 1997, p. 161

<sup>58</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, New York: Alfred and Knoff (Ed.), 1993, pp.1-73.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, pp. 73-103.

hegemony. On occasions, subalternization of the native people went on in the name of civilizing them and on other occasions by instilling in and propagating the idea among the natives that the colonialists were culturally superior and civilized and the natives culturally inferior and uncivilized. Besides, suppression, oppression and economic exploitation in different forms, the colonizer forced the native to live as utterly poor, culturally subjugated, personally frustrated and psychologically alienated people. Thus natives formally were relegated into the slave or subaltern class when they were driven out and dispossessed of their own land or properties. During the colonial period Indian people underwent the same experience. 61

However, a section of subalterns in the postcolonial period became intellectuals. When colonizers left India they also left behind their educational institutions, churches, civil administration and judiciary. Therefore, it surprises none that once colonized on some occasions would behave like the slave and on some other occasions would copy their ex-masters by wielding power to dominate others<sup>62</sup>. Postcolonial people like Chacko and Mammachi bear the burden of colonial history. Their life is conditioned not only materially but also psychologically, by colonial history.<sup>63</sup> They are exactly what Macaulay<sup>64</sup> wanted them to be with the introduction of English education system in India. "Indian in blood and color, but English in taste and in opinions, in morals and in intellect."

Colonial legacy has always been imperative in the subalternization of different sects of people in India. In *The God of Small Things* the workers in the Paradise Pickles & Preserves stand for the colonized natives- the 'subaltern other' who are appropriated, regulated, disciplined and fed by a neo-colonialist like Chacko. Mammachi and Chacko here embody colonial power. Their forefathers came from Syria and settled in Kerala. They are upper-class Christians of Syrian origin. They are outsiders but here they are the ruling class, dominating the native

<sup>60</sup> Edward Said, "Representing the Colonised: Anthropology's Interlocutors", *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 15(2), 1989, pp. 205-225

<sup>61</sup> R. J. Crane. *Inventing India in English- Language Fiction*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992, p. 123

<sup>62</sup> Edward Said, "Representing the Colonised: Anthropology's Interlocutors", *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 15(2) 1989, pp. 125-150

<sup>63</sup> M.S. Hossain, "Cross Cultural Encounter in *The God of Small Things*", in *Musing the Post Colonies* Maswood Akhter (Ed.), A Chinno Publication, 2012, pp. 107-33

<sup>64</sup> Thomas Macaulay, "Minute on Indian Education", *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 8th Edition, London: Norton and Norton, 2006, pp. 1610-1612

people. Fanon (2001)<sup>65</sup> states, "The governing race is the first and foremost, those who come from elsewhere, those who are unlike the original inhabitants, 'the other'." Fanon reiterates, "The church in the colonies is the white people's church, the foreigner's church. She does not call the natives to God's ways but to the ways of the white man, of the master, of the oppressor." Roy unmasks the true color of colonialism and Christian priests in the following extract:

When the British came to Malabar, a member of Paravans, Pelayas and Pulayas (among them Velutha's grandfather Kelan) converted to Christianity and joined the Anglican Church to escape the scourge of Untouchability. As added incentives they were given a little food and money. They were known as the Rice-Christians. It didn't take them long to realize that they had jumped from the frying pan to the fire. They were made to have separate churches, with separate services, and separate priests. As a special favour they were given their own separate Pariah Bishop. After independence they were found that they were not entitled to any government benefits like job reservations or bank loans at low interest rates, because officially, on paper, they were Christians, and therefore casteless. It was a little like having to sweep away your foot prints without a broom. Or worse, not being allowed to leave footprints at all. <sup>66</sup>

When the British arrived in Malabar, a number of low caste people including Velutha's grandfather, Kelan, converted to Christianity in the hope of freeing themselves from the curse of untouchability. But upper class Syrian Christians never accommodated the low caste Christians and always avoided them by not developing any social or marital relations with them. Rather, they were made to have separate churches and separate priests while losing opportunity of availing any benefits from the government such as –rations, allowance, job reservations or receiving bank loans at low interest rates. Roy thus reveals the hypocritical and discriminatory approach of upper caste Syrian Christians.

Quest for sexuality is integral to colonial intervention as is shown by Said in his *Orientalism* (1978).<sup>67</sup> In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe there was no free sex. 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century western writers formulated a body of discourse about the eastern people which helped imperialism flourish in diverse shapes in which colonization through the quest of sexuality is one. With the escapism of sexual fantasy these writers portrayed the Orient with harems, princesses, slaves, dancing girls and boys, sherbets, ointments and so on. Said says:

<sup>65</sup> F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Trans. Constance Farrington, New York: Grove, 2001, pp. 55

<sup>66</sup> A. Roy, The God of Small Things, New Delhi: India Ink, 1997, p. 74

<sup>67</sup> Said Edward, Orientalism, London and Henley: Routledge and Kegal Paul, 1978, p. 190

Just as the various colonial possessions—quite apart from their economic benefit to metropolitan Europe—were useful as places to send wayward sons, superfluous populations of delinquents, poor people, and other undesireables, so the Orient was a place where one could look for experiences unobtainable in Europe.<sup>68</sup>

Sexual exploitation of the factory women and the tea pickers by Chacko and Mr. Hollick respectively is a testimony to the continuity of colonial sexual quest in the postcolonial era. The superior white Englishman is coveting his subordinate's wife; it is the colonizers' coveting. <sup>69</sup> Before this, he coveted the poor tea-pickers and became successful. The tea-pickers did not protest, neither did Ammu's husband. It is the silence of the colonized as is Velutha's in front of Mammachi and Chacko. The irony of this dark aspect of forced sex is that Pappachi would never even believe his own daughter's statement that any Englishman can seduce another man's wife—a native. As a woman, Ammu longs for equilibrium between physical and the spiritual. She feels that she is not merely in possession of a man, who by virtue of being a man, has his sole right over her body. Apart from her physical self she is also a person who feels and longs for emotional communication besides physical one. Roy's *The God of Small Things* is a protest against the lustful and carnal nature of men and consumerism of sex in the global market monopolized by men. <sup>70</sup>

#### **Consequences of Subalternization**

Subalternization leaves a traumatic scar on the mind of the victims leading them to lose their mental equilibrium, individual identity and social recognition. They lead a psychologically disturbed life and may become physically and mentally sick. A feeling of insecurity, as an outcast in the family and an alienated social being, haunts them throughout their life. Such shocking and traumatic experience help create a psycho-generation who are physically disabled and mentally handicapped. Rahel and Estha bear a testimony to this. Vainglorious attitude regarding class- distinction prejudiced standing about love and marriage, snobbish and fake concept of family tradition and values bring no profit either for the individual or for society. Rather, they create new problems ranging from family discord to pushing a person to undertake suicidal attempts in utter frustration or killing, vandalizing or sex-perversion or to creating other chaotic situations in society. Arundhuti Roy in *The God of Small Things* expresses her

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p. 190

<sup>69</sup> K. Millet, Sexual Politics, Great Britain. Abacus Edition, Sphere Books, 1972, p.143

<sup>70</sup> S. S. Prasanna, 'An Introduction to Women and Women Writing in English', *Indian English Poetry and Fictional Critical Elucidations*, New Delhi: Sarup and Sons, 2007, pp. 75-96

deep concern about the freedom of expression and restoration of the right to live and love, regardless of caste, colour or gender.

#### Protest of the Subaltern other

The God of Small Things has incorporated the protest of the gendered subaltern and the untouchable against the nasty politics of the communist establishment, public administration, the police department, the Christian maternal system and the Christian priests. It has also recorded the assertion of the identity of the subaltern other or the marginal other through meaningful self expression which transgresses socially given relationship through Velutha, Ammu, Estha and Rahel. Roy voices the female self and sensibility with the aim of exploring the female psyche boldly encountering male chauvinism, patriarchy, social discrimination, political exploitation, sexual subjugation and religious vandalism, with the assertion of women's authority and subalterns' identity. Ammu considers her marriage with Velutha a release from her prisoner's life. 71 She represents a resistant postcolonial spirit. Her violation of love-laws and her resistance challenges the foundation of society. She revolts against her own family traditions. In marrying a 'Dalit', she seeks to obtain social dignity and the right to fulfill her sexual and emotional needs. She feels completely free which is evident from her changed behavior after her marriage. She starts wearing backless blouses with her saris and carries a silver lame purse on a chin. She smokes cigarettes and learns how to blow perfect smoke rings. 72 Velutha also suffered a lot for the cause of their love. He violated the age-old love-laws which forbid cross-cultural relationships. Ammu and Velutha, both, realized that they were made for each other and they were beyond all manmade love laws<sup>73</sup>. They wanted to stand by each other in the face of all opposition from the upper class society. They aimed to explore the possibility of establishing a society where a Paravan could enjoy conjugal life with an upper class Syrian Christian woman. The twins Rahel and Estha's incestuous love bears the trait of protest against tradition, custom and love-laws. Social, economical, political and psychological repression often leads people to enjoy sex perversion.<sup>74</sup>

After separation from Velutha, Ammu used to spend hours on the river bank with her little transistor and had midnight swims. The revolt attains denser

<sup>71</sup> A. Chaskar, "Multiculturalism in *The God of Small Things*", in *Multiculturalism in Indian Fiction in English*, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers Ltd, 2010, p. 139

<sup>72</sup> A. Roy, The God of Small Things, New Delhi: India Ink, 1997, p. 40

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, pp. 176-177

<sup>74</sup> S. M Hossain, "Cross Cultural Encounter in *The God of Small Things*", in *Musing the Post Colonies* Maswood Akhter (Ed.): A Chinno Publication, 2012, p. 120

manifestation. She started wearing flowers in her hair and carried magic secrets in her eyes. She spoke to no one. No one could fathom the depth of her eyes and silence. Her strange behaviour is a sign of her growing rebellious spirit against the dominant patriarchal culture which ignores her, her identity as a woman in society and within the family. She revolts against the social and patriarchal system which neglects her babies; the protest is against the hypocrisy of family bondage, and marriage. Through her rebellious attitude she tries to raise the voice of female folk and the marginalized in society against all kinds of injustice and retain honour and self-respect of the downtrodden.

Ammu, a genuine rebel for the cause of women's freedom, protests against any kind of violence, torture, suppression or oppression inflicted upon women from any corner, whether be it patriarchal, conjugal, social or psychological. Ammu's transgression denotes her revolutionary zeal against patriarchal culture which blocks women's way to liberty and freedom. When she was physically tortured by her husband Velutha for thwarting his English Boss' sexual misadventures, she protested. Ammu took down the heaviest book she could find in the bookshelf and hit him with it as hard as possible. When Velutha's insanity crossed the limit, she deserted him. Ammu's reaction indicates the gradual ascension of her rebellious spirit against hegemonic 'male' culture which believes in subjugation of women. Ammu wants to prove that women are not mere sexual objects to be used as commodities. She is a free will agent having a distinct entity and she can take decisions of her own. She has the right and freedom to do what appears to her correct and just. She fights against the family tradition, religious values, social norms, rules and laws which bracket women as the 'second sex' and or 'second class human beings' and restrict women's freedom. With her weak wings she dreams to fly free breaking the shackles of patriarchy and family traditions and crossing the boundaries of caste, culture and community. Through her activities she voices the rights of women; her voice is the voice of women; it represents the voice of the oppressed, suppressed, and the subaltern other. Arundhuti Roy has ascribed voice to the subaltern other; the subaltern other in The God of Small Things has spoken. Roy, as a social activist, aspires to prove that a woman cannot be ostracized for being a divorcee. Women, rather, can be a protector of man as well.

Ammu brought up her children in a way, within her limited capacity, so that they could face the harsh reality of the world. Rahel returned from England to Ayemenem not to seek shelter but to provide shelter for her weak and feeble

<sup>75</sup> A. Roy, The God of Small Things, New Delhi: India Ink, 1997, p. 44

brother, Estha. Her violation of dress code by wearing men's attire is indicative of her rejection of the traditional male assumption about women's dress pattern prevailing in patriarchal society. Rahel's growing concern about and great care for Estha, her twin brother, is a reversal of the picture of the past they left behind when they were growing up amidst the cold aloofness and eccentricity of the seniors in the family in absence of their parents. There, they underwent diverse pressures, taboos, condemnations. Nobody in the family showed any concern about them. Baby Kochamma disliked the twins to such an extent that she considered them 'doomed', 'fatherless waifs'. "As they were half Hindu hybrids, no self-respecting Syrian Christian would ever marry them". In defiance of the social and love codes, Rahel developed an incestuous affair with her twin brother Estha. Her love for Estha seems to be an outcome of their aversion to all kinds of injustice done to them by the family, patriarchy and the society. Through Rahel and Estha, Roy has shed some lights on condition of the children in India.

Though Ammu and Velutha were finally silenced by the state apparatus and patriarchal society, they have at least been able to raise their voice for a space for both the 'cultural other', the 'subaltern other' and the 'biological other' (women) in a male dominated society. Velutha approached Mammachi after the disclosure of his relation with Ammu boldly. He prepared himself to face any consequences for his transgression. Therefore, when Ammachi humiliated and threatened to kill him, he protested replying quietly, "We'll see about that." It illustrates the rebellious attitude of the untouchable; it is a protest of the subaltern other.

#### Conclusion

Arundhuti Roy's *The God of Small Things* is a story of women's emancipation and the liberty of the subaltern other. It is an outstanding piece of art which sketches the life of women of three successive generations, highlighting their likes, dislikes, sufferings, plights, pains, agony, and the wrongs done to them either by family members or by social forces. The novel celebrates the freedom of women, women's empowerment, and sets some directions for social reformation to minimize the gap between the rich and the poor, touchable and untouchable, men and women and to mitigate the misunderstanding between the individual and the institution.

In her novel, Roy has given vent to the development of her perception regarding the revival of radical women, their urges, needs, and survival tactics in view of their own social conditions. The transformation of the subaltern other, both

<sup>76</sup> A. Roy, The God of Small Things, New Delhi: India Ink, 1997, p. 285

women and untouchables, into assertive, self-made figures, who are striving to secure their right place in society, turn out to be the central focus in *The God of Small Things*. Roy supports the rebellious perspectives of the subaltern and gestures at the prospect of the emergence of a healthy society inhabited by a new generation who would find space enough to live a decent life with the guarantee to love and marry anyone. In *The God of Small Things* Roy records her resentment against patriarchal systems of maneuver and exploitations by articulating a feminine sensibility and by demonstrating their equal footing with their male counterparts having the parameters of their own. The subaltern other thus finds a voice and speaks out on safeguarding his/her rights in Roy's novel. Roy's clarity of vision is remarkable, her voice original, her story beautifully constructed and masterfully told.

# GLOBAL-LOCAL INTERACTIONS: FIRST THREE DECADES OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN BANGLADESH\*

Ayesha Banu\*\*

#### Abstract

The main focus of this paper is to look into the feminist formulations with particular emphasis on global–local interactions and its impact in shaping the contours of the women's movement in Bangladesh. The time frame of this study covers the first three decades of Bangladesh i.e. 1971-2000. The paper reveals that the feminist formulations are not the sole prerogative of the women's organisations or the feminists alone. There are several sites and platforms where feminist articulations are made. The women's movement, while making its own articulations, is also engaged in a dialogue with other actors in the wider domain of feminism. Among other actors and sites of feminist formulations, the state and global feminism have come out as two major sites, with which the women's movement is constantly interacting, shaping and being shaped in its journey of feminist developments. This study made use of qualitative research methodology, conducting in-depth interviews and collecting life stories of key protagonists of the women's movement, and blending such primary data with secondary source materials.

#### Introduction

This paper attempts to look at the interface taking place at a macro level, highlighting the nature of interaction from a broader perspective in relation to the state, global feminism and development of autonomous feminist voices at the local level. The purpose here is to look into feminist formulations around the world to understand what impact these global scenarios have had on local level feminist formulations. The article also explores what kind of alliances and breaches took place within the women's movement. It tackles questions surrounding the role of global feminism and the reactions of the women's movement in relation to the state, and thus, will look at feminist makings that

<sup>\*</sup> The article contains long and detailed excerpts as quotations. The length is intentional as I wanted to record the voices in verbatim from the key protagonists of the women's movement in Bangladesh.

<sup>\*\*</sup> Ayesha Banu, Associate Professor, Department of Women and Gender Studies, Dhaka University. This paper is drawn from her PhD research conducted in 2011-12. The author is grateful to all of the respondents for their valuable time and insights. She is greatly indebted to Professor Dr Najma Chowdhury, Dhaka University, Professor Dr Firdous Azim, BRAC University and Professor Dr. Maitrayee Chaudhuri, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi for their guidance, support and encouragement.

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were placed on the table. This paper would specifically highlight the role of two global initiatives: the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and UN led World Conferences on Women (WCW).

A large part of the data and information for this paper was drawn through indepth interviews conducted with eleven personalities in total, seven of whom are considered as the key protagonists of the women's movement of Bangladesh. The interviews focused on a wide range of issues within the feminist movement during the specific time frame. These key figures of the women's movement are also associated with three major autonomous women's organisations, namely Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP), Women for Women (WfW) and Naripokkho (NP). Most of the interviews were conducted March 2011 to September 2011. The interviews also turned out to be an account of life story, reciprocal discussions and dialogue between the interviewee and the interviewer, simultaneously creating an oral history of the women's movement. These detailed life stories eventually revealed the inner dynamics of the movement and various facades of its global-local interactions, usually absent in secondary sources. In fact the interviews were abundantly complementing to the secondary sources.

# Global Feminism and its Impact upon the Women's Movement of Bangladesh

Curiously, most of the discussions with the respondents on the movement often ended up relating local agendas with issues and initiatives led by the global feminism – particularly feminism led by the United Nations (UN). Another reason behind this far-reaching influence that the UN discourse had on the women's movement was the shifts and changes in the broader global scenario. A reference to two basic dates relevant to this discussion will bring the point home. It needs to be reiterated here that Bangladesh became an independent nation in December 1971 while, the International Women's Year was declared in 1975 and 1976-1985 was declared as the Decade for Women.

As mentioned earlier, key figures from the women's movement were often found to be associating their agendas with UN-led global movements –sometimes as a yard stick to their movement or as a tool to substantiate their struggle on any particular issue. Many of the activities of the women's movement in Bangladesh were thus found to revolve around UN charters, UN WCW, and preparations of shadow reports, follow up and implementation and monitoring of CEDAW or other charters. Major figures from the movement thought that WCW and other

<sup>1</sup> For the sake of reserving the anonymity of the respondents I will avoid directly revealing the names of the respondents while the representative organisations might be mentioned where and as necessary.

global movements have actually strengthened the women's movement, in terms of gaining up-to-date knowledge, policy formulation, conceptual clarification of issues like feminism, equality, equity, equal rights and opportunities, equal outcome including affirmative actions, and gender lens. On the other hand, there are voices, however weak, confessing the co-option of local agendas under the broad umbrella of the global women's movement or feminist schemas.

Global women's movement always played a critical role in shaping Bangladesh women's movement. Looking back in history, Bangladesh women's movement, at its embryonic stage, was engaged with the Indian and the Soviet women's movement through Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) and Indian Women's Federation (IWF).<sup>2</sup> Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (it was known as East Pakistan Mahila Parishad and later prior to the War of Liberation (WoL) named itself as Shongrami Mahila Parishad), being one of the largest pioneering women's organisations of the 1970s had close ties with India and the former USSR. It was also possible because of the political alliance of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's government with India and the Soviet bloc during that time.

## **Building up of International Alliances: The Decade of Seventies**

Discussion with one of the pioneering activists of the movement revealed that after the West Pakistani military crackdown on Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan) on 25<sup>th</sup> March 1971, one of the key figures from the movement went to India along with other leaders of the then Communist Party. Despite their differences in party-wise political affiliation, women leaders like Maleka Begum<sup>3</sup>, Matia Chowdhury<sup>4</sup> and Sajeda Chowdhury<sup>5</sup> were given the responsibility, by the male political leaders, of creating awareness about Bangladesh War of Liberation and the ongoing violation of human rights while they were in exile in India. The first initiative taken by them was to travel all over India to create awareness about the genocide in Bangladesh and seek international support. Networks and contacts were established with the Communist Party of India (CPI), Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) and Indian Women's Federation

<sup>2</sup> Maleka Begum, "Bangladesh Nari Progoti Andolon: Shomosha O Kaaj", Ekok Matra, Vol. 3 (2), 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Maleka Begum, a women's rights activist and gender practitioner with academic and field-work experience in teaching and research. She had been the General Secretary of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP) for 22 years (1970-1992).

<sup>4</sup> Matia Chowdhury, with a colourful history of political engagement since her student days, is a presidium member of Bangladesh Awami League. She is a Member of Parliament and the Minister of Agriculture under the prime ministership of Sheikh Hasina. She held this post twice before from 1996 to 2001and 2009 to 2013 during the previous tenure of Awami League in power.

<sup>5</sup> Sajeda Chowdhury, MP, senior member of Awami League (AL) presidium and Deputy Leader of the House in 2014, an activist during the War of Liberation.

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(IWF). There were negotiations with government on guerrilla training, refugee issues and support for freedom fighters, arms and ammunition supply, medical help, running of war hospitals, and providing nursing services. Interaction with Indian women activists opened up new understanding, new frontiers, new experiences and exposure to women's issues. Apart from mobilisation and efforts to ensure international support for Bangladesh in general, two concrete worth mentioning efforts related to women's issues were made.<sup>6</sup>

Firstly, establishment of international networking and contacts with women's organisations was crucial to the women's movement in independent Bangladesh. Through Indian connections, Bangladesh's women's movement received exposure to the Soviet bloc as well as establishing global networks. These attempts at networking placed BMP on firmer ground in the years to come.

Secondly, inspired by Mohammed Farhad, Maleka Begum prepared a small pamphlet highlighting violence against women (VAW), with descriptions of genocide and atrocities committed by the Pakistan army in Bangladesh, in order to draw international attention. Maleka wrote a small booklet in Bangla with photographs and information on VAW and other atrocities, which was translated in English by Renu Chakravarty, Vice President of IWF. Later this booklet was used widely in various awareness building efforts in favour of Bangladesh. IWF presented this booklet to the Soviet Women's Committee too.

Feminist leaders, with the help of Indian Women's Federation (IWF), travelled widely to mobilize support for Bangladesh. Members of IWF, such as Aruna Asaf Ali, Bimala Faruqui, Geeta Mukherji, Bani Dasgupta, Ila Mitra, Kalpana Datt Joshi, Nibedita Nag and many others, were deeply involved in this effort. In July 1971, Freda Brown<sup>8</sup> from Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) took part in the hunger strike to protest against the Bangladesh genocide in front of the Australian Embassy at Delhi along with Maleka Begum and Matia Chowdhury.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> BMP a, interview dated March 2011.

Mohammed Farhad, a freedom fighter, an ex-MP and former general secretary of Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB). Farhad played a crucial role during different political movements in the country including the Language Movement, the Education Movement in 1962, Mass-Upsurge of 1969, the Liberation War and the anti-autocratic movement. He died on October 9, 1987 in Moscow at the age of 49.

<sup>8</sup> Freda Brown was an Australian political activist who was a member of the Communist Party of Australia and later the Socialist Party. She died in 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Maleka Begum, *ShangrakkhitoMohilaAshon: SharashariNirbachan* [Direct Election in Reserve Seats], (ShuchiPatra 2000); BMP a, interview dated March 2011.



**Figure**: Maleka Begum, women activist; Motia Chowdhury, current Minister for Agriculture to be seen picketing with Freda Brown, renowned women activist from Australia, with others protesting shipment of US arms to Bangladesh in 1971, Kolkata.

Source: Heather Goodall, oral historian from Sydney. Collected from Facebook posting of Meghna Guhathakurta, Director, RIB, dated Jan 04, 2015

Other international mobilisation through networks and linkages were also critical. Indian IWF arranged a meeting with women in Indian Association Hall on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1971. A meeting to chalk out future activities took place between BMP and IWF on June 1971. BMP delivered a statement on June 12, 1971 addressing the world community urging them to support the Bangladesh cause and to stop the violence against women. 11

International networking was extended by these activists further during October 1971, when they requested the United Nations to constitute an investigative committee to explore the genocide and war crime against the women of

<sup>10</sup> Hasan Hafizur Rahman, 'Bangladesher Swadhinota Juddho: Dalilpatra [The Liberation War of Bangladesh: Documents]', Hasan Hafizur Rahman (ed.), Vol. XII, (Ministry of Information, 1982).

<sup>11</sup> Hasan Hafizur Rahman, 'Bangladesher Swadhinota Juddho: Dalilpatra [The Liberation War of Bangladesh: Documents]', Hasan Hafizur Rahman (ed.), Vol. VI, (Ministry of Information, 1982).

Bangladesh. The same plea was sent to the women's group of the Soviet Union who declared their support for Bangladesh and demanded justice.<sup>12</sup>

These were strategic initiatives from the women's movement. Instead of shrouding the rape and wartime VAW issues, the women's movement was thrusting these into the limelight. Claiming international justice and war time trial was one of their agendas apart from putting an end to the war. Women's peacemaking efforts were entwined with taking part in a 'just war'. Multiple and complex experiences of war and VAW were actually shaping the feminist agenda during 1971 within and beyond the borders of Bangladesh.

The global feminist movement played a significant role in shaping the women's movement in Bangladesh in terms of exposure to western feminist formulations and in constructing their own agenda by following personal and organisational guidelines. After 1975, the focus began to shift to the UN-led women's movements and soon, the UN became a critical landmark for shaping the local women's movement. Feminists interviewed have conferred among each other about this influence of global feminism and attempted to link it with the broader internal political milieu.

The relationship we had with the international women's movement and other organisations from the Socialist bloc lasted till 1990. But we lost all connections with them after the fall of Socialism. BMP was exposed to the international arena through its association with the former Soviet bloc and CPB (Communist Party of Bangladesh) and its association with Indian feminism during the early days of the War of Liberation in 1971. The UN-led global movement was only a sharper continuation of the earlier awareness. <sup>13</sup>

The key figures who were interviewed represent three main women's organisations of the country. All were largely involved in mobilising for CEDAW and implementation of the UN-led WCW. The women's movement thus was engaged in a tripartite interaction with local-global and state machinery, and dealt in issues related to global initiatives. However, questions were also raised within the movement on the extent to which the idea of indigenous, organic, autonomous women's movement can be perceived in a globalised world. Interaction, exchange and interfaces between all these factors have fundamentally given rise to new forms within the women's movement, which is quite different from the forms and nature of movements during the seventies and eighties. The following sections argue how the global-local interfaces influenced the local agendas like demand for Uniform Family Code (UFC).

<sup>12</sup> Maleka Begum, Ekattorer Nari [Women of 71], (Dibboprokash 2004).

<sup>13</sup> BMP a, interview dated March 2011.

## Uniform Family Code (UFC) and CEDAW

In Bangladesh, rights in public and private arenas were found to be moulded by global feminism at the state and organisational levels. Many local initiatives were shaped by global effort while local agendas informed and influenced the global frameworks. Bangladesh is a signatory of various international conventions designed to ensure gender equality, which include Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and most importantly for the women's movement—Convention to Eliminate Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

CEDAW was adopted by the United Nations on December 18, 1976 and entered as an international treaty on September 3, 1981<sup>14</sup>. Bangladesh is one of the 160 countries which signed their commitments to the convention. In November 1984, Bangladesh ratified CEDAW-with reservation on Articles 2, 13.1(a), 16.1 (c), and (f) - on the basis of religious sentiments. The reservations are mainly concerned with family matters like marriage and dissolution, guardianship of children and inheritance, which are also related to the personal laws prevailing in the country. While the government feels that these provisions are in conflict with religion-based personal laws, the women's movement, on the other hand, counters that these reservations are a barrier to the protection and promotion of women's rights. Feminists and other progressive groups have challenged these reservations by the government, mainly because the personal laws of Muslim, Christian and Hindu suffer from many misinterpretations, distortions, and discriminations against women. In this connection, before going into details of global feminism, a brief discussion on demand for Uniform Family Code (UFC) by the Bangladesh women's movement is necessary here.

#### **Movement for Uniform Code (UFC)**

The movement around UFC gained momentum during the late eighties. The British-era legislation was applied in Pakistan after 1947, and post-partition legislation enacted in Pakistan continued to form the basis of Bangladesh personal laws. Warren Hastings, in 1772, settled the decree of 'Personal Law'. The decree denotes that the colonial ruler should not intervene in the religious and family matters of colonial Bengal. As a result, matters that directly affect women such as marriage, divorce, dowry, maintenance, guardianship, custody, inheritance, compensation of conjugal rights etc. were separately governed by

<sup>14</sup> See http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/ for details

<sup>15</sup> Maleka Begum, *Byaktigoto Ain Porjalochona: Bangladesh O Poschim Bongo* [Revisiting Personal Law: Bangladesh and West Bengal], Mimeo of Post-Doctoral Research as Visiting Professor to Kolkata University, India, (India 2009); Government of Bangladesh, Laws and Issues Related to Women Affaires in Bangladesh (Manual), (Ministry of Women and Children Affaires 2008).

each community's 'religious personal law' system. For instance, marriage of Muslims is regulated by, among others, the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance 1961 or the Muslim Marriage and Divorce (Registration) Act 1974. Hindus are regulated by, among others, the Hindu Marriages Disabilities Removal Act 1946 or the *Hindu Widows Remarriage Act 1872*. <sup>16</sup>Thus the term 'religious personal laws' continued to be part of the official documents and vocabulary since the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>17</sup> The Bangladesh Constitution drafted in 1972 went through certain changes regarding family law. Some elaboration in this regard would be helpful to appreciate the background of the movement for UFC. 18 The legal system of Bangladesh is generally categorised in two branches, i.e, Constitutional Law and General Law. The General Law, inter alia, included civil and criminal laws under the Code of Civil Procedures 1908, the Penal Code of 1860 and Criminal Procedure Code of 1896 etc. The personal laws, also known as Family Laws, do not fall into these categories. The existence of separate laws for each community has direct implications on women's lives because the kind of justice meted out to a woman is determined by her respective religious community. Moreover, the dichotomy arising from this practice of dual legal systems that run parallel to the Constitutional rights in Bangladesh is subject to enquiry and critical analysis.<sup>19</sup>

According to Pereira (2002), the inherent contradiction in the Constitution clearly reflects an ambiguous relationship between the state and the individual citizens more specifically, women. For example, Article 28(1) of the Constitution states that, 'The state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.' But this is immediately followed by Article 28(2), which narrates, 'Women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the state and of *public life*' (italics mine). This only denotes clear lack of affirmation of non-discrimination in the personal sphere as opposed to clear

<sup>16</sup> Faustina Pereira, The Fractured Scales: The Search for a Uniform Personal Code, (Popular Prakashan 2002); H. Ahmed, Divorced or Married: the Position of Bangladeshi Women Between English and Bangladeshi Law, LLM Essay (Unpublished), (London 1991); R. Bhuiyan, Gender and Tradition in Marriage and Divorce: An Analysis of Personal Laws of Muslim and Hindu Women in Bangladesh, (UNESCO 2010).

<sup>17</sup> Personal Law is common to countries under colonial rule. Apart from India and Bangladesh, personal law prevails in Myanmar, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Guyana, Trinidad, Jamaica and in Middle Eastern countries as well (Begum, 2009).

<sup>18</sup> See UNESCO & WfW (2005) for detail.

<sup>19</sup> UNESCO & Women for Women, Marriage, Inheritance and Family Laws in Bangladesh: Towards a Common Family Code, (Dhaka 2005); A. Khanam, *Bangladeshi Narir Moulik Odhikar Ebong Ekivuto Paribarik Ain* [Women's Basic Human Rights in Bangladesh and Uniform Family Code], (Bangladesh Mahila Parishad 1993).

provisions of state in the public arena.<sup>20</sup> All these contradictions have shaped and influenced the demand for UFC in the women's movement of Bangladesh.



Figure 1: Police resisting the demand for Uniform Family Code. Source: BMP, 1993: 122, Shmaranika, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad 1970-92, Dhaka.

# A Radical Demand: Unheeded and Abandoned

Although the demand for UFC was raised in post-independence Bangladesh, the push for realising it came much later, i.e., during the late eighties. The influencing factors to mobilise women's organisations towards UFC were played at both national and international/global levels. While the need for a non-discriminatory personal law system within the country was felt, it was also supported and triggered by international conventions like CEDAW. Two pioneering organisations in favour of UFC- Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP) and Ain-o-Shalish Kendro (ASK) – had worked closely for several years in drawing up the content of the probable Code. As one of the main selected organisations, BMP first came up with a draft proposal on UFC in 1989.

Organisations like Women for Women was also involved in identifying the constraints and loopholes within the laws and focus on discriminatory legal rules

<sup>20</sup> Faustina Pereira, The Fractured Scales: The Search for a Uniform Personal Code, (Popular Prakashan 2002).

that perpetuate gender inequality and ignore human rights. They conducted research to highlight the background, the process and efforts of the women's movement and also to propose ways and mechanisms to amend and reform the laws. The entire effort culminated in a publication entitled 'Marriage, Inheritance and Family Laws in Bangladesh: Towards a Common Family Code'. <sup>21</sup> WfW believes that full ratification of CEDAW will solve many problems related to personal laws of Bangladesh. <sup>22</sup> Creating a knowledge base in support of the issue was one of their main concern.

All the way through the late eighties to the nineties, women's organisations, particularly BMP, arranged a series of district-level workshops throughout the country. The draft was prepared by the Legal Aid Sub-committee of BMP, drawing support from noted lawyers and civil society members. In 1992, they presented the first draft in two consecutive national-level workshops which were attended by people from across the policy level and civil society.<sup>23</sup> For the first time in the history of Bangladesh, such a proposal in favour of UFC was placed before the government by the women's movement. According to BMP, despite the fact that the Constitution of Bangladesh acknowledges equal rights for women in Articles 10, 16, 26, 27, 28, 29 and 30 with all its subsections<sup>24</sup>, it actually fails to be effective due to the presence of the personal law which is, by default, discriminatory to women. BMP thinks that UFC is designed and drafted to reflect the basic principles of the Bangladesh Constitution and it is in unison with charters and conventions declared by the UN from 1945 onwards, particularly with CEDAW. According to BMP and ASK, UFC was thus necessary to bring equity, equal rights and status to women across religious communities. Narration of the UFC revealed that radical demands made by the women's movement ultimately came to almost nothing.

Two of main respondents representing BMP report the process of drafting UFC during the mid-eighties until early nineties. They also noted the all-out support of the civil society and of a group of experts, consisting of both men and women including many brilliant male lawyers and professionals. The women's movement was most successful in mobilising professional support from many notable men. However, in the end, all these efforts proved moot and the agenda could not see the day of light.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> UNESCO & Women for Women, Marriage, Inheritance and Family Laws in Bangladesh: Towards a Common Family Code, (Dhaka 2005).

<sup>22</sup> WfW a, Interview dated: March 2011. WfW b, Interview dated: June, 2011.

<sup>23</sup> Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, *Sommilito Paribarik Ain* [Uniform Family Code]. (Dhaka 2006).

<sup>24</sup> The Constitution of Bangladesh, as modified up to 31st May, 2000, Dhaka: People's Republic of Bangladesh.

<sup>25</sup> BMP b, interview dated: October 2011.

...it was in BMP where we first began to critically analyse the flaws of personal laws in 1985. Our proposal was for marriage registration under government procedure, which will be applicable for all religious communities. We thought that the social and cultural programmes can be followed at the family level, according to norms and practices of each religion. A group of dedicated and distinguished people like Sufia Kamal, 26 Debesh Bhattacharya, Amirul Islam, K M Sobhan, Sigma Huda, Ayesha Khanam, Rina Helal, Bela Nabi, Advocate Zead Al Mamun and many more were involved during the preparation of the draft. Nonetheless, movement around Uniform Family Code could not mark its space within the broader framework of the women's movement. Many years went by in discussions with various lawyers to accommodate the legal issues from the perspectives of various major religions. The civil society also thought that this demand will not be sustained because of the religious issue. We soon realised that Constitutional amendment is necessary to incorporate the UFC. 27

The question of Constitutional amendment naturally became a contentious one. The entire process seemed long and complicated. Search for alternatives became imperative. Soon the idea of family court was raised by Barrister Rabeya Bhuiyan<sup>28</sup> as an alternative. Reformist approaches began to emerge as a response to the challenge. For instance, Hindus have no laws for divorce and a Hindu woman is unable to fight a case in favour of divorce. The noted Lawyer Debesh Bhattacharya, who took the advantage of the Family Court which was established in 1985, won a divorce case for a Hindu woman whose husband was involved in extra marital affairs. Following this case of divorce in the Hindu community, the Hindu lawyers began stressing the fact that there is no need for UFC. Favourable change can easily be brought within the existing religious framework and gradually people from the Hindu and Christian communities started to say that UFC is no longer essential if necessary reforms are incorporated as required.

What becomes obvious from the above is the struggle, difficulties and technical limitations that the women's organisations, along with their allies, had to face while lobbying for a legal system that ensures equal rights for women. The biggest challenge came from communities themselves, especially from non-Muslim religious groups. Technically, the movement was limited by the Constitution itself which was beyond the scope of women activists to change or alter.

<sup>26</sup> Sufia Kamal, (20 June 1911–20 November 1999) was a Bangladeshi poet, freedom fighter, feminist and political activist. Sufia Kamal was an influential cultural icon in the Bengali nationalist movement of the 1950s and 60s and an important civil society leader in independent Bangladesh. Her feminist activism dates from pre independence period. She was the founding leader of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad. She died in 1999 and was the first woman to be given a state funeral in the country.

<sup>27</sup> BMP a, interview dated March 2011.

<sup>28</sup> Barrister Rabeya Bhuiyan, Lawyer, member of Women for Women, Minister, Women's Affairs in the cabinet of H M Ershad.

Activists from BMP were not happy with the fate of UFC and regretted not being prudent enough to incorporate the bill of UFC when the Constitution was being drafted. However, the demand petition they carried to the first democratic government of the new Bangladesh in 1972 *did* contain issues related to 'equal rights of inheritance for both girl and boy child, equal rights for women in divorce and around the issue of age of consent to marriage etc.' But again, the entire sixteen-point demand<sup>29</sup> was kept aside by the then Prime Minister, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, to be considered when the time was 'appropriate'.<sup>30</sup> Historically proven that 'now' is always contentious for the women's movement. Pushing back by saying 'not now' is common to many movements across the world.<sup>31</sup> Feminist agendas are typically identified by the mainstream nationalist movements as 'not a priority'.

# More Challenges: Contestation with Religion; Appropriated by the Global Feminism

Apart from not considering UFC as a priority agenda, it was also politicised as being anti-religion.

Soon the demand for UFC became a religious issue and people and men with vested interest started to accuse us for being anti-religion and, so the movement did not get wide range support. Furthermore, our demand was mainly concerned with the Muslim family law; we were not vocal about Hindu or Christian women. People from other communities did not come forward with the demand. A renowned lawyer tried to propose changes in Christian family law but was vehemently rejected by her own community. We tried to involve leaders from all communities but could not make much progress. In India, massive changes in Hindu family law was made possible because of the presence of secularism in their Constitution. We also started to draft UFC in the same spirit. But now, when we are in a point in time were secularism is not in the constitution any more, I see little hope in realising this Code in near future.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> See Appendix 1. Sixteen Point Demand of BMP.

<sup>30</sup> Maleka Begum, "Bangladesh Nari Progoti Andolon: Shomosha O Kaaj", Ekok Matra, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2002.

<sup>31</sup> S. Rai, 'Women and the State in the Third World: Some Issues for Debate', S. Rai and G. Lievesley (eds.) *Women and the State: International Perspectives*, (Taylor and Frances 1996), pp. 5-22; M. Molyneux, "Mobilization without Emancipation? Women's Interests, the State and Revolution in Nicaragua", *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 1985, pp. 27-54; D. Kandiyoti, 'Women And The Turkish State: Political Actors or Symbolic Pawns?', N. Y. Davis and F. Anthias (eds.) *Women–Nation–State*, (Macmillan 1989); M. Molyneux, "Mobilization without Emancipation? Women's Interests, the State and Revolution in Nicaragua", *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 1985, pp., 27-54; D. Kandiyoti, 'Women And The Turkish State: Political Actors or Symbolic Pawns?', N. Y. Davis and F. Anthias (eds.) *Women–Nation–State*, (Macmillan 1989).

<sup>32</sup> BMP a, interview dated: March 2011

In retrospect and from the movement's experience, BMP thinks that UFC should not be abandoned in the name of reforms. Although the awareness of the demand is entangled with constitutional change, resistance from religious groups and other challenges like conflict with the question of religion — UFC is still important for establishing women's rights in the family. The key protagonists of the movement are aware that under the circumstances, UFC has little chance. Nevertheless, UFC has its own logic to be there reflects the feminists.

On the other hand, UFC soon lost its spark because many positive changes have already started to take place at policy levels through CEDAW, National Women's Development Policy (2013) and many other women-friendly laws. BMP believes that in spite of all these alterations, no real change have taken place in the most crucial areas like polygamy, inheritance and guardianship of children. Registration of marriage and divorce is not yet applicable for all. According to BMP, right now (2000 onwards), the strategy should be to first ensure registration of marriage and divorce, which is the main pre-condition to move forward with equal rights in the family. Till then, presence of a Family Court - which is open for all - is a big achievement: state the feminists from BMP.

#### CEDAW: One of the Major areas of Concerns for the Women's Movement

Despite the co-option of UFC by the global feminism, all three organisations explored here unanimously agreed upon the prime importance of CEDAW for establishing women's rights. Since the declaration of CEDAW and lack of full ratification, a strong network of women's groups started to advocate at the top tiers of government for full ratification and implementation of CEDAW provisions in the national legislation during the early eighties. A CEDAW Forum was formed and launched in 1992, composed of individuals and organisations that were active on women's rights. Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP), Women for Women (WfW), Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA) and Naripokkho (NP) were at the frontline of this Forum. A CEDAW committee was established under the leadership of Salma Khan<sup>34</sup> during the 1980s. She was then in an influential post in the Planning Ministry, Government of Bangladesh and played a significant role as an elected president of the CEDAW committees

<sup>33</sup> See, www.law.emory.edu for detail on legal status related to women.

<sup>34</sup> Salma Khan, a women's rights activist at home and human rights practitioner at the international level is the immediate past President of Women for Women: A Research and Study Group- and executive board member. She is the founder Chairperson of NGO Coalition on Beijing Process (NCBP), a network of 624 NGOs working towards implementation of Beijing Platform for Action. She was elected a Member of the UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1992 and served three terms in the CEDAW Committee (2003-2006). She was the first Asian to be elected the Chairperson of CEDAW (1997 & 1998). See more at: http://www.commonwealthfoundation.com/updates/profile-salma-khan# sthash.q4S1SrBb.dpuf

of the UN. WfW and NP also played a crucial part in pursuing the issues. With the help of International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAW), workshops on how to incorporate the convention into domestic laws and appropriate training were conducted for different groups in order to raise public awareness.<sup>35</sup> A unified effort is more effective than several isolated approaches, opined the respondents. At a later point, they were successful in urging the government to withdraw its reservation on articles 13 [a] and 16.1 [f]. The other provisions remain the top priority of women's organisations and NGOs in their lobbying and advocacy activities. The women's movement has begun to be vigilant and participative in political decision-making processes. The government's action to consult with women's groups and activists for the preparation of the country report to CEDAW and the integration of CEDAW in domestic legislation proves that women's voices can no longer be ignored. This involvement in the law reforming process is by far a great achievement. All these efforts have united the women's movement and other NGOs in fighting for the promotion of women's equal rights. 3637

Additionally, an Optional Protocol to the CEDAW, authorizing communication from individual or groups of individuals, was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1999 and Bangladesh signed the Protocol in September 2000. By accepting the Convention, Bangladesh commits itself to undertake a series of measures, including legislation and temporary measures, to end discrimination against women in all forms. Countries that ratified or acceded to the Convention are legally bound to put its provisions into practice. They are also committed to submit national reports, at least every four years, on measures they have taken to comply with their treaty obligations.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Women in Politics Resource Network, (1998). WPRN Newsletter, Vol. 1, No.3, (Women in Politics Resource Network 1998).

<sup>36</sup> Sardar Shaheen Ali, 'Conceptual Framework', Sardar Shaheen Ali (ed.), Conceptualising Islamic Law, CEDAW and Women's Human Rights in Plural Legal Setting: A Comparative Analysis of Application of CEDAW in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, (UNIFEM 2006); Mahmuda Islam, 'CEDAW and Bangladesh: A Study to Explore the Possibilities of full Implementation of CEDAW in Bangladesh', Sardar Shaheen Ali (ed.), Conceptualising Islamic Law, CEDAW and Women's Human Rights in Plural Legal Setting: A Comparative Analysis of Application of CEDAW in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, (UNIFEM 2006).

<sup>37</sup> Mahmuda Islam, 'CEDAW and Bangladesh: A Study to Explore the Possibilities of full Implementation of CEDAW in Bangladesh', Sardar Shaheen Ali (ed.), Conceptualising Islamic Law, CEDAW and Women's Human Rights in Plural Legal Setting: A Comparative Analysis of Application of CEDAW in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, (UNIFEM 2006).

<sup>38</sup> Tureen Afroz, 'CEDAW and the Women's Rights in Bangladesh- A Promised Silver Lining', http://www.worldnewsbank.com/tureen- seminar.html (accessed 24 September 2014).

As stated earlier, Bangladesh has endorsed most of the provisions of the CEDAW with reservations on article 2 and 16 (c) as of today (2014), because those are in conflict with the personal laws. However, the struggle for UFC is no more on the agenda of mainstream women's organisations. This is because CEDAW is supposed to be the all-encompassing convention that secures rights of women both in the private and public spheres. Hence, an autonomous indigenous feminist formulation has been co-opted by the global frame work. The women's movement became engaged with UN formulations. Days and months were spent on shaping the agendas of the women's groups in conformity with the global outline. In a sense, with a strong ally like the UN backing its formulations, the movement's journey was made easier. This alliance only supplemented their demands and agendas, giving them an international legitimacy which helped the women's movement to form a common platform. BMP remembers that the CEDAW charter was not addressed by the government when it first came to the ministry. They came to know about it from a personal communication and acquired a copy from UNIC (United Nations Information Centre). Rakhi Das Purakayosthay from BMP translated this in Bangla in 1984.<sup>39</sup>

All the three frontline organisations believe that CEDAW has played a critical role in the women's movement of Bangladesh, forming connections with global and local streams of feminism. The women's movement, in relation to CEDAW, has yet another dimension to it. Women for Women (WfW) or other women's organisations, while taking up issues like CEDAW, also needed to coordinate with the state and act as a pressure group by constantly pushing the state machinery for full ratification and implementation of CEDAW. CEDAW as an agenda has more legitimacy compared to other issues related to the state. The state is important in this context in terms of gaining access and facilitating positive negotiation. Although full implementation of CEDAW will have little direct impact on women in general, it has an international and political value. Implementation of CEDAW by the state has both national and international dimensions. Most importantly, CEDAW is in accordance with the Constitution of Bangladesh and thus the efforts towards ratification of CEDAW and removing the remaining reservations is legitimate. International endorsements are critical for Bangladesh in this regard. Women's organisations are thus engaged in negotiation with the state for full ratification, but at the same time they also blame the government for not living up to its promises of removing reservations and modifying national laws to be in conformity with CEDAW. 40

According to the respondents, CEDAW and WCW brought many women's organisations into one platform and thus have strengthened the women's

<sup>39</sup> BMP a, interview dated: March 2011.

<sup>40</sup> S. Nazneen and M. Sultan, M. (2010). "Reciprocity, Distancing, and Opportunistic Overtures: Women's Organisations Negotiating Legitimacy and Space in Bangladesh". *IDS Bulletin*, Vol. 41, No. 2, 2010, pp. 70–78.

movement. They thought that the Bangladesh women's movement could continue with its relentless journey and identify themselves as part of the global movement. However, full trust on CEDAW was not without apprehension:

...till now (2012) the government has not done anything for full ratification of CEDAW. Bangladesh government has been acclaimed with many international awards but none of the consecutive governments have taken the risk to ratify it fully. Everybody wanted to avoid the existing contradictions regarding religion and personal laws in our Constitution and, more importantly, the insurmountable resistance that is inherent to our psyche.<sup>41</sup>

CEDAW, to Naripokkho (NP), is one of the most comprehensive charters for the women's movement. However, the point of departure for NP is that it believes that the women's movement should not concentrate only on its full ratification but also to take cognizance of what has already been approved and move forward with its implementation. The movement should also focus the process of feeding CEDAW into the broader policy discourse. Gaps and loopholes –which was an obstacle to realise the goal – were also identified by NP. "When we were busy with ratification of such international conventions, we did not realise that it should come through the parliament – which did not happen in case of CEDAW. In that sense, Bangladesh government is not technically liable to do anything about it" says the respondent from NP. However, it seems that the drive for full ratification of CEDAW has lost its momentum over the years. Despite taking CEDAW as a yardstick in favour of realising local demands, the women's movement often feels that activities around CEDAW has dwindled down into mere preparation of shadow reports and attending to WCW in New York.

# World Conferences on Women (WCW)<sup>42</sup> and the Women's Movement

In June 1946, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) established the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) to ensure the empowerment of women and gender equality, <sup>43</sup> and to provide recommendations to the Council on obstacles to women's rights in political, economic, civil, social and education fields. Over the years, the CSW has organised different conferences in order to assert and improve the rights of women. So far, four world conferences on women have taken place. The conferences have sought to unite the international community behind a set of common objectives with an effective plan of action for the advancement of women everywhere, in all spheres of public and private life.

<sup>41</sup> BMP b, interview dated: July 2011.

<sup>42</sup> See www.un-ngls.org for details.

<sup>43</sup> ECOSOC Resolution establishing the Commission on the Status of Women. E/RES/2/11, 21 June 1946.

The First World Plan for Action, adopted in Mexico City in 1975, called upon governments to develop strategies that would bring gender equality, eliminate gender discrimination and integrate women in development and peace-building sectors. Within the United Nations, the Plan of Action also led to the establishment of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

The Second World Conference, held in Copenhagen in 1980, brought together 145 Members States to review the Mexico Plan for Action. It was stated that despite the progress made, special attention were required in areas such as employment opportunities, adequate health care services and education.

At the Third World Conference held in Nairobi in 1985, the UN revealed to Member States that only a small number of women benefited from the improvements, and participants were asked to explore new areas to ensure peace, development and equality. Three sectors identified in Nairobi include equality in social participation, equality in political participation and decision-making. The conference further recognized the need for women to participate in discussions in all areas and not on gender equality only.

The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995) was the largest conference the United Nations had ever organised. Over 189 governments, 17000 participants (including 6000 government delegates), more than 4000 representatives of NGOs, 4000 journalists and all the United Nations organisations attended the Conference.

The 189 UN Member States unanimously adopted the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) to ensure the improvement of all women. The BPFA outlined 12 critical issues, which are barriers for the advancement of women, and identified a range of actions that governments, the United Nations and civil society groups should undertake and make women's human rights a reality. All these global initiatives have culminated into the formulation of the National Women Development Policy in 1996.

As mentioned above, the rise of UN-led global feminism – particularly the advent of CEDAW and WCW – was welcomed by the women's movement at large. Unanimous consensus has been observed throughout the 1980s and 1990s in holding up the UN guideline and in using it as a pressure tool to achieve women's rights. Almost all the key persons interviewed expressed great enthusiasm, zeal and passion with regard to addressing, disseminating, ratifying and implementing the UN declarations.

The interviewee from BMP narrates the history which is relevant to this discussion. According to her, the first commotion around the Mexico WCW was dissipated by the political shift in 1975, but Copenhagen (1980) and Nairobi (1985) were attended with considerable interest. Heightened interest among women's organisations and NGOs were seen around the Beijing Conference in 1995. Special committees, alliances and networks were established to aid the collaboration with global UN efforts. She narrates the chronological history which is relevant to this discussion:

The period of 1976-1985 was declared as the Decade for Women but the first 5 years went by without any real intervention. Mexico Conference of 1975 was hardly represented by the women's movement. However, a few steps were taken up by the army backed government of those days like female quota in job sectors or incorporating women in para-security forces, establishing of Ministry of Women's Affairs etc. It was during eighties that I began to get involved and seized the opportunity to attend the Copenhagen World Conference in 1980, which was a great learning experience for me. I had the chance to compare the global women's movement with the local one. In 1981, we had another committee consisting of representatives from 95 women's organisations which was inspired by the women's conferences in Prague, Czech Republic; that we attended in 1981 with five representatives under the leadership of Sufia Kamal. We began to weave dreams the way we had done in 1975 that we would celebrate World Women's year and the whole decade nationally with women from all over the country. We also thought we would work together with voluntary organisations and NGOs to chalk out a plan for women, but all dreams were shattered again, due to Ershad's<sup>44</sup> undemocratic military rule. However, our dreams were rejuvenated in 1993 when we came together again under the leadership of Najma Chowdhury to work for the preparatory committee of the fourth World Conference in Beijing with 250 members. In 1999, a committee was established with 350 members to work under Salma Khan for Beijing + five conferences to be held in 2000.<sup>4</sup>

WCW became a common platform for all to get together and work, hand in hand, towards a collective cause. To some, CEDAW and WCW were helpful as a tool to spearhead the movement during the restricted political regime.

Western exposure was revealing for us in many ways. World Conferences on Women were effective in uniting us all again during Ershad's regime. WCW gave us a purpose and a target to achieve together despite a non-cooperative political situation. 46

Of all the WCW, the Beijing Conference in 1995 turned out to be the most critical one with far-reaching impact upon the women's movement. Yet, the enthusiasm

<sup>44</sup> H M Ershad, ruled during the period of 1982-1990.

<sup>45</sup> BMP a, interview dated: March, 2011.

<sup>46</sup> BMP a, interview dated: July 2011

and fervour was not applicable for all. Despite the same ideological bargain, agreement and common understanding was hard to achieve.

#### Beijing Preparation Committee: Coalition, Consensus and Conflict

Najma Chowdhury, the President of WfW of the time was the key person involved in the Beijing Preparatory Committee. Najma Chowdhury, representing Bangladesh, was involved in maintaining liaison with the government and international UN bodies in 1978. She contributed to the preparatory phase of CEDAW as a member of the third committee and, again, in 1980 she was nominated for attending the UNESCO general conference to lobby for the post of secretary in UNESCO from Bangladesh. In 1984, she went to New York again, to lobby for the post of president in UN bodies from Bangladesh and attended the General Assembly of UN as a nominated representative from the civil society. All these activities had prepared her for the more complex and challenging responsibility of co-ordinating the 'Beijing Preparatory Committee' in the early 1990s.

It was during the beginning of the nineties. Through an internal exercise, the UN realised that the goals which were set during the last conference had not been achieved in many countries. It was decided to have another conference in1995 to highlight some of the pertinent issues which remain unattained. The UN asked for a national report – a nonpartisan one –that would highlight the progress of women, women's organisations and NGOs. In 1993 there was a South Asian Conference on women in Manila organised by ESCAP. Upon our return, a coalition was established from the need to prepare for the world conferences. ADAB<sup>47</sup> was our secretariat.<sup>48</sup>

In this connection, the respondent representing WfW states that, coalitions are very helpful for a collective voice. But on the other hand, every coalition also creates division, wedges, distance and misunderstandings. The coalition had to address two main responsibilities: firstly, preparing a collective report through interaction with all voluntary organisations and NGOs, and secondly, to negotiate a meaningful dialogue between the movement and the government. Now, after all

<sup>47</sup> Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB) is the national apex organisation of the local, national and international non-government organisations (NGOs) working in Bangladesh. It was founded in January 1974 as a loose coalition of some foreign aided NGOs that were engaged in relief and rehabilitation activities. It was known as Association of Voluntary agencies in Bangladesh (AVAB). In 1976, it was renamed as Agricultural Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB) because its members concentrated their activities in the fields of agriculture and food production. A subsequent renaming took place in December 1983 as Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh with its acronyms ADAB remaining unchanged. Since that time, ADAB emerged as the apex body and national coordinating agency of the development NGOs in Bangladesh.

<sup>48</sup> WfW b, Interview dated: June 2011.

these years, leaders of the women's movement feel that they had largely failed on the second.<sup>49</sup>

The above respondent clarifies that: previously, there were distinctions between autonomous women's organisations and NGOs. But, to the UN, the entire women's movement was perceived under the broader umbrella of NGO activities, which is not tied to either the state or the government. After the intervention of the UN-led global the women's movement, all organisations had to register as NGOs to participate in the UN conferences. The distinction between NGOs and autonomous women's organisations became blurred. She wanted to limit the coalition to only NGOs working on women's issues, but other organisations – whoever had any project on women – wanted to join. Thus, the most challenging task was to coordinate between autonomous women's organisations and NGOs. Her experiences in coordinating the Beijing attendance had also reflected upon the dialectic relationship between the state and the women's movement.

In this connection, it was revealed to the leaders of the movement that there is nothing called an undifferentiated women's movement. It has many ways, many courses of action and multiple layers. It is always a great challenge to negotiate consensus on any issue and to move forward unitedly. The internal contradictions and differences and conflicting opinion often eclipse the purpose of knitting a comprehensive view. According to the key person of the Beijing Preparatory Committee:

I soon realised that there is a conflicting role between the state and the women's movement. To word it differently, the state wants to keep its distance from the women's movement because it believes that the movement is always trying to attain some undue advantages from it, while the women's movement thinks that the state is depriving them. I felt that the main challenge for the women's movement is to establish a relationship of meaningful dialogue between the two. In spite of the breaches and wedges, representatives went to Beijing to attend the 4th world conference and had a very successful showcasing there. Some opted for not to attend at all due to their diverged position in relation to global participation and internal disagreement. After the conference, the coalitions were dissolved in 1995. 50

The above narration of the leader from the women's movement reflects that conflicts over power, differences of opinions and disputes are parts of any alliance that can challenge the progress of the women's movement. On the other hand, coalitions like the Beijing Preparatory Committee presented a platform where many women's organisations and NGOs could join, share and work on issues related to their existence. Global agendas and activities created a space for local organisations to get together and sharpen their arguments. Women leaders were also engaged in the process of making, coordinating and combining the

<sup>49</sup> Ibid

<sup>50</sup> WfW a, Interview dated: March 2011.

differences and diversities towards a compromise. The euphoria led to diverse activities like attending and shadowing of women's conferences at the local level, research and publication, and exploring new arenas for knowledge production and creativity. Most importantly, a channel of communication was opened up between the women's movement and the state.

#### CEDAW and WCW: Institutional Building at the Local Level

Naripokkho, on the other hand, had something different up their sleeve and approached WCW and CEDAW's involvement with global feminism from a different point of view. They thought Global feminism had led to institutional building at the local level with local voices.

NP organised a conference in *Jaydevpur*, on the outskirts of Dhaka, prior to the Beijing conference. Due to disagreement on the Yasmin issue<sup>51</sup>, some key figures in the movement and organisations decided to boycott Beijing, while others thought of creating a similar space for those who could not make it to Beijing. The alternative conference took place with the participation of more than 250 organisations. The experiences of sharing, discussing, articulating, raising voices etc. took place in a manner which none thought was possible earlier. Over the course of the conference, members became attracted to the whole experience and parting became difficult for many at the end of it. They were saying that not meeting again for follow-ups – after all the sharing and eye opening experiences – will harm their goals. Most of the women from the grassroots level had a slogan 'we will talk and share our experiences and we will sit regularly' ('*Nijederkothabolbo, niyomitoboshbo*' in Bangla). Out of this much-felt need,

<sup>51</sup> Yasmin, a fourteen year old house maid was gang raped and killed by three police officers on her way to her hometown Dinajpur in August 24/25, 1995. Spontaneous processions and rallies took place demanding that the police be tried. Yasmin's mother recognised her daughter from a newspaper photo, lifeless as she lay strewn in an open three-wheeled van. Soon, a people's movement emerged. Lathi-charge, followed by firing by the police, killed seven people. Public outrage swelled. Roadblocks were set up, curfew was defied, police stations were besieged, and arrested processionists were freed from police lock-ups by members of the public. Outrage focused on police superintendent Abdul Mottaleb, District Commissioner Jabbar Farook, and Member of Parliament Khurshid Jahan, the-then Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's sister, perceived to be central figures in the cover-up. Shommilito Nari Shomai, a large alliance of women's organisations, political, cultural and human rights activists joined the people of Dinajpur, as Justice for Yasmin turned into a nationwide movement. Three policemen, Moinul Hoque, Abdus Sattar and Amrita Lal were found guilty. Women's organisations were highly agitated and disappointed with the role of state on this issue at that time. Finally in 2004, they were executed.

See A. Parvez, *Yasmin: Biplobhinotar Kaley Ekti Roktopater Shironam* [Yasmin: A Story Written in Blood During The Period of Absence of Revolution], (Shommilito Nari Shomaj 1996).

'Doorbar' network was launched and NP played a central role in its establishment.

Finally Shireen Huq (NP) mobilised international funds from Danida, Canadian CIDA, and the Norwegian Embassy for three years, and *Doorbar* was formally launched in 1995. There were eleven sub-committees based on 11 regions of the country to begin with. By the time it was 1999, Doorbar was a registered organisation with the ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, a NGO, receiving foreign funding on its individual capacity. It had its network in sixteen areas, working in all sixty-four districts with more than five hundred organisations, and is operating on its own (since 2009) following a formal structure. The key respondents from NP thinks that *Doorbar* is one of the greatest achievements of the global the women's movement because it was a direct positive outcome of the Beijing Conference and later, Doorbar became the doorway to the grassroots for NP. Doorbar also played a key role during the sex workers movement in 1999. Now, it is a separate alliance for the women's movement, separate from traditional partisan politics. NP is a small organisation, with not more than 100 members, among which only 30 are active members and has no branches but Doorbar is like an extension of NP. NP could reach out to the grassroots through *Doorbar*.

The birth of WfW in 1973 also coincided with the preparatory phase on the International Women's Year, which culminated in the Mexico Conference (First World Conference on Women) in 1975. This land mark development ushered in a decade of close interaction between the United Nation (UN) and its member states over issues of women's development as noted in the documents that were the outcome of the WCW. Due to the synergy created by the interactions of the UN, the international women's movement, the member states of the UN and the local women's organisations within the member states, there was also a resurgence of the global women's movement. These movements carried their agendas through regional and international networks and platforms, often cutting across territorial boundaries. In doing so, they also lent their voices to the aspirations and demands of the local women's organisations. According to the feminists interviewed, the task of redesigning gender relations, which the UN has mandated to encourage the government of the member states to accomplish, was not easy, particularly in countries where there was hardly any data base which was not infected with the patriarchal world view. There was, therefore an urgent need to create knowledge about women so that adequate policies for women's development could be formulated and put into effect.

Women's studies centres and institutes were seen as effective tools for bringing about the necessary transformation through knowledge production, by the successive World Conferences on Women as well as by women's organisations,

NGOs, and forums which detailed the official conferences and provided the space and strength to local organisations and their representative regional platforms and networks to lobby their cause (WfW c, Interview dated: March 2011).

Apart from the landmark publication by WfW titled 'Women for Women 1975, the annual convention of the organisation on 'Women and National Planning in Bangladesh' (1990) led to mainstreaming of women in the macro chapter of the Fourth Five Year Plan. Activities of WfW also included influencing the government decisions on census reports, figures for maternal mortality and morbidity, agriculture and women's work, women in politics, so on and so forth.

However, how far this global influence was benefitting local agendas was a question raised by the respondents. Apprehension, trepidation and a feeling of being co-opted were obvious concerns in some.

# Global Co-opting the Local<sup>52</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the UN agendas offered the state an opportunity to portray a modern image while the women's movement also took advantage of these international efforts. The global scenario raised an area for everyone to establish network, build alliances and act as a force that pressurizes the government to comply and conform to the UN conventions and agendas. Following the CEDAW guideline, local feminists were able to work on a National Women Development Policy in 1996 (*Jatiyo Naari Neeti*), which then became an indigenous feminist formulation for the movement, working towards developing new institutional arrangements.

On the other hand, a feeble voice could be discerned protesting the overshadowing by the global thus co-opting the local in that manner. Despite painstaking efforts, demand for UFC lost its zeal with the commencement of global demands via the UN, conventions around human rights and CEDAW. The entire effort, however, was diluted by the surge of umbrella formulations of UN and other global interventions. The women's movement had to give in or strategize their actions in favour of reforms rather than facilitate a complete overhaul or structural change. This is one example of national agendas getting co-

<sup>52</sup> Alternative voices were also noted much later, beyond the all-encompassing UN led global feminism from the feminists from the South to form 'People's Union of South Asia' and through the 'South Asian Declaration, 2006. See South Asian Feminist Network, 'South Asian Feminist Declaration 2006' http://www.sangatsouthasia.org/sites/default/files/safm%20declaration%202007.pdf (accessed 10 September 2013). South Asian Feminist Network, 'Feminist Response to the Proposal for a People's Union of South Asia', http://www.sangatsouthasia.org/sites/default/files/sangat\_a%20feminist%20vision%20of%20a%20people\_15-4-2010.pdf (accessed 10 Sept. 2013).

opted by global agendas. As a result of local-global interaction, reforms in gender issues - particularly in connection with rights in the family remained sketchy and fragmented in Bangladesh. The women's movement, through its vibrant initiatives, has tried to make it a comprehensive and coherent one but it often got stalled at the last moment at the highest policy level. As a result of subtle manipulations, changes and shifts at the global level, feminist attempts at the local level failed to achieve a meaningful result at the end. The women's movement had to remain content with whatever they could attain. State interventions and co-option by the global feminist formulations often led to appropriation of indigenous feminist articulation which, had the potentials to bring structural and strategic changes.

It was also observed that, since the emergence of Bangladesh, UN-led developments around feminism have been associated with donor funding and the infiltration of globalisation/ "NGOisation" 53 replacing the voluntary nature of autonomous women's voices. In order to attend the UN conferences, WCW and all other organisations had to register as NGOs to fit the requirements of the UN. Since then, theoretically, any distinction between a NGO that provides micro credit and generates employments and a voluntary women's organisation like BMP or WfW or NP ceased to exist. Women's organisations in Bangladesh have long been identified as non-profit, and voluntary organisations were outweighed by the world of NGOs. Meanwhile, the independent voice got lost in the myriad of global commotion.<sup>54</sup> Almost all of the respondents also feel that changes and shifts in the political economy of the country since the mid-seventies, including the rise of UN global feminisms, has downplayed local feminism. Local issues got co-opted and priorities became blurred. Small scale and voluntary community-based organisations were overpowered by the multitudes of NGOs and donor priorities. With a note of discontentment, one of the key respondents from BMP says, "...no matter what, I still believe that we will have to continue our local struggles hand in hand with the global one. We cannot let go of our autonomous local agendas."

Similarly, NP raises the concerns of placing high stakes on international conventions, which may shift the attention of the women's movement from the vulnerabilities of women within the country. Women are already in disadvantageous positions as victims of injustice due to internal failures of the legal system, challenges of implementation processes, political partisanship, and change in regimes etc. The women's movement should be careful about getting diverted by global agendas ignoring internal challenges.

<sup>53</sup> I. Jad, "The "NGOisation" of the Arab Women's Movement", *IDS Bulletin*, Vol. 35, No. 4, 2004, pp. 34–42.

<sup>54</sup> Discussions with feminists from India revealed that feminist formulations in India hardly ever shape their agendas and issues in accordance with the UN guideline.

## In Hope and in Despair

However, after all these years, and looking back retrospectively, many felt that nothing much was achieved from all those efforts. They could not really bridge the gap between the people and the policy arena. The women's movement has been successful in raising issues, resisting injustice and denuding rights, but not much progress was made in terms of influencing policies in favour of women. According to the leaders of the movement, the women's movement has undoubtedly made considerable progress in terms of women's rights through local and global initiatives like world conferences, Beijing +five, CEDAW, National Women's Development Policy and so on, but the accumulated result is inadequate. On the other hand, some felt that this is part and parcel of any movement all over the world. In most of the cases, it is all about one step forward and two steps backward.

The women's movement is like a river, there are ebbs and flows (*jowarbhata r moto*). Sometime the river of movements is fast and clear, sometimes slow and murky. The women's movement has many faces, has many layers to pursue ranging from women's most intimate relationship within a household situation, economic scarcity and poverty, VAW etc., to political rights in public. We have multiple identities to follow in our personal lives. So does the movement. We have to address each and every issue as and when it surfaces, depending on the context. The biggest challenge for the women's movement and feminist realisation is to come to terms withthe diversity of these issues.<sup>55</sup>

On the other hand, it is also true that the women's movement in Bangladesh has built vibrant transnational networks for peace and justice since the very inception of Bangladesh as a nation. It has created feminist spaces within international and national institutions and was used by the women's organisations and feminists to promote gender justice within the country. Diplomatic skills were applied in the arduous work of crafting international conventions to promote women's rights. Working locally and globally, the movement acted as a pressure group at the national level to ratify conventions like CEDAW. Women's organisations were able to promote policy learnings, created new knowledge and influenced the policy process in favour of establishing women's rights. Moving from local to global and global to local or indeed working simultaneously at local and global levels - has become one hallmark of transnational activism in the current era. <sup>56</sup>

Given the globalised nature of today's world, the UN interventions were an enriching process of 'give and take' rather than merely a hegemonic co-option of the local. It must be recognised that remarkable changes, transformation and new

<sup>55</sup> WfW a, Interview dated: July 2011.

<sup>56</sup> M. Hawkesworth, *Political Worlds of Women: Activism, Advocacy and Governance in the Twenty-First Century*, (Westview Press 2012).

configuration have taken place within and outside the movement due to the changes at the global level which can be termed as 'glocal'. 57

# **Concluding Comments**

This paper has primarily looked into the complex relationship between the women's movement and global-local interaction. It has explored the intricate relationship between global feminism, the state and other organisations and institutions shaping the broad umbrella of the women's movement in Bangladesh. The global influences have been identified by the respondents as one of the main influencing factors: firstly, in terms of broader political and economic paradigm shifts that took place in Bangladesh over the first three decades, and secondly, the role of global feminism – particularly UN led charters like CEDAW or WCW – were highlighted as critical lighthouses and a common platform for the women's movement of Bangladesh.

The state, on the other hand, was identified as one of the critical players in shaping the entire form of the movement. The complex and ambivalent relationship with the state has greatly influenced the responses and strategies of the women's movement and have created both breaches and bridges between organisations. However, the need to work on local agendas and priorities and not to be co-opted by external influences remained central to the feminist voices of the Bangladesh women's movement.

<sup>57</sup> N. Chowdhury, Of Mangroves and Monsters: Women's Political Participation and Women's Studies in Bangladesh, (Pathak Shamabesh 2010).

# Appendix: 1

#### 16 Points Demand of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP)

Sixteen points demand of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP) placed before Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the first Prime Minister of Independent Bangladesh in 1972. Translation from Bangla to English mine. See Begum, M. 2002, *Nari Andoloner Panch Dashak* in Bangla (Five Decades of the Women's Movement, Onnyoprakash: Dhaka, pp. 85-86 for detail:

- 1. Ensuring women's emancipation and status in every sphere of life and establishing the rights of women in economic, social, political arena including jobs and profession, freeing the women from all sorts of social oppression and discrimination.
- 2. National Education Committee should take up the responsibility to eradicate illiteracy of the mass and women.
- 3. Increasing the number of girls' educational institution at primary and secondary level.
- 4. Immediate implementation of free and mandatory education for girls up to grade eight.
- 5. Special education programme for adult women
- 6. Increasing the opportunity for women in higher education and vocational training.
- 7. Legal measures to stop dowry system and implementation of the law against polygamy
- 8. Realising the equal rights of women in case of divorce. Stopping coerced marriages of adult women against their will
- 9. Establishing equal rights in inheritance for both boys and girls. Proposal for removal of the law of transferring the portion of inheritance claim in absence of a son to the paternal uncle's sons, despite having a daughter of his own
- 10. Ensuring security and mobility of women both in public and private and in every sphere of life
- 11. Equal opportunity and pay scale for women in all job sector, eradication of extreme unequal situation in Tea industry
- 12. Establishing day care centre for women working in education institution, office and industrial organisations.
- 13. Taking up alternative measures to stop child labour
- 14. Ensuring availability of daily necessities via government sponsored subsidy shops
- 15. Dissolving the system of selection system in reserve seats for women. Increasing the number of reserve seats in the parliament from fifteen and ensuring direct election in those seats.
- 16. Providing support to disadvantaged women by creating legal aid committee by the government

# BEGUM ROKEYA'S ENGLISH WORKS: RELEVANCE TO WOMEN EDUCATION

Hossain Al Mamun\*

#### Abstract

Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1880-1932) understood the causes of the despicable situation of Indian women and prescribed women education as a remedy. Rokeya emphasized women education to emancipate them so that they could be free as humans. Her efforts to improve Indian women's status amidst the biased social mores are marked by her strong writings such as *Sultana's Dream*, "God Gives, Man Robs," "Educational Ideas for the Modern Indian Girl," and so on. Considering the ambiance of nineteenth century when women had very little or even no opportunity to read or write, Rokeya was lucky to get the support of her husband, which later helped her pave the way for women education in India. Given the fact that there remained no other choice than education for women's emancipation, this paper will examine Rokeya's views on and visions of women education.

## Introduction

Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain is widely acknowledged and accepted as an iconic figure in Bangladesh who laid serious efforts to improve and amelioration of women's situation in society. She wrote essays, novels, utopias, poems, humor and satirical articles on women rights and other social issues both in Bengali and English. She also produced limited number of English pieces: *Sultana's Dream*, "God Gives, Man Robs" and "Educational Ideals for the Modern Indian Girl" and wrote around twelve letters in English. In addition, she established a girl's school for Muslim women and argued with the patriarchs of the Muslim society, in pursuance of the necessity of women's education. This study particularly focuses on Rokeya's three English pieces and refers to some other writings.

The central objective of this study is to show the relevance of Rokeya's English pieces to women education. The specific objectives are:

- i) to know about Rokeya's struggle for becoming a learner and a writer;
- ii) to know how she defined and demonstrated education and its necessity for women;
   and
- iii) to show the relevance of her opinions, views and visions to establish women education in an unfavorable society.

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This paper employs the method of content analysis. The resources or data are taken from both primary and secondary sources, which are simply qualitative in nature. Primary sources refer to the author's own writings, whereas the secondary sources refer to the works done by the others on the author. The main text of the literary fiction of *Sultana's Dream* and two other English essays—"God Gives, Man Robs" and "Educational Ideals for the Modern Indian Girl" have been considered as the primary sources of data. A number of relevant books, research articles and some web sites have been used as the secondary sources which have been analyzed and presented through logical interpretation.

#### Rokeya's Struggle as Learner and Writer

Begum Rokeya was born in 1880 at Pairaband of Rangpur district and grew up in a conservative Bengali Muslim family where she was tutored in Arabic and Urdu privately. Her elder brother Ibrahim Sabir taught her English secretly. Her first biographer Shamsunnahar Mahmud describes: "They had to wait for the dead of the night to be able to conduct their clandestine studies since the family objected to such untraditional learning for girls." In 1896, she was married to a magistrate, Khan Bahadur Syed Sakhawat Housain, whose encouragement and official connections widened her exposure to western knowledge and his official rank provided her with wider access to Europeans, with whom she could interact and share ideas<sup>2</sup> and finally they recognized and appreciated her piece *Sultana's Dream* with enthusiastic manner. Thus, she got an opportunity to communicate with educated women and in these ways she "became perfect in English." Shamsunnahar Mahmud further says:

Later, her husband actively fostered her education and encouraged her to write. Consequently, in spite of never having been to a school to learn, Rokeya grew into an exceptionally knowledgeable woman. Her struggle to achieve this feat indicates the strength of prejudice against female education in her culture.<sup>4</sup>

Primarily Rokeya was self-educated and home-taught but she went on to acquire at least five languages: Bangla, English, Urdu, Persian and Arabic by the help of her family members. Mahmud states: "Once Ibrahim held a big, illustrated

<sup>1</sup> Susmita Roye, "Sultana's Dream vs. Rokeya's Reality: A study of one of the 'Pioneering' Feminist Science Fictions", Kunapipi, Vol. 31, 2009, p. 141

<sup>2</sup> Md. Mahmudul Hasan, "Commemorating Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and Contextualising her Work in South Asian Muslim Feminism", Asiatic, Vol. 7, 2013, p. 54

<sup>3</sup> Rachana Vijay Musai, "A Feminist Context in Rokeya Housain's Sultana's Dream", Golden Research Thoughts, Vol. 2, 2012, p. 1

<sup>4</sup> Susmita Roye, Op. cit., p. 141

English book before Rokeya and said-Little sister, if you can learn this language, all the doors to the treasures of the world will be open for you." Sometimes Ibrahim and Rokeya had their "tutorial session" late at night in order to maintain maximum secrecy.

Rokeya's father Zahiruddin Saber permitted his daughters only reading the Qur'an in Arabic. On the other hand, his two older sons, "after receiving privileged education at a local school, studied at the elitist St. Xavier's College in Calcutta, which later on helped them enter the civil service." He did not give his daughters any formal learning "chiefly for the fear of social stigma and obloquy associated with female education." Srivastava says: "Social mythologies against female education, child marriage and purdah were widespread among both Muslims and Hindus, which rendered their formal institutions of learning 'devoid of female students'." Rokeya had to face and work on three different and dimensional fronts—literary, political, and educational simultaneously. The publication of the essay "Pipasha" in the Calcutta-based *Nabaprabha* in 1902 marked the inauguration of her literary career. Rokeya's life went through many strives and hurdles. Hasan says:

Despite her tremendous creative talents, insights and energies, we notice a gap in her literary production from 1909 to 1914. During this period, she could not focus on writing, presumably because of multiple grieves caused by the deaths of her parents, children and husband. Her life was full of trials and tribulations.<sup>9</sup>

But she did not give up her plan to make her creative world bigger. Rokeya wrote relentlessly "for a whole period of three decades beginning in 1902 and ending with her death, and producing foundational literary works of different genres and subject matters, predominantly women's issues." "Narir Adhikar" (Women's Rights) was her last writing which was left unfinished on her table on the night

8 Gouri Srivastava, *The Legend Makers: Some Prominent Muslim Women of India*, New Delhi: Concept, 2003, p. 3

<sup>5</sup> Md. Mahmudul Hasan, "Commemorating Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and Contextualising her Work in South Asian Muslim Feminism", *Op. cit.*, p. 46

<sup>6</sup> Md. Mahmudul Hasan, "Marginalisation of Muslim Writers in South Asian Literature: Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's English Works". South Asia Research, Vol.32, 2012, p. 195

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's English Works". South Asia Research, Vol.32, 2012, p. 195

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 193

<sup>9</sup> Md. Mahmudul Hasan, "Commemorating Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and Contextualising her Work in South Asian Muslim Feminism", *Op. cit.*, p. 47 10 Ibid

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she died and after 25 years of her death the magazine "Mahe-nau" posthumously published it in 1957.

## Rokeya's Views on Women Education

Rokeya's writings speak about the importance of women's education. She provides a definition of education in her piece "Stree Jatir Abanati." She observes:

Education does not mean to follow a particular nation or cultural norms. God has given us many faculties and education means to cultivate that natural faculty by hard work and exercise. It is our duty to ensure the proper use of our faculties. God has given us hands, legs, eyes, ears, mind and, the ability of thought. When we do good works with our hands, observe with the eyes, listen with ears and can think reasonably, that is called education. <sup>11</sup>

Here, Rokeya demonstrates the purposes of education, its nature, scope and emergence of its uses in a wide canvas. Rokeya further says: "Women's education is required to enlighten the enslaved mind of the women so that their slavery like situation can be removed and gender equality put in place."

Her voice was very loud and clear regarding women's education for their emancipation and enlightenment. In her another essay "Burqa" Rokeya posits:

Unless we receive higher education, society will not achieve progress. As long as we are not equal to our men in the spiritual world, the mere hope of progress is nothing but a mirage. We must cultivate all branches of knowledge.<sup>13</sup>

She expresses her strong grievance over men who deprive them from receiving and learning education, discriminated them to show their "efficiency", consider them as "weak", "incompetent" and "inferior" and extend their helping hand leading them to "become slaves of indolence and, by extension, of men." Due to the lack of education women lose their "ability to differentiate between freedom and captivity, progress and stagnation, slowly from being landlords and master of the house, men, in stages, have ended up being our lord and proprietor." Rokeya wants to see the development of the women in their innate faculties through the

<sup>11</sup> Md. Mahbubur Rahman, "Gender Equality in Rokeya's Writing", *Master Thesis*, Department of English and Humanities, BRAC University, Bangladesh, Web. 12 May, 2015, p. 59

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 66

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 58

<sup>14</sup> Mahbubul Alam, "Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain: An Unknown Voice of Bengal", *Sino-US English Teaching*, Vol.10, 2013, p. 659

<sup>15</sup> Mohammad A Quayum (ed.), "Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain: A Biographical Essay", in *The Essential Rokeya: Selected Works of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1880-1932*), Boston: Leiden Brill, 2013, pp. 6-7

cultivation of knowledge which does not penetrate to their mind just like the sunlight cannot penetrate to their bedroom. <sup>16</sup> She states education as an obligation:

God has given us hands, legs, ears, eyes, imagination and the power to think. If we strengthen our hands and legs through exercise, do good deeds with our hands, observe attentively with our eyes, listen carefully with our ears, and learn to make our thinking ability more sophisticated through reflection, then that is true education. <sup>17</sup>

Rokeya did not believe in any "disparity between men and women in the context of learning, which was highly revolutionary considering the material culture in which she launched her educational movement." In this regards Ghosh states:

Even long after women's education was accepted by the society, women were considered inferior to men in intelligence. They were not given the opportunity to study science. Perhaps it was thought what was not needed for household chores such as cooking, raising of children, knitting, writing letters or keeping daily accounts were unnecessary for them.<sup>19</sup>

She deliberately declares that men and women should have equal status and opportunity for social development where women's education is a must. In order to spread and stable women's education, Rokeya also advises for establishing separate schools and universities for female.

#### Rokeya's English Writings: Relevance to Women Education

The following discussion offers a detailed analysis of three writings: *Sultana's Dream*, "God Gives, Man Robs," and "Educational Ideals for the Modern Indian Girl"

#### Sultana's Dream

Rokeya wrote *Sultana's Dream* in 1905 to examine her proficiency in English. Her husband persuaded her to publish it in the Madras-based English language periodical *The Indian Ladies Magazine*. Though it was well-received in that community, *Sultana's Dream* was "unavailable to the majority of Indian womanhood among whom only the very privileged could read and write in English, it was still popular enough among its high caste women readers to emerge in book form in 1908." About twenty five years after its publication, Rokeya recalled everything behind writing and producing *Sultana's Dream*:

<sup>16</sup> Mahbubul Alam, Op. cit., p. 661

<sup>17</sup> Mohammad A Quayum (ed.), Op. cit., p. 12

<sup>18</sup> Mahmudul Hasan, "Commemorating Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and Contextualising her Work in South Asian Muslim Feminism", *Op. cit.*, p. 49

<sup>19</sup> Srabashi Ghosh, "Birds in a Cage: Changes in Bengali Social Life as Recorded in Autobiographies by Women", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1986, p. 92

<sup>20</sup> Mukti Lakhi, "An Alternative Feminist Modernity: Fantastic Utopia and the Quest for Home in *Sultana's Dream*", *Postgraduate English*, Cambridge: University of Cambridge, Vol.14, 2006, p. 2

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My adorable late husband was on a tour; I was totally alone in the house and wrote something to pass my time. After coming back, he asked me what I was doing during those two days. In reply to his query, I showed him the draft of 'Sultana's Dream'. He read the whole piece in one go while standing and exclaimed: 'A Terrible Revenge.' Then he sent the draft to the then Commissioner [of Bhagalpur] Mr. McPherson for possible [language] correction. When the writing came back from McPherson, it was noticed that he did not make any pen-mark on the draft. Rather he sent a note attached that read: 'The ideas expressed in it are quite delightful and full of originality and they are written in perfect English [...]. I wonder if she has foretold here the manner in which we may be able to move about in the air at some future time. Her suggestions on this point are most ingenious.'

The text explores her attitude toward Muslim patriarchy and was influenced by her beliefs that "men's selfishness and women's mental slavery were/are the two factors causing the degradation of women in India."<sup>22</sup> Education is also "the recurring motif and driving force of women's emancipation in *Sultana's Dream*."<sup>23</sup> Rokeya did not believe in "any disparity or discipline differences between male and female education and sought women's access invariably to all branches of knowledge"<sup>24</sup> and she campaigned to make "chemistry, botany, horticulture, personal hygiene, health care, nutrition, physical education, gymnastics, and painting and other fine arts open to women."<sup>25</sup>

In *Sultana's Dream*, she portrays Sister Sara with potentials in modern branches of knowledge like: history, politics, military strategy, education and science. Hence, in the Ladyland number of Universities has been founded where women are engaged in various kinds of research like the storm-stopping machines, creation of flying cars, artificial fountains and solar-heat machines etc. Susmita Roye describes:

Sultana's dream-world is one where women run universities and are great scientists. They are one and all highly educated and are also in control of the educational system of their community. Sister Sara mentions that she works in the laboratory and describes to Sultana the various scientific wonders achieved by their women. That is indeed only possible in a dream for both Sultana and Rokeya. <sup>26</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, "Bayujaney Ponchas Mile: Safol Swapno", (Fifty Miles in the Air: A Dream Came True), In Abdul Quadir (ed.) *Rokeya Rachanabali*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2006 [1932], pp. 252-53

<sup>22</sup> Fayeza Hasanat, "Sultana's Utopian Awakening: An Ecocritical Reading of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Sultana's Dream*", *Asiatic*, Vol.7, 2013, p. 116.

<sup>23</sup> Abu Saleh Md Rafi, "The Comparative Nature in Comparative Literature: A Case-study of Some Major Bengali Literary Works in Conjunction of Other National Literatures", *Bangladesh Research Foundation Journal*, Vol.1, 2012, p. 7

<sup>24</sup> Md. Mahmudul Hasan, "Marginalisation of Muslim Writers in South Asian Literature: Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's English Works". *Op. cit.*, p. 188

<sup>25</sup> Ibic

<sup>26</sup> Susmita Roye, Op. cit., p. 141

Rokeya lived in a world where "she was allowed only a narrow traditional religious education at home, suited to limit the mental horizons of aspiring girls and to equip them solely for a confined life as a wife and mother."<sup>27</sup> She formulated a "curriculum [that] included physical education, handicrafts, sewing, cooking, nursing, home economics, and gardening, in addition to regular courses such as Bangla, English, Urdu, Persian, and Arabic."<sup>28</sup>

In *Sultana's Dream*, women emerge as superwomen through education. They have the caliber to use science and technology for the best of their country. The basic theme of *Sultana's Dream* is education and adaptation of science. Rokeya distinguishes feminine and masculine technology very clearly. Musai supports her saying: "Feminine technology is related to solar energy and is environment friendly. On the other hand, masculine energy is based upon the power of muscles and weapons."<sup>29</sup>

## "God Gives, Man Robs"

Hasan's essay titled "Marginalisation" opines that *Sultana's Dream* basically deals with her views on education in general whereas her piece "God Gives, Man Robs" projects her feminist philosophy in terms of Islamic tenets. In support of his argument, Hasan quotes the first few lines of Rokeya's essay showing that she has begun it with an aphorism that reads: 'Man Proposes, God Disposes'. Rokeya then opposes this view by saying that in her personal opinion, it is, in fact, God who is the Giver while it is man who is the robber. She goes on to say that God has created men and women with same animal instincts such as hunger, thirst, and the necessity to sleep. Rokeya further states that as per Islamic statute, both men and women are dictated to pray five times a day. Therefore, there is no dissimilarity that has been divinely sanctioned upon men and women.

In the essay "God Gives, Man Robs", Rokeya touches on the core of Islamic teachings; according to her, leave no room for gender injustices which were clearly prevalent in her society. Rokeya critiques patriarchal, mainstream interpretations of Islam and re-examines them by using the hermeneutic tool of 'ijtihad', critical thinking and reinterpretation of the Qur'an and prophetic

28 Roushan Jahan (ed.), "Rokeya: An Introduction to Her Life", New York: The Feminist Press, 1988, p. 42

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>29</sup> Rachana Vijay Musai, Op. cit., p. 2

<sup>30</sup> Md. Mahmudul Hasan, "Marginalisation of Muslim Writers in South Asian Literature: Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's English Works", *Op. cit.*, P. 189

<sup>31</sup> Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, "God Gives, Man Robs", In Abdul Quadir (ed.) *Rokeya Rachanabali*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2006 [1927], p. 491

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teachings, in order to restore the egalitarian message of Islam and to get rid of misogynist elements mixed with it in her social setting. Thus, she pointed her finger at those who thought themselves the custodians of Islam and abused this position to promote patriarchal authority at the expense of women's sufferings. Rokeya asks for the true values of Islam:

In Arab society, where women were being oppressed and female infanticide was widespread, the Prophet Muhammad came to their rescue. He not only promulgated some precepts but also set an example how to treat women with respect. He showed how to love one's daughter by demonstrating his love to Fatima [his daughter]. That love and affection for one's daughter is rare on earth. Alas! It is because of his absence among us that we [women] are in such a despicable plight!<sup>32</sup>

Rokeya did not go against her religion or cultural values. Hossain notes: "When Rokeya looked for role models to show that emancipation was possible, she turned not to Western women but those of the subcontinent or the Muslim world." She promotes 'idealised Islamic values' and highlights Islam's emancipatory aspects by looking at Qur'an and Hadith through the prism of justice and jurisprudence of gender equality.

#### "Educational Ideals for the Modern Indian Girl"

Hasan notes that Rokeya's essay "Educational Ideals for the Modern Indian Girl" reflects her feminist philosophy as domestic and individualistic that is charged with her own social construct and that is why her ideals perfectly vindicate women's rights of the society, which she was a part of.<sup>35</sup>

Rokeya opines that girls are being educated in the line of Western methods, which substantially expunges anything that is "Indian." She focuses on ideals of womanhood that have run in Indian society for ages, which the girls are not posed with. She goes on to say that these ideals have been narrowed down and broadly customized; it is now time to de-customize and broaden it so that its finesse can be perceived and internalized. She speaks strongly against blatant "imitations of Western custom and tradition" stating that by doing this we are enslaving ourselves neglecting our own tradition.

<sup>32</sup> Md. Mahmudul Hasan, "Marginalisation of Muslim Writers in South Asian Literature: Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's English Works", *Op. cit.*, pp. 189-90

<sup>33</sup> Yasmin Hossain, "The Begum's Dream: Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and the Broadening of Muslim Women's Aspirations in Bengal", *South Asia Research*, Vol. 12, 1992, p. 4 34 Ibid, p. 8

<sup>35</sup> Md. Mahmudul Hasan, Op. cit., p. 190

<sup>36</sup> Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, "Education Ideals for the Modern Indian Girl", In Abdul Quadir (ed.) *Rokeya Rachanabali*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2006 [1931], pp. 494-95

The essay "Educational Ideals for the Modern Indian Girl" clearly reveals her intense desire for educating women. Rokeya says that girls should broaden their outlooks and modernize themselves. Girls should be taught how to carry out their duties "commendably" and focus on long term plan, which is not "superficial" but pragmatic because the future of India "lies in its girls".<sup>37</sup>

In this regard Alam says that Rokey criticizes those men who have a wrong concept about women's education, as these men think that education to women will bring evil and mortified by it. While the society is prone to forgiving uneducated women, it is equally tough on persecuting those who have even a little education regardless these women do any mistake or not. It is in fact their schooling that is the target of attack. Rokeya invites all women to come forward and educate themselves to challenge this onslaught on them.<sup>38</sup>

Rokeya wanted to see Indian women educate through awakening their consciousness, self-confidence, and self-respect about their own right which should drive them forward. She talked about women's educational advancement in relation to men's interest in it. Rokeya argued that if the mothers remained ignorant their sons would never be brave and bright.

#### Conclusion

From the above discussion and analysis it can be said that Rokeya's English pieces are found as vital resources that give us influential and effective wisdom to encourage and establish women education. It is also found that Rokeya played an important role in spreading women's education and their empowerment. She tried to rectify unnatural practices of seclusion and men's perception towards educating women. Finally, Rokeya urges all women to lay efforts to move forward and foster their intellect via education.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, pp. 495-496

<sup>38</sup> Mahbubul Alam, "Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain: An Unknown Voice of Bengal", *Op. cit.*, pp. 661-62

# DEVELOPMENT PERFORMANCE OF BANGLADESH: ASSESSING SOME SELECTED INDICATORS

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Ishtiaque Selim\*

#### **Abstract**

This paper attempts to assess three major development indicators of Bangladesh, namely: investment, agriculture and foreign aid. Investment is the key to development for it hikes productivity, generates employment and thus raises output of the economy. By contrast, agriculture, marked with low productivity level, is considered a sector that does not accelerate growth. Therefore, underdeveloped economies tend to make efforts to progress toward a more urban-based non-farm sector. At the same time, dependency on foreign aid could undermine the overall development process of an economy for it generally increases the economic uncertainty and burden. The article employs the qualitative method to measure the development of Bangladesh in light of these three indicators. The study finally concludes that although Bangladesh has made progress in the agricultural sector, the country lags behind in investment and foreign aid sectors.

## Introduction

Development is a complex and multidimensional process requiring attainment of a number of variables ranging from GDP growth to access to health care. There is a widespread recognition that high growth over the long run is necessary to achieve lasting improvements in social outcomes (Martinez and Mlachila, 2013). At the same time Todaro (2003), points out that "It is not just the mere fact of rapid growth per se that determines the nature of its distributional benefits but more the character of economic growth". Thus, the quality of growth<sup>2</sup> which is

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<sup>1</sup> M Martinez and M. Mlachila, "The Quality of the Recent High-Growth Episode in Sub-Saharan Africa" IMF Working Paper, African Department, 2013, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Martinez and Mlachila (2013) defined the quality of growth on the basis of two features: First, the intrinsic features of the economy like the fundamental natures in terms of strength, volatility and sustainability. Second, by analyzing the impact of growth on several socio-economic outcomes. For details see, M. Martinez and M. Mlachila, (2013), "The Quality of the Recent High-Growth Episode in Sub-Saharan Africa" IMF Working Paper, African Department, p. 3.

important for development at the same time is defined basically in terms of fundamental nature of different economy. In this back drop, the paper would focus on gauging the development process of Bangladesh by assessing three economic indicators, namely, investment, agriculture dependency, and dependency on foreign aid.<sup>3</sup>

The main objective of this study is to appraise the current stage of Bangladesh's development in terms of investment, agriculture dependency and foreign aid dependency. In doing so, the paper would look into the investment performance of Bangladesh. It also tries to find out whether the economy is experiencing a structural shift from a rural based agriculture to urban based industrial sector. The article, at the same time, attempts to present the trend and features of foreign aid structure of Bangladesh. It brings about the performances of two developing nations, namely China and Malaysia, for comparative analysis purpose. Now why compare the development performance of Bangladesh with that of China and Malaysia? In other words, what is the rationale behind selecting these two East and Southeast Asian economies which are now more advanced than the economy of Bangladesh? The answer is simple: while China enjoys the status of a global economic powerhouse, Malaysia's economic growth over the last few decades is no less spectacular. These two economies' start had been rather modest as they faced development complexities such as poverty, over population, political upheaval, low investment, agriculture and foreign aid dependency. Appropriate investment and agriculture policy, and prudent utilisation of foreign aid enabled both China and Malaysia to prosper. Bangladesh's development challenges are not much dissimilar than those faced by both China and Malaysia. Hence, it is worthwhile in a general sense to mention the economic performances of these economies in the analysis.

The paper is organized as follows. After a brief introduction in the first section, the second section explains the logic behind choosing investment, agriculture dependency and external dependency as the major indicators for understanding the development performance of Bangladesh. The third section discusses the methodology of the paper. The next section focuses on the changing pattern of investment and analyzes the logical framework of investment regime by looking

<sup>3</sup> According to the Todaro and Smith (2003), the three amongst six common characteristics of developing countries are low levels of productivity, substantial dependence on agricultural production and primary product exports, and dominance, dependence and vulnerability to international relations. For details, see, Micheal. P. Todaro and Stephen. C. Smith, *Economic Development*, (Person Education, 2003, p. 46.

at the quality of GDP growth. The fifth section discusses the contributions of agriculture in order to measure the development performance of Bangladesh in the context of structural change model. The sixth section investigates the external assistance scenario of Bangladesh and discusses its role over the development performances. Finally the last section concludes the paper.

## Rationale behind Selecting the Indicators

There are strong rationales for choosing investment, agriculture, and external assistance as the three indicators of development performance. First, investment is one of the key drivers to economic growth as it increases productivity and generates much needed capital for developing economies. Acceleration of investment is linked to employment generation which leads to higher per capita income. Bangladesh government has planned to boost its investment regime to achieve a specific growth target. In fact, Bangladesh government aims to raise the investment share in GDP by 2015 to attain a growth rate of 8 per cent. The government further intends to boost this share to reach a 10 per cent growth rate by 2021. Second, dependency on agriculture and foreign aid has been regarded as features of a typical under-developed nation. Agriculture is characterized by low productivity, and thus a structural transformation towards a more productive manufacturing sector is required for Bangladesh economy. At the same time, over dependency on foreign aid reflects the incapability of an economy to generate its own resources to finance projects aimed for development. Such dependency could easily expose a nation to economic vulnerability.

## Methodology

The article employs the qualitative approach. It looks into relevant secondary dataset from various sources such as World Bank, Bangladesh Bank, and the Bangladesh Government's Ministry of Planning. Besides, various relevant national and international journals were consulted for necessary information. The paper also uses the literature of some pioneers in the field of development economics for the analytical purposes.

#### **Investment Performance of Bangladesh**

Investment is one of the critical factors that explains economic growth and development. From the Classical School perspective, investment is important, and from Keynesian view point volatility in investment (or in other words business spending) causes economic instability. Seminal works by Rostow (1960),<sup>5</sup> Harrod

<sup>4</sup> Planning Commission, *Sixth Five Year Plan FY 2011-FY 2015*, (Part-1, July 2011), (Ministry of Planning, Government of Bangladesh), pp. 44, 78.

<sup>5</sup> W. W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960).

(1939)<sup>6</sup> and Domar (1946),<sup>7</sup> and Chenery and Bruno (1966)<sup>8</sup> emphasize increased investment to champion development.

According to Rostow, investment is pivotal for an economy to reach the so-called take off stage. In the same vein, both Harrod and Domar, and Chenery and Bruno stressed on filling the savings-investment gap. Investment especially in export oriented sectors in rapidly developed economies like China and Malaysia has played a pivotal role over the years in attaining spectacular growth.

Now what is the investment scenario in Bangladesh? Official records suggest that private and public investments have steadily increased over the last two decades. The following table provides the private as well as public investment figures in Bangladesh from 2001-2002 to 2013-14.

**Table 1:** Trends of Public, Private and Total Investment in Bangladesh (as per cent of GDP)

Fiscal year	Private investment	Public investment	Total investment
2001-02	16.8	6.4	23.2
2002-03	17.2	6.2	23.4
2003-04	17.8	6.2	24.0
2004-05	18.3	6.2	24.5
2005-06	18.7	6.0	24.7
2006-07	19.0	5.4	24.4
2007-08	19.2	5.0	24.2
2008-09	19.5	4.6	24.1
2009-10	19.40	5.01	24.4
2010-11	19.46	5.28	24.7
2011-12	19.65	5.38	25.03
2012-13	21.75	6.64	28.39
2013-14	21.39	7.30	28.69

Source: Ministry of Finance, *Bangladesh Economic Review2005, 2010, 2012, 2014* (Government of Bangladesh).

Some features are evident from the investment data. First, starting from the new millennium total investment in Bangladesh had been more or less stagnant for it

<sup>6</sup> R. F. Harrod, "An Essay in Dynamic Theory", *The Economic Journal*, Vol. 49, No. 193, (March 1939), pp. 14-33.

<sup>7</sup> Evsey D. Domar, "Capital Expansion, Rate of Growth, and Employment" *Econometrica*, Vol. 14, No. 2, April 1946, pp. 137-147.

<sup>8</sup> H B Chenery and A M Strout, "Foreign Assistance and Economic Development", *American Economic Review*, Vol. 56, (1966), pp. 679-733.

was hovering around 24 per cent of the GDP. However, total investment ratio marked significant improvement over the last two fiscal years. Second private investment has become dominant over public investment. The share of private investment is about 80 per cent in the total investment. Third, there had been a secular decline in public investment, which only revamped in the last two fiscal years. While private investment recorded a 3.85 per cent growth from 2000-2001 to 2011-2012, public investment declined by 1.82 per cent during the same period of time.

The investment trend in general, as depicted from the table, does not give an encouraging scenario as private investment dominates public investment. The privatisation-led development theory propagated by the leading protagonists of the development partner might increase the so called GDP growth but it will be at the cost of permanent base of effective development. The primary objective of any private investment is to strive for maximum profit thereby literally overlooking the long-run social benefit of the country. Despite generating employments for Bangladesh economy, more often private investment in areas like health, education, transportation and industry fails to look after the interest of the common mass.

On the other hand, public investment can influence economic development. However, it is not without problems such as procrastination, corruption, lack of monitoring and accountability, lack of proper planning, mismanagement and inefficient resource utilisation. For Bangladesh, the challenge to public investment regime stems from government's inability to fully implement the ADP (annual development programme) budget. During fiscal year 2006-2007, for instances, government did not spend 29 and 32.5 per cent of ADP budget respectively. It makes the overall investment scenario in Bangladesh rather depressing. Also, the slow pace in implementing projects under PPP (Public Private Partnership) is not helping cause either. Launched to increase the role of private sector, it will take some time to realise full potential from PPP. 10 The energy crisis is another issue that could cause hindrance to investment. Nevertheless, it is necessary to mention here that the constraints to public investment noted above can be addressed to some degree. For example: Bangladesh Government has planned to invest around 6 per cent of GDP in PPP projects by the end of 2015. To address the energy crisis, government at the same time has targeted to generate an additional 4743 MW of electricity in FY 2014

<sup>9</sup> Calculated from, Planning Commission, *Op. cit*, p. 79. 10 *Ibid.*, p. 80.

and FY 2015. Hence, proper role of public investment may lead the country to the right path of development such as the ones in China and Malaysia, where public investment worked effectively in tandem with private investment.

#### Role of Interest Rate to Accelerate Investment

Conventional economic wisdom argues for a positive relationship between the deposit interest rate and savings rate. By contrast, investment is negatively related to the lending interest rate. However, the sensitivity of investment to the lending interest rate is higher than that of the savings to the deposit interest rate. The difference in sensitivity is due to the fact that households save with the banks or other financial institutes not only for reaping interest rate but also for ensuring the security of their wealth. Thus small variation in the deposit interest rate does not influence savings significantly. On the other hand, the rate of return of investment depends basically on two factors: the cost of investment, and price of products of investors in the market. As the product market is strictly competitive locally and globally, an investor can not transfer additional investment cost into the product price. Therefore, to make profit the viable option for an investor is to lower the cost of borrowing fund. As a result, the volatility in lending interest rate might halt the pace of economic development by stemming the flow of investment. However, one must keep in mind that a lower deposit interest rate could depress savings rate which in turn might create a shortfall of funds for investment. Hence, the issue is not lending interest rate but the so-called interest rate spread.

Interest rate spread is defined as the difference between lending interest rate and deposit interest rate. The bigger gap between the two or a larger spread ensures higher profit for banks and financial institutes. As such bigger gulf between the lending and the deposit interest rate further the difference between national savings and total investment of the country.

In Bangladesh, the private banks outnumbered the state-owned banks. Thus, the former one participates significantly in financing the businesses in Bangladesh. The private banks, however, enjoy a higher interest rate spread vis-à-vis their state-owned counterparts. It results in a higher general interest rate of the country. According to Bangladesh Bank, in 1990, the average lending interest rate of state-owned commercial banks was 14.06 per cent, when it was 16.44 per cent in private commercial banks.<sup>11</sup> In 2007, the lending interest rate of state-owned commercial banks was 11 per cent.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, the lending interest rate

<sup>11</sup> Bangladesh Bank, Policy Analysis Unit, *Rationalizing Interest Rate Spread in the Banking Sector*, Policy Paper 0804, (May 2008), p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

of private commercial bank was 13.43 per cent which was 2.43 per cent point higher than that of in the state-owned commercial banks over the same time period.<sup>13</sup>

Figure-1: Trends of Interest Rate Structure in Bangladesh.



Source: World Bank.14

According to Bangladesh Bank, from June 2001 to December 2007, the average interest rate spreads of private commercial banks and foreign commercial banks were 6 per cent and 8.12 per cent respectively. The spreads were substantially higher than that of in the state-owned commercial banks (5.65 per cent). All these evidently have affected cost of borrowing fund adversely thereby raising the level of prices and hampering the development process.

Monetary policy of Bangladesh Bank has also impacted the rate of interest and consequently investment spending. For the last few decades, Bangladesh Bank implemented tight monetary policies mainly to curb inflation.<sup>16</sup> In doing so it removed the interest rate cap, which in turn created liquidity shortages in money market and raised the rate of interest.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, fiscal policy of

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> World Bank: World Bank Data on Deposit Interest Rate <www.data.worldbank.org/indicator/FR.INR.DPST> (accessed January 21, 2014).

<sup>15</sup> Bangladesh Bank, Policy Analysis Unit, Op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> The Daily Star, August 4, 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

Bangladesh government does not help the cause of interest rate and investment. To finance the national budget, the government over the last few years has been borrowing excessively from the local banking sector thereby creating crisis of fund for investment especially for the private sector. The implication of the higher borrowing on the part of Bangladesh government is that it raises the cost of fund available for the private sector and thus reduces investment spending.

## Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to Development

Economic theories over the years have explicitly contested in favour of FDI. It is commonly regarded that FDI helps augmenting investment and promoting competition between local and foreign enterprises. It also increases production efficiency and enables to spill technology, knowledge and know-how. Furthermore, some studies have suggested that FDI has positive impact on export oriented industries and on overall economy. For example, Dabour (2000) reported that FDI assisted host nations "to supplement their domestic savings and investment and to benefit from the associated transfers of technology, management knowledge, business culture and access to foreign markets". 18 Another study by Borensztein, Gregorio and Lee (1998) found that FDI is an important vehicle for the transfer of technology, contributing relatively more to growth than domestic investment. 19 However, the higher productivity of FDI is contingent upon the minimum threshold stock of human capital in the host country. According to the International monetary fund (IMF) "direct investment reflects the aim of obtaining a lasting interest by a resident entity of one economy (direct investor) in an enterprise that is resident in another economy (the direct investment enterprise)".20

It is necessary to mention that this sub-section would not intend to find out whether FDI enhances the economic efficiency in Bangladesh. The intention of the remaining part is to measure the performance of Bangladesh in gaining FDI, and to compare its FDI performance with two developing economies, namely, Malaysia and China, for assessing development performance.

<sup>18</sup> N. M. Dabour, "The Role of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Development and Growth in OIC Member Countries", *Journal of Economic Cooperation*, Vol. 21, (2000), p. 27.

<sup>19</sup> E. Borensztein, J. D. Gregorio and J-W Lee, "How Does Foreign Direct Investment Affect Economic Growth?", *Journal of International Economics*, Vol. 45, (June 1998), p. 115.

<sup>20</sup> International Monetary Fund (IMF), *IMF Committee on Balance of Payment Statistics and OECD Workshops on International Investment Statistics*, Series Paper 2, (2009) <a href="www.imf.org/External/.../diteg2.pdf">www.imf.org/External/.../diteg2.pdf</a> (accessed February 25, 2014).

10 9 8 7 6 Percentage 5 Bangladesh 4 China 3 -Malaysia. 2 1 0 -1 Year

Figure-2: Trends of FDI in Bangladesh Compared to China and Malaysia

Source: World Bank.

Figure 2 shows that both China and Malaysia were able to maintain a moderately higher growth rate of FDI inflow which helped them to consolidate the balanced economic growth. On the other hand, Bangladesh did not show any significant improvement in attaining FDI inflow. In fact, the FDI growth rate has been hovering around a mere 1 per cent of the GDP over the last three decades. At the earlier stage after the independence, the country adopted a planned economic regime which acted reversely to attain FDI and to accelerate the GDP growth. From the early 1980s, Bangladesh started to open its economy that resulted in gradual increase of FDI inflow to the country. From figure 2, it has been clearly observed that in the decade of 1980s, Bangladesh attained highest level of FDI. In the 1990s, the highest level of FDI inflow was 0.43 per cent of the GDP, which was recorded in 1999. After the independence, the biggest FDI inflow was 1.35 per cent in 2005. All these clearly indicate a depressing FDI regime for Bangladesh.

### Total Investment and GDP Growth

This part of the paper attempts to compare the investment-growth linkage in Bangladesh *vis-à-vis* China and Malaysia. Table A in the annex reports the investment and GDP growth performances of Bangladesh, China and Malaysia. From the table we can find a positive relationship between total investment and

GDP growth in Bangladesh, China and Malaysia. The table further depicts a strong investment and growth performances by China and Malaysia over Bangladesh during the last three decades. In 1980s, the average Bangladesh investment as a percentage of GDP was 16.74 and average GDP growth rate was only 3.72 per cent. On the other hand, the average investments for China and Malaysia in the same decade were 40 per cent and 31.20 per cent respectively (See Table in annex). Needless to say that due to higher investment flow, both China and Malaysia recorded healthy average GDP growth rate of 9.35 per cent and 6.04 per cent respectively during the 1980s. And in the next two decades investment and GDP in Bangladesh registered commendable growth also.

It is also discernible from in Annex 1 that high level of investment in early 1980s in China and Malaysia were not accompanied by reasonably high GDP growth rate. Paradoxically, growth rates of the two economies picked up when investment rate declined slightly. This is because the investment was healthy and thereby worked as a base for balanced growth. If the level of investment can be maintained at a reasonable rate, the economic growth will be stable. From 1990-91 to 1999-2000, the average investment of China and Malaysia were 39.05 per cent and 36.36 per cent of GDP respectively and the average growth rates of the two countries were 10.45 per cent and 7.22 per cent respectively. On the contrary, Bangladesh demonstrated moderate performance in accelerating investment and GDP growth. Only in the first decade of the new century Bangladesh progressed well in investment and GDP growth. From 2001-02 to 2010-11, both investment and GDP growth recorded marked improvement over Malaysia wherein investment rate in that era declined quite significantly. However, a faster investment growth is required to achieve the 8 per cent to 10 per cent GDP growth rate aimed by Bangladesh government in its Sixth Five Year Plan (SFYP) and Vision 2021. As mentioned earlier in this article that Bangladesh needs to increase the investment rate to 32.5 per cent by fiscal year 2015 and to 40 per cent by fiscal year 2021 to meet the growth targets set by SFYP and Vision 2021 respectively.21

## Performance of Agriculture in Bangladesh

The role of agriculture in Bangladesh's development has been pivotal. With roughly 50 per cent of the country's labour force engaged in this sector, agriculture is a vital source of employment. The sector also provides all important food stuff and nutrient. By supplying raw materials and workers, agriculture complements to the industrial sector. Agriculture at the same time is helping the

<sup>21</sup> Planning Commission, Op. cit., pp. 44, 78.

economy to reduce its rural poverty. Over the last decade, agriculture growth rate in Bangladesh has been hovering around 3 per cent as opposed to 2 per cent across 1970s and 1980s. Though the contribution of agriculture to GDP in Bangladesh has recorded a secular decline in the last four decades, the sector still plays an important role in the country's growth. By mid nineties agriculture accounted for only a quarter of the country's GDP, but roughly 85 per cent people were directly or indirectly linked to agriculture.<sup>22</sup> By 2011, less than 20 per cent of GDP were originated from agriculture, while service and industry<sup>23</sup> became the most dominant sectors. In fact, industry and service constituted more than a 25 per cent and 50 per cent respectively of the GDP. The contribution of industry is projected to grow to 32 per cent by the end of 2015.<sup>24</sup>

However, too much dependence on agriculture is not conducive to development. It is widely claimed that productivity in agriculture sector is moderate, and demands for agriculture products are not much sensitive to income causing trade imbalance for least developed countries which in most cases export agriculture goods. Therefore, classical development models and studies have argued in favour of developing manufacturing sectors typically characterised by higher productivity. The much vaunted Lewis Theory (1954) argued for a structural change in the developing economies to attain development.<sup>25</sup> Structural change implies an economy's transformation from "traditional subsistence agriculture to more modern, more urbanized, and more structurally diverse manufacturing and service economy". 26 The surplus labour in the low productive agriculture, as Lewis explained, would transfer to industry or manufacturing sector which in turn would generate excess fund for reinvestment for capitalists thereby leading to sustainable growth in industrial sector. Hence, development of industry and nonagriculture sectors has become critical to development. One advantage of such transformation is that with more workers migrating to industries, the lobour productivity and real wage in rural sector would increase.

Some studies have revealed the growing importance of industry in growth, employment generation and poverty reduction. For example, Mundlak (2005) showed that US development in the nineteenth and twentieth century was

<sup>22</sup> Planning Commission, Ministry of Planning, Op. cit.

<sup>23</sup> As per BBS definition manufacturing is the source of 70 per cent industrial GDP and 80 per cent of industrial employment. See, *Ibid.*, p, 44.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>25</sup> See, for details, W. A, Lewis, "Economic Development with Unlimited Supplies of Labour, *Manchester School*, Vol. 22, (1954), pp. 400-449.

<sup>26</sup> Micheal. C. Todaro and Stephen. C. Smith, Op. cit.

propelled by technological progress and investment in rail road and other infrastructure.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, in Korea, the main driving force to development in the 1960s was the expansion of export oriented industry.<sup>28</sup> The country adopted strategic policies that focused not on agriculture but on raising savings and investment, and developing human resources to support the industrial base. In a cross-country study, Islam (2006) reported that real wage hike in industry increased the pace of poverty reduction, and he also indentified that poverty reduction is positively related to employment in industries.<sup>29</sup> Another study of Islam (2002) showed growth of employment in industrial sector in some Southeast Asian economies pushed up rural wage and thus improved poverty situation.<sup>30</sup>

This section, in an effort to measure the degree of dependency by Bangladesh on the traditional sector, would try to find whether the country is heading towards industrialisation from the traditional subsistence sector. The section also attempts to compare Bangladesh's development performance with the development experiences of China and Malaysia to identify the right path to development. However, it needs to be mentioned here that the transformation toward industrialisation should not come at a cost of agriculture. As indicated earlier that this sector is still important to the growth of Bangladesh economy. In fact government of Bangladesh should put emphasis on developing agro-based industries in the country.

In recent years, a structural change in employment takes place in Bangladesh economy. The structural change implies the creation of additional jobs in industry and service sectors which would take workers away from agriculture to non-agriculture sector. While in 2005-06 nearly half the labour force was involved with agriculture, it dropped to 43 per cent in 2009-10. At the same time, employment in manufacturing sector has recorded a steady growth. The share of manufacturing employment in 2009-10 rose to 12.34 per cent from 10.06 per cent in 1995-96. In absolute term between 2005-06 and 2009-10 an additional 3.6 million workers joined non-agriculture sector and 600,000 workers have migrated

<sup>27</sup> Y. Mundlak, "Economic Growth: Lessons from Two Centuries of American Agriculture", *Journal of Economic Literature*, Vol. 43, (2005), pp. 989-1024.

<sup>28</sup> Ibia

<sup>29</sup> Rezwanul Islam, *Fighting Poverty: The Development-Employment Link*, (Lynn Rienner Publisher, 2006).

<sup>30</sup> Rezwanul Islam, "Poverty Alleviation, Employment and Labour Markets: Lessons from the Asian Experiences and Policies". Chirstopher Edmonds and Sara Medina (eds.), *Defining the Agenda for Poverty Reduction: Proceedings of the First Asia and Pacific Forum on Poverty*, (Asian Development Bank, Manila, 2002).

from agriculture to non-agriculture sector.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, it has been projected that by 2015 service and industry would account for roughly 65 per cent of total employment in the country.<sup>32</sup> In short, a transformation in the economic structure is quite evident, which, in line with classical models, have taken Bangladesh in the right track of development.

**Figure-3:** Share of Employed Labor force in Agriculture and Manufacturing Sector

Source: Ministry of Finance, Bangladesh Economic Review 2012, (GoB).<sup>33</sup>

Now the paper would compare the pace of structural change of Bangladesh economy with that of China and Malaysia. From table 2 one observes, across the last three decades the role of agriculture in GDP fell in the three economies. However, a marked difference exists in the industry sector. While industry accounted for considerable proportion of GDP in China and Malaysia over the last 30 years, its contribution to Bangladesh's total output remains relatively low. Also, statistics suggest that reductions in agriculture share in GDP increase growth rates in China and Malaysia. For example, in the 1980s average GDP growth rates of both China and Malaysia were 9.34 and 6.4 per cent respectively, when the average agricultural contributions to GDP of these two economies were

<sup>31</sup> Planning Commission, Op. cit., p. 76.

<sup>32</sup> Calculated from *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>33</sup> Last labor force survey was conducted in 2010.

29.3 and 20.3 per cent respectively. In the next decade, China and Malaysia registered a higher GDP growth rate of 10.45 and 7.22 per cent respectively. During the same decade, contribution of agriculture to the GDP slumped to 20.6 and 13.2 per cent in China and Malaysia respectively. Thus, as the role of agriculture declined, these economies achieved robust growth rate.

Table 2: Trends of agricultural contribution in comparison with China and Malaysia (as a percentage of GDP)

Year	Bangladesh			China			Malaysia		
	Agriculture	Industry	Service	Agriculture	Industry	Service	Agri.	Industry	Service
1980	32	21	48	30	48	22	23	41	36
1985	33	21	46	28	43	29	20	39	42
1990	30	21	48	27	41	32	15	42	43
1995	26	25	49	20	47	33	13	41	46
2000	25	26	49	15	46	39	9	48	43
2001	24	26	50	14	45	10	8	46	46
2002	23	26	51	14	45	41	9	45	46
2003	22	26	52	13	46	41	9	47	44
2004	21	27	52	13	46	40	9	49	42
2005	20	27	53	12	47	41	8	46	45
2006	20	28	52	11	48	41	9	47	45
2007	19	28	52	11	47	42	10	45	45
2008	19	29	52	11	47	42	10	45	45
2009	19	29	53	10	46	43	9	41	50
2010	19	28	53	10	47	43	10	41	49
2011	18	28	54	10	47	43	12	40	48
2012	17	27	56	10	45	45	10	41	49
2013	16	28	56	10	44	46	9	41	50

Source: World Bank.34

On the other hand, the economy of Bangladesh performed better in 1990s with growth rate hovered around 4 to 5 per cent and the industrial sector expanded faster than the agricultural sector. Between 2000 and 2011, share of agriculture in Bangladesh fell quite steadily. But, the share of industry in total output rose at a slow rate. In other words, the pace of industrial expansion in Bangladesh remains quite moderate in relation to China and Malaysia. Seen thus, a transformation in the economic structure, in line with Classical models, is quite evident, which, has placed Bangladesh in the right track of development. At the same time, it needs to

<sup>34</sup> For agriculture data see <www.data.worldbank.org/indicator/NV.AGR.TOTL.ZS> (accessed February 7, 2014); for industry data see <www.data.worldbank.org/indicator/NV.IND.TOR.ZS> (accessed February 7, 2014), and for service data see <www.data.worldbank.org/indicator/NV.SRV.TETC.ZS> (accessed Feb. 7, 2014).

recognise that in terms of pace of this transformation Bangladesh lags behind developing economies like China and Malaysia.

#### **External Assistance in Bangladesh Economy**

Bangladesh has been a major foreign aid recipient country since her birth. Foreign aid used to play an important role in formulating and implementing development plans in Bangladesh.<sup>35</sup> Right after independence, the war-ravaged economy required foreign aid mainly for reconstruction and rehabilitation purposes. Only in recent times the country seems to become less reliant on foreign assistance with increased trade and foreign remittances. In 2008, for example, revenue from exports and foreign remittances were respectively 10 times and 6 times more than foreign aid.36 In terms of share in GDP, the importance of foreign aid has also declined in Bangladesh. From 1970s to 1990s, external assistance remained more than 6 per cent of GDP, while by 2005 its share became only 2 per cent of GDP.<sup>37</sup> However, still foreign aid remains an important factor in Bangladesh to finance development projects and fiscal deficit, and to attain the goals of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).<sup>38</sup> Over the years foreign assistance has been disbursed for implementing development projects, ensuring food security, enhancing education quality etc. The major sources of foreign aid for Bangladesh are: IDA (International Development Association), ADB (Asian Development Bank), Japan, USA, UN System, UK, Canada, Germany, the EU and the Netherlands.<sup>39</sup>

It may be noted that the inflow of external assistance, in terms of foreign aid, loans and grant, is mainly a good measure of economic solvency of an economy. In their seminal work, Chenery and Strout (1966) put forward the idea of filling up the savings-investment gap, and reducing the foreign exchange shortages through external aid and assistance. Hence, the more well-off economies require less external assistance, while it is in high demand in the less prosperous

<sup>35</sup> Syed Ashraf Ali, "On Utilisation of Foreign Aid", The Financial Express (Dhaka), July 2, 2013.

<sup>36</sup> M. G. Quibria, "Aid Effectiveness in Bangladesh: IS the Glass Half Empty or Half Full?", (April 2010), p. 12 <www.erd.gov.bd/index.php/reports/foreign-aid-flow-overview-2012-2013> (accessed December 15, 2013).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>38</sup> Mohammad Jasim Uddin: "Foreign Aid and Economic Diplomacy of Bangladesh", *Dhaka Courier* (Dhaka), May 2, 2013.

<sup>39</sup> See for details, External Relations Division, *Foreign Aid Scenario 2012-13*, (Government of Bangladesh), p. 6 <a href="https://www.erd.gov.bd/index.php/reports/foreign-aid-flow-overview-2012-2013">www.erd.gov.bd/index.php/reports/foreign-aid-flow-overview-2012-2013</a>> (accessed January 2, 2014).

<sup>40</sup> H B Chenery and A M Strout, Op. cit.

economies. In other words, the countries with sufficient investment, high employment opportunities, high per capita income, adequate foreign reserve and soaring GDP growth rate will naturally have less dependency on foreign assistance than the relatively poor and economically backward nations.

Nevertheless, external assistance per se has its own problem. Influx of foreign aid can appreciate the local currency thereby hindering the growth of exports. To counter such phenomena with increase of money supply could only increase inflation. 41 In Bangladesh foreign aid issue is often quite controversial because it is claimed that foreign assistance has failed to impact poverty reduction significantly, and often conditions attached to foreign aid have paved way for the donors to influence the policy options of Bangladesh government. <sup>42</sup> A number of studies also reported negative impact of foreign aid on Bangladesh development. For example, Sobhan (1982)<sup>43</sup> in his famous study argued that foreign aid in Bangladesh only promoted inequality by increasing wealth of the urban and rural elite. Quazi (2008)<sup>44</sup> found foreign assistance in Bangladesh in fact reduced growth rate and domestic gross savings rate. Similar findings were reported by Alamgir (1974)<sup>45</sup> and Islam (1992)<sup>46</sup>. Also, without stable government, functional institutes and conducive policies, the effectiveness of foreign aid can be questioned. 47 Furthermore, it is widely perceived that long-term foreign assistance does not bring about expected outcomes for developing economies; only enhances the debt-burden of general mass. Thus, the degree of external dependency of a country can be a crucial indicator to assess the development performance of an economy. This section would try to gauge the development of Bangladesh from external economic dependency view point. This part of the paper, in an effort to measure the level of foreign dependency, would try to find out whether the foreign aid inflow to Bangladesh is depicting increasing or

<sup>41</sup> Ajit K. Ghose, "The Challenge of Economic Development". Mustafa K. Mujeri (ed.), Development: Constraints and Realisations, (The University Press Limited, 2014), p. 276.

<sup>42</sup> M. G. Quibria, *Op. cit.*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>43</sup> Rehman Sobhan, The Crisis of External Dependence, (ZED Press, 1982).

<sup>44</sup> See, Rahim M. Quazi, "Macroeconomic Effects of Foreign Aid in Bangladesh Revisited". Syed Saad Andaleeb (ed.), *The Bangladesh Economy: Diagnoses and Prescriptions*, (The University Press Limited, 2008), pp. 125-140.

<sup>45</sup> Mohiuddin Alamgir, "Foreign Capital Inflows, Savings and Economic Growth: A Case Study of Bangladesh", *The Bangladesh Economic Review*, (1974), pp. 577-598.

<sup>46</sup> Anisul Islam, "Foreign Aid and Economic Growth: An Econometric Study of Bangladesh", *Applied Economics*, vol. 24, (1992), pp. 541-544.

<sup>47</sup> See for details, K. A. S Murshid, "Critical Perspectives on Aid in Bangladesh". Syed Saad Andaleeb (ed.), *Op. cit.*, pp. 91-124.

decreasing trend. As narrated earlier in this section that higher dependency on external resources can impinge development, and on the other hand, a relatively less requirement of foreign aid could be a positive sign for development.

In Bangladesh, foreign aid—commonly known as ODA (Overseas Development Assistance)—is granted in three ways, namely: food, commodity and project aid. Food aid now is mostly received to assist the people suffering from natural disasters like cyclone, flash flood, and other natural calamities, and to support safety net program while commodity aid is provided to ease the balance of payment and to implement development project. On the other hand, project aid finances projects implementing under the annual development program (ADP). Project aid's share is the largest in total aid of Bangladesh. It should be kept in mind that both food and commodity aid is mostly relief which is not repayable. By contrast, project aid is a repayable loan with interest after a stipulated time period. The following table shows the total and net inflow of three types of foreign aid to Bangladesh since 1999.

Table 3: Trends of foreign aid in Bangladesh (in million USD)

Year	Food	Commodity	Project aid	Total aid	Payment	Net foreign
	aid	aid			(Principal)	aid
1999-00	142.20	282.90	1150.00	1575.10	396.10	1179.00
2000-01	50.80	183.70	1134.30	1368.80	416.46	952.34
2001-02	36.05	154.91	1251.28	1442.23	435.30	1006.9
2002-03	47.75	175.20	1362.07	1585.02	452.00	1133.02
2003-04	31.58	0.00	1008.85	1033.43	423.10	610.33
2004-05	32.47	22.00	1433.98	1488.45	472.60	1055.85
2005-06	97.23	0.00	1470.41	1567.64	488.80	1078.84
2006-07	59.89	0.00	1564.74	1624.62	525.10	1099.52
2007-08	83.31	0.00	1873.39	1956.70	580.16	1376.54
2008-90	37.56	0.00	1626.47	1664.03	641.20	1022.83
2009-10	88.30	0.00	2076.14	2164.44	687.40	1477.04
2010-11	103.00	0.00	1674.17	1777.17	727.54	1049.63
2011-12	69.26	0.00	1964.08	2033.34	785.52	1247.82
2012-13	20	0.00	2766.14	2786.14	899.52	1886.61
2013-14	30.63	0.00	2888.71	2919.34	1089.21	1830

Source: Bangladesh Bank, *Major Economic Indicators*, (December 2000, 2006, 2009, 2011, 2013, November 2010, and April, 2015).

<sup>48</sup> For detailed discussion see, External Economic Division, Op. cit., pp. 8-9.

A look into Table 3 would help one to report some findings. First, it is discernible from the table that the total foreign aid inflow to Bangladesh shows by and large an increasing trend over the years. Second, aid inflow, as one gets from the table, to Bangladesh is not stable. From 1999-2000 to 2003-04, foreign aid inflow depicted declining trends. On the contrary, from 2003-04, the aid inflow to Bangladesh demonstrated a steady growth. In 2004-05, the total aid inflow was USD 1259 million, while in 2007-08 it jumped to USD 1956.70 million thus registered a growth of 52.42 per cent. This rising trend of aid flow still exists. Aid inflow in 2012-13 increased by 67.23 per cent, when compared to the 2008-09 inflow of aid. Third, a shift has taken place in the aid structure as inflow of project aid now outweighs the inflow of food aid and commodity aid. Project aid, as discussed earlier, unlike food and commodity aid is repayable with interest. Hence, this type of aid would create difficulties in maintaining economic stability because it could increase interest burden of common people. Fourth, food aid records more or less a declining trend. By 2012-13 food aid constituted a sharp reduction to USD 20 million from USD 142.20 million in 1999-2000 (86 per cent). Food aid, in fact, declines 6.61 per cent per year during this period. Volume of food aid has waned due to increased productivity in Bangladesh agriculture. At the same time, volume of commodity aid has slumped to zero with Bangladesh's tax revenue, export earnings and remittances have increased considerably. In stark contrast, project aid registered a 140.53 per cent growth from 1999-2000 to 2012-13. In 2012-13, total inflow of project aid shot up to USD 2766.14 million from USD 1150 million showing a growth rate of 10.81per cent each year. Finally, it is important to note that in 2012-13 total aid inflow of USD 2786.14 million was roughly 37 per cent higher than that of in the previous fiscal and it was the highest amount of aid received by Bangladesh so far in a single fiscal vear.49

Now, the paper would make an attempt to compare the foreign aid dependency of Bangladesh *vis-à-vis* Malaysia and China. In doing so, the paper here resorts to ODA data as percentage of Gross National Income. ODA is basically provided to launch development projects and is disbursed under certain conditions. It is repayable with a concessional interest rate after a certain period of time. ODA is sanctioned for economies which are very vulnerable. Thus, more vulnerable economies need more ODA than the relatively well-off economies. The following table has reported the share of ODA in the GNI of Bangladesh, China and Malaysia since 1980.

<sup>49</sup> The Daily Star (Dhaka), January 30, 2014.

**Table 4:** Trend of Net ODA received by Bangladesh, China and Malaysia (% of GNI)

Time period	Bangladesh	China	Malaysia
1980	7.3	0.0	0.6
1985	5.1	0.3	0.8
1990	6.7	0.6	1.1
1991	5.9	0.5	0.6
1993	4.2	0.7	0.1
1995	3.3	0.5	0.1
1997	2.3	0.2	-0.3
1998	2.6	0.2	0.3
2000	2.4	0.1	0.1
2005	2.1	0.1	0.0
2010	1.3	0.0	0.0
2011	1.2	-0.0	0.0
2012	1.7	-0.0	0.0
2013	1.6	-0.0	-0.0

Source: World Bank.

The data portray declining trend of ODA for each economy. However, in 1980 when Bangladesh's ODA share in GNI was 7.3 per cent, China received no ODA. In the same year, Malaysia's ODA share in its GNI was a meager 0.6 per cent. This comparison of ODA shares in the GNI reflects the state of the three economies in 1980. In fact, during 1980s the average annual output growth rates for both China and Malaysia were 9.35 per cent and 6.04 per cent respectively. In stark contrast, the average growth rate in Bangladesh over the same period of time was only 3.72 per cent. As both China and Malaysia in the 1980s enjoyed robust growth they required little assistance from foreign donors. From 1980 to 2012, the average ODA inflow had been 6 per cent of GNI for Bangladesh as opposed to average inflows of 0.3 per cent and 1.5 per cent for China and Malaysia respectively. In the first decade of 2000s, a period synonymous to high economic growth for Bangladesh, the share of ODA in Bangladesh's GNI tend to decline quite rapidly. But during this same period China and Malaysia's share dropped to almost zero showing these two economies' spectacular development.

From the discussion in this section, we have seen, foreign aid is still maintaining a rising trend, at least in terms of absolute volume, in Bangladesh. It helps one to assume that the country does not generate enough resources internally to finance

<sup>50</sup> Calculated from table A in the annex.

the development program. Hence, there is a fair degree of dependency on external assistance. As mentioned earlier, higher degree of foreign aid dependency undermines the development process. It also creates a sense of economic insecurity in the nation. Besides, foreign aid dependency in Bangladesh is considerably higher vis-à-vis China and Malaysia. Bangladesh government, at the same time, is striving for non-concessional loans from external source to finance infrastructure project and revamp investment regime. All these suggest that foreign aid would continue to play a significant role in Bangladesh's economy. Therefore, the country needs to go a long way to attain sustainable development by reducing the degree of external dependency.

#### **Concluding Remarks**

The paper has made an attempt to assess the development of Bangladesh in terms of investment performance, agriculture dependency and dependency on external economic assistance. Growth of investment, as the paper observed, has been not so far significant rather facing challenges in terms of poor FDI inflow and for faulty interest rate structure. It has, among other things, observed that the dominance of private investment might not be beneficial as it always tries to maximise profit overlooking the overall interest of the nation. At the same time, the cause of investment is not helped by the high cost of borrowing fund. The paper found that Bangladesh also lags behind economies like China and Malaysia in attracting FDI. At the same time, Bangladesh's investment share in GDP *vis-àvis* these two nations reflects the needs to press hard to further improve the share for attaining a higher growth rate.

On agriculture front, the article notices that Bangladesh has experienced a structural transformation with more jobs and output being generated in the non-farm sector. In other words, the contributions of manufacturing and service sector have swelled in recent years. This development, as the article mentioned, is consistent with the so-called Lewis Theory that propagated development through the shift of employment from agriculture to urban-based manufacturing sector. However, Bangladesh requires furthering the pace of transformation to catch up economies like China and Malaysia.

On the other hand, foreign aid continues to play an important role in financing development projects in Bangladesh with project aid outweighing both food and commodity aid. The article, among other things, reveals that Bangladesh still depends on foreign assistance as in recent times total aid inflow has shown an increasing trend. Therefore, overwhelming presence of external aid would question the economic capability and also might hamper the development process as it raises the loan burden of the people in the long run.

In short, even though transformation towards non-farm activities from traditional agriculture activities brought some dynamism in the development performance, Bangladesh still needs to boost up its investment regime, and decrease its dependency on external assistances.

Annex 1

Total investment and GDP growth of Bangladesh, China and Malaysia. (As per cent of GDP)

cent of GI			1		1		
	Bangl	ladesh	Ch	ina	Malaysia		
Year	Total	GDP	Total	GDP	Total	GDP	
	investment	growth rate	investment	growth rate	investment	growth rate	
1980-81	17.6	3.8	52.41	5.2	32.40	6.9	
1981-82	17.8	2.4	55.09	9.1	37.26	5.9	
1982-83	17.00	4.00	33.52	10.90	39.72	6.30	
1983-84	15.90	5.2	34.20	15.2	38.44	7.8	
1984-85	16.30	3.2	34.89	13.5	33.53	-1.1	
1985-86	16.70	4.2	38.35	8.8	27.50	1.2	
1986-87	16.00	3.7	38.36	11.6	25.90	5.4	
1987-88	16.30	2.2	37.00	11.3	23.10	9.9	
1988-89	16.70	2.6	37.89	4.1	25.92	9.1	
1989-90	17.10	5.90	37.27	3.80	28.24	9.00	
1990-91	16.90	3.30	36.14	9.20	32.85	9.5	
1991-92	17.30	5.00	36.12	14.20	37.80	8.90	
1992-93	17.90	4.60	37.46	14.00	35.37	9.90	
1993-94	18.40	4.10	44.48	13.10	39.18	9.20	
1994-95	19.00	4.90	42.20	10.90	41.20	9.80	
1995-96	20.00	4.60	41.90	10.00	43.64	10.00	
1996-97	20.72	5.4	40.44	9.30	41.48	7.30	
1997-98	21.60	5.20	37.95	7.80	42.97	-7.40	
1998-99	22.20	4.90	37.10	7.60	26.68	6.10	
1999-00	23.00	5.90	36.76	8.40	22.38	8.90	
2000-01	23.10	5.30	35.12	8.30	26.87	0.5	
2001-02	23.10	4.40	36.27	9.10	24.40	5.40	
2002-03	23.40	5.30	37.87	10.0	24.78	5.8	
2003-04	24.00	6.30	41.20	10.10	22.76	6.80	
2004-05	24.50	6.00	43.26	11.30	23.05	5.30	
2005-06	24.70	6.60	42.10	12.7	19.97	5.80	
2006-07	24.50	6.4	42.97	14.20	20.45	6.50	
2007-08	24.20	6.20	41.74	9.60	21.56	4.80	
2008-09	24.18	5.7	44.05	9.2	19.32	-1.6	
2009-10	24.41	6.10	48.24	9.20	14.45	7.20	
2010-11	24.73	6.70	47.74	9.20	21.42	5.1	
2011-12	28.0	6.5	49.0	7.7	26.0	5.6	
2012-13	28.0	6.0	49.0	7.7	26.0	4.7	

Source: World Bank<sup>51</sup>

<sup>51 &</sup>lt;www.data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG> (accessed Feb. 4, 2014).

# BENGAL VILLAGES AS SEEN BY THE FOREIGNERS (14TH–17TH CENTURIES AD)

Sahidul Hasan\*

#### Abstract

Bengal is the largest delta of the world where villages occupy an important position as human settlement. Historians and social scientists have explored different aspects of urban life in the history of Bengal. But villages remain almost out of their focus. European scholars began research on Bengal villages at the beginning of the colonial rule. Most of these research studies based on the gazetteers, census reports and district reports were published for the smooth operation of the revenue system and administrative structure. Our present knowledge on pre-colonial Bengal villages is mainly based on these colonial records. This paper tries to explore various aspects of Bengal villages during fourteen-seventeenth centuries using the foreigners accounts as primary sources. Most of the foreigners, who came during the period under review, were travelers and traders. They have visited various areas of Bengal and left a vivid description about the rural areas. Using these descriptions this paper concludes that the general pattern of villages in Bengal has not changed over a long time.

Villages have historically played a very important role in the nourishment of human culture in Bengal. Although several urban centers flourished in different areas of Bengal, villages have continued to be the heart of all human activities in this deltaic land. European scholars started the study of rural Bengal after the acquisition of the *Diwani* (in 1765) by the British East India Company. Before the promulgation of the Permanent Settlement in 1793 several commissions were formed to study the state of revenue collection in this region. Many Reports and Minutes were published where a variety of issues were discussed on rural Bengal. During the two centuries of colonial rule several Gazetteers, Census Reports and District Reports contained many important information and statistical data on

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<sup>1</sup> Here 'Bengal' has been used in the historical sense comprising the present independent state of Bangladesh and the Indian province of *Paschim Vanga* (West Bengal).

<sup>2</sup> For details about the permanent settlement in Bengal, Sirajul Islam, *The Permanent Settlement in Bengal: A Study of Its Operation, 1790-1819*, Dhaka, 1979; for details about colonial records on rural Bengal, see, Sirajul Islam, *Rural History of Bangladesh: A Source Study*, Dhaka, 1977.

Bengal villages. Our knowledge on villages of colonial Bengal is more or less derived from these publications.

Our perceptions about Bengal villages in the ancient and medieval period are few assumptions based upon the above records; we get only a few references in indigenous literary sources. Medieval Bengali Literature also depicts various aspects of village and rural life in Bengal.<sup>3</sup> Location, settlement pattern, environment or panorama of Bengal villages is evident from the account of the foreigners. This article offers an account draw a panorama of the Bengal villages during fourteen-seventeenth centuries - a major part of the medieval period- on the basis of the descriptions left by the foreigners. Among them mostly were travelers and sailors. A few of them were members of diplomatic missions, traders or missionaries.

The article is divided into three sections. The first section reviews the existing literature on the concept of villages in Bengal in colonial period with particular reference to contemporary official records. The second section draws a pen picture of the villages from the descriptions left by the foreigners who visited Bengal in the aforesaid period. The last section attempts to analyze the nature of rural Bengal in pre-colonial times. M.A. Rahim spoke very highly of the value of travelogues. He stated, "The records of the foreign travelers are of indispensable value in the reconstruction of the social history of Bengal." The article also uses a few letters of the early Jesuit missionaries who were sent to Bengal. The diary of Abdul Latif, who may not seem to be a foreigner due to his North Indian affiliation, was used as a source. It should be noted that Abdul Latif was not a Bengali by birth and he stayed for a short period in Bengal. We have to complement with due respect that their curious eyes were like the modern movie cameras. They recorded in their accounts what they actually saw and they described it without any bias and preconceived notion.

I.

Before going into discussion on village in colonial historiography it will not be irrelevant to define the concept 'Village'. The etymological origin of the word:

<sup>3</sup> For details, Omlendu Chakrabarty, 'Banglar Vaisnav Shahitye Gramer Bhumika'; Kamalkumar Singha, 'Bangla Shahityae Gram: Dainandin Jiban O Samaj (Prachin O Modhy Jug)', both were published in Prodip Roy (ed.), *Banglar Itihasa O Songskritite Gram*, Dhaka, 2014, pp. 161-184, 247-262.

<sup>4</sup> M.A. Rahim, Social and Cultural History of Bengal Vol. 1. (1576-1757), Karachi, 1963, pp. XXIV.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> A.B.M Shamsuddin Ahmed, "Bengal under the Rule of the Early Iliyas Shahi Dynasty" (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Dhaka), 1987, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Wakil Ahmed, Op.cit., p. 5

village is a noun originated from the Latin word *villaticum*, old French word *vilag* (houses and other buildings in a group inhabited place larger than a hamlet but smaller than a town). In Social Science village is defined as:

a clustered human settlement or community, larger than a hamlet but smaller than a town, with a population ranging from a few hundred to a few thousand (sometimes tens of thousands). Villages are normally permanent, with fixed dwellings; however, transient villages can occur. Further, the dwellings of a village are fairly close to one another, not scattered broadly over the landscape, as a dispersed settlement. 9

According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* the village has "traditionally been contrasted with the city: the village is the home of rural occupations and tied to the cycles of agricultural life." B.H. Baden Powell in his *The Origin and Growth of Village Communities in India* defined village in the following words:

 $\dots$  the term does not refer merely to a street or group of buildings – as in England of to-day; it includes both the cluster of houses and the surrounding lands cultivated. Such a group has always a local name and known limits.  $^{11}$ 

But the definition of village in Bengal is little different compared to other areas of the subcontinent and Europe. Thomas Sison commented about the villages in Rangpur area in 1814: "There is no village in this area what we mean in general definition." The *Fifth Report of the Select Committee of the East India Company*, published in 1812, described administrative structure of Bengal village as a "simple form of municipal government" under which "the inhabitants of the country have lived from time immemorial." "The conventional paradigm of Indian village community is based on the consensus of administrators and scholars during the last two hundreds years." The idea of the isolation and self sufficiency of the Indian village was first propounded by Charles Metcalfe. In 1830 in his famous minutes he romanticized this as follows:

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<sup>8</sup> http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=village; http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/ definition/ english/village accessed on 20 December 2014.

<sup>9</sup> http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Village accessed on 20 December 2014.

<sup>10</sup> http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/629051/village accessed on 20 December 2014.

<sup>11</sup> B.H. Baden Powell, *The Origin and Growth of Village Communities in India*, Oxford, 1899, pp. 7-8.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Sarif uddin Ahmed and Dinak Sohani Kabir, 'Atharo O Unis Shotoke Banglae Gram', in Prodip Roy (ed.), *Banglar Itihasa O Songskritite Gram*, Dhaka, 2014, p. 227.

<sup>13</sup> Akbar Ali Khan, Discovery of Bangladesh: Explorations into Dynamics of a Hidden Nation, Dhaka, 2009, p.23

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

The village communities are little republics, having nearly everything that they want within themselves and almost independent of any foreign relations. They seem to last where nothing else lasts.<sup>15</sup>

Karl Marx's analysis of Indian village was based on the reports of the British administrators in India. He also popularized the concept of village selfsufficiency. 16 Akbar Ali Khan in his Discovery of Bangladesh: Explorations into Dynamics of a Hidden Nation attempted to find out the nature of the rural structure in Bengal and commented that, "there is no consensus on the definition of village itself in this region". 17 While searching the composition of rural Bengal he noticed that, "Unfortunately the received doctrines on rural society in Bengal zone is based not on independent investigation on the nature and structure of rural settlements but on perceptions and preconceptions of generations of scholars on Indian village communities. The rural settlements in Bengal area, assumed to be indistinguishable from the village communities in South Asian subcontinent."18 Khan also commented that, "This assumption is not only wrong but also misleading." He expressed that "historical evidence on rural society in this region is scanty. It will, therefore, be more convenient to start with an analysis of the village at present rather than attempting the reconstruction of the village in the past." In doing so he mentioned the Census Report of 1901, where village was defined in the following words:

A village may be either a collection of houses having a separate name or else the mauza, i.e. the area treated as a village in the survey. <sup>19</sup>

Khan also referred to the district magistrate of Barisal in the southern part of Bengal who described a typical village in the 19<sup>th</sup> century which is given below:

The houses are scattered and there is little of collectivist village life. Each house stands by itself on the mound, surrounded by thicket of fruit trees as there is no house in sight or nearer than 100 yards.<sup>20</sup>

It will be very relevant to quote the comment made by of W. W. Hunter on Bengal villages in the *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, which is as follows:

The villages of Bengal vary greatly in different parts. In Bihar, especially south of the Ganges, the buildings are closely packed together, and there is no room

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*; M N Srinivas and A M Shah, 'The Myth of Self-Sufficiency of the India Village' in *The Economic Weekly*, 1960, September 10, p. 1375.

<sup>16</sup> arl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Works, Moscow USSR; 5th edition, 1962, p. 350.

<sup>17</sup> Khan, Op.cti., p.143

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. 23.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p.26.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 42.

for trees or gardens. As one goes eastwards, the houses, though collected in a single village site, are further apart and each stands on its own patch of homestead land, where vegetables are grown and fruit trees and bamboos afford a grateful protection from the glare of the tropical sun. Further east again, in the swamps of East Bengal, there is often no trace of a central village site and the houses are found in straggling rows lining the high banks of rivers or in small clusters on mounds from 12 to 20 feet in height laboriously thrown up during the dry months when the water temporarily disappears.<sup>21</sup>

J. Peter Bertocci in his research on post-colonial villages titled *Elusive Village:* Social Structures and Community Organization in East Pakistan described a village in the Comilla district in the same vein. He writes, "The village....is at best an intervening organization in an institutional constellation which is geographically expansive and demographically inclusive in character." Discussion regarding the Bengal villages may be conveniently keeping in mind Khan's comment "....all rural settlements in a particular region may not be homogenous. Even within the same region the structure of a few villages may deviate from the general pattern." It is apparent that Bengal villages were not similar in pattern; it varied from area to area and the structural and administrative pattern also differed.

II.

With this brief literary review on Bengal village based on colonial records, we will try to investigate the accounts of the foreigners, who came to Bengal between 14<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and draw a sketch of Bengal villages. Among them the African globe-trotter Shaykh Abu Abdullah Muhammad Ibn Battuta (1304-1378) was the first. The purpose of his sojourn in Bengal was to meet Shaykh Jalaluddin in the mountainous region of Kamru (Kamrup of ancient times has been indentified with Assam and adjacent Sylhet area of Bangladesh). The first town of Bengal which Ibn Battuta entered on 9 July 1346 A.D. was Sudkawan (identified with present Chittagong, Bangladesh). From there he proceeded to the mountains of Kamru through river ways, which was a month's journey. There he met the Sufi, Shaykh Jalaluddin. After a three-day stay at the *khankah* of the Sufi he went towards the town of Habank (location is still obscure) on the bank of the river *An-Nahr ul-Azraq* (the blue river, it has been identified with the Surma

<sup>21</sup> W. W. Hunter, *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Calcutta, Reprint 1985, p. 34. Quoted in Khan, *Op.cit*, p. 31.

<sup>22</sup> J. Peter Bertocci, "Elusive Village: Social Structures and Community Organization in East Pakistan", (Unpublished Ph. D. thesis, Michigan State University), 1970, quoted in Khan, *Op. cit.*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>23</sup> Khan, Op.cit, p. 144.

river). He sailed on this river for 15 days and reached the town of Sunurkawan (identified with present Sonargaon, Narayanganj District of Bangladesh). From there he boarded a Chinese junk bound for Java.<sup>24</sup>

While passing through the *An-Nahr ul-Azraq* Ibn Battuta puts a very panoramic view of the rural area. He describes:

The way to Bengal and Laknauti lies through this river, along the bank of this river to the rights as well as to the left there are water wheels, gardens and villages such those along the bank of the Nile in the Egypt. ..... For fifteen days we sailed down this river passing through villages and orchards as though we are going through a mart.<sup>25</sup>

Bengal had a very close contact with China from the ancient period and it continued till the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Several diplomatic and economic exchanges between Bengal and China are described in the Chinese Emperors' official history. Chinese court received fourteen missions from Bengal and sent only four in return during the first four decades of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Among the members of the diplomatic envoys Mahuan and Fei Hsin were prominent. Their narration contains various aspect of political, cultural, social and economic life of Bengal in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Before we examine their information regarding the rural parts of Bengal it will be very relevant to refer to an article titled, 'History and Legend of Sino-Bangla Contacts', written by Zhang Xianyi. In this article he pointed out that "The finest description of Bangla was presented by Wang Dayuan, a great traveler who had been to South China Sea and the Indian Ocean with Chinese merchant ships between 1330 and 1337." Wang Dayuan described Bengal in his work titled *Brief Annals of Foreign Islands* in the following words:

Lofty mountains are covered with luxuriant trees. The inhabitants live in houses built in a circle.  $^{28}$ 

Zhang Xianyi identified Wang Dayuan's above description with the scene of mountainous areas like Rangamati in the north of Chittagong of Bangladesh.

<sup>24</sup> For travel description of Ibn Batuta, L.P. Harvey, *Ibn Battuta*, London, 2007; Wakil Ahmed, *Banglae Bideshi Parjatak*, Dhaka, 1990, p.20-33; http://www.banglapedia.org/HT/I\_0002.htm accessed on 17 December 2014; Sukhomoy Mukhopadhaya, *Banglar Itihas 1204-1576*, Dhaka, 2005, pp. 604-608.

<sup>25</sup> Mahdi Husain, The Rehla of Ibn Battuta, Baroda, 1953, p. 241

<sup>26</sup> For detail about the diplomatic relation between Bengal and China, Haraprasad Ray, *Trade and Diplomacy in India-China Relations: A Study of Bengal during the Fifteenth Century*, New Delhi, 1993; P C Bagchi, 'Political Relations between Bengal and China in the Pathan Period', *Viswa-Bharati Annals*, I, 1945; Zhang Xianyi, 'History and Legend of Sino-Bangla Contacts', http://bd.china-embassy.org/eng/mjlxx/gk/t823712.htm accessed on 13 December 2014.

<sup>27</sup> Zhang Xianyi, Op.cit.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

About the people of Bengal Wang Dayuan remarked, 'the locals are simple and kind'. While describing Bengal's agriculture he reported:

Local people plough the field all the year round and harvest three times a year. They leave no vacant land and create a very beautiful farm view. Everything is sold at a low price... the weather is always hot.<sup>29</sup>

From the description of both Wang Dayuan and Ibn Battuta, both of whom have seen Bengal in the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century it is evident that rural Bengal was "peaceful and affluent" and silver coins were in use as mediam of exchange in the local markets.

Both Ma Huan and Fei Hsin were members of royal Chinese missions to Bengal. As a result their description throws light on the royal court of Bengal Sultans and the urban life centered on the ruling class.<sup>30</sup> Ma Huan spoke about his journey from Che-ti-chiang (identified with present Chittagong) towards the then capital of Bengal at Pandua (identified with a town about twelve miles from the modern town of Maldah in Paschim Banga, India) through So-na-erh-chiang (same as Ibn Battuta's Sunurkawan). He mentioned about the climate, flora and fauna of this region; and described the people and their language and customs, past times and the royal court at the capital. His comments were of general nature. He did not mention any thing about rural Bengal. Fei Hsin was one of the associates of Ma Huan in the diplomatic mission sent to Bengal. He compiled his experiences in 1436 after returning to China in 1433. The title of his work was Xingocha Shenglan (The Overall Survey of the Star Raft). It is not known when the book was first printed; its earliest available published version is dated in 1544.<sup>31</sup> He put an interesting observation regarding the attitude of co-operation among the village inhabitants. He wrote:

Men and women have meals separately. Remarriage is not accepted. Those who can't support themselves, like orphans and widows, are taken care by families of the same village in turn so that they don't have to beg for food in other villages, shows a prevailing sense of righteousness.<sup>32</sup>

From the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century many European travelers visited Bengal. The accounts of Antonio de Brito, Caesar

20 34

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>30</sup> Mahuan's description was translated by J. V. G Mills: *Ma Huan, Ying-Yai Sheng-Len (The Overall Survey of the Ocen's Shores)* [1433].

<sup>31</sup> For details about Fei Hsin's account http://www.banglapedia.org/HT/F\_0059.htm accessed on 15 December 2014.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Zhang Xianyi, *Op.cit.*; Sukhomoy Mukhopadhaya in his *Banglar Itihas* 1204-1576, Dhaka, 2005, p. 618 translated almost at the same meaning in Bengali.

Fredrick, Ralph Fitch, Sebastian Manrique, Niccolao Manucci and Jean-Batitise Tavernier are significant. These accounts highlighted many unknown areas of the history of Bengal.

In 1519 Antonio de Brito came to Bengal with a royal mission from Portugal. We get a description of the journey, written by an anonymous interpreter of the mission.<sup>33</sup> The mission landed at Chittagong and was asked to go to Gaur to meet Sultan Nusrat Shah (1519-1532). They left Chittagong on 13 October 1521 and stayed at Aluia (modern Arula) for two weeks. Description of their journey is given below:

We arrived at Aluia at one o'clock in the morning....We were given accommodation in the best shanties in the area, all the houses being of this type. .... To amuse ourselves, however, we did make several trips to surrounding country....Aluia is situated along a river, the mouth of which stretches for two leagues.....The area is very green and is covered in trees bearing fruits quite different from ours; the ground is used for the cultivation of rice and sugar cane. 34

From Aluia they started for Jogdia, an island nine or ten leagues from Aluia. After crossing Jogdia they continued their journey along the coast and reached a place called Meamgar. The interpreter's experience at Meamgar was as follows:

Our first night up stream was spent under a tree as there was nowhere to stay. We carried on like this for the next few days passing, on both the banks of the river small villages .... There are a number of sugar plantations here producing a very fine sugar which costs nothing.<sup>35</sup>

From the above description, it is evident that the said interpreter from the coastal area of Chittagong was going through river into the inland area and their destination was Gaur. The river side rural area portrayed by the Portuguese interpreter in the 16<sup>th</sup> century was very similar to the description given by the famous Moroccan globetrotter Ibn Battuta. Both of them have seen villages and green fields on both sides of the rivers they were passing through.

Caesar Fredrick traveled in the East from 1563 to 1581. He came to Bengal in 1567 through Satgaon (known as Saptagram in the Hugli district, situated on the southwestern bank of the Saraswati river near its junction with the Hughli river). From Katak port of Orissa, he started for Chittagong. On his way due to a

<sup>33</sup> Bouchon, Genevieve and Thomaz, Luis Filipe, *Voyage dans les deltas du Gange et de l'traouaddy Relation Portugaise Anonyme*, Paris, 1988; Sukhomoy Mukhopadhaya, *Op.cit.*, pp. 576-576, 639-666.

<sup>34</sup> Bouchon, Genevieve and Thomaz, Luis Filipe, Op.cit., p. 309.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p. 311.

hurricane he had to take shelter in Sandwip.<sup>36</sup> Fredrik's travelogue is very important for reconstructing the navigation history of Bengal in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. But he has also made an interesting comment on a temporary village named Buttor near Satgaon. He narrates:

A good tides rowing before you come to Satagan, you shall have a place which is called Buttor, and from thence upwards the ship does not goe, because that upwards the river is very shallowe, and little water. Every Year at Buttor they make and unmake a Village, with houses and shoppes made of strawe, and with all things necessarie to their uses, and this village standeth as long as the ships ride there, and till they depart for the Indies, and when they are departed every man goeth to his plot of houses and there setteth fire on them, which thing made me marvaile. For as I passed up to Satagan, I saw this village standing with a great number of people, with an infinite number of ships and *Bazars*, and at my return coming downe with my captain of the last ship, for whom I tarried I was amazed to see such a place so soone razed and burnt, and nothing left but the signe of the burnt houses.<sup>37</sup>

J.N. Das Gupta observed that what Fredrick saw was temporary village fair which is also a characteristic of village which used to hold such fair in seasons.<sup>38</sup>

Ralph Fitch (1550-1611) visited India in 1583. He started his journey towards Bengal in 1585 from Agra across the rivers Jamuna and Ganga and reached Tanda<sup>39</sup> in February 1586 with 180 boats loaded with commodities. From Tanda he went to Kochbehar. From there he proceeded to Hughli. From Hughli he came to 'Sinnergan' (Ibn Battuta's Sunurkawan and Mahuan's So-na-erhchiang) via Bacola (identified with Barisal, Bangladesh) and Serrepore (Sripur), situated in the present Munshiganj district of Bangladesh is now extinct having been washed away by the Padma. He went to Chittagong from Sonargaon. Then he left for Pegu (Myanmar) via Sandwip. While passing Tanda his comments about the flood caused by the river Ganges are as follows:

<sup>36</sup> For details about Caesar Frederick's travel in Bengal please see J.N. Das Gupta, *Bengal in the Sixteenth Century. A.D.*, Calcutta, 1914; Wakil Ahmed, *Op. cit.*, Dhaka, pp. 45-48, 110-112; http://www.banglapedia.org/HT/F\_0189.htm accessed on 17 December 2014

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Gupta, Op.cit, p. 104

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Tanda was the capital of the Karranis. It was situated on the west bank of the Ganges about 24.14 km southeast of present Maldah town and 19.31 km west of the Teliagarhi pass. From the account of Ralph Fitch it appears that Tanda was a big prosperous city which was decaying on account of the change in the course of the Ganges. In 1826 the city was completely destroyed by floods, and disappeared into the river. For details, http://www.banglapedia.org/HT/T 0050.htm, accessed on 18 December 2014.

Tanda standeth from the river Ganges a league, because in times past the river flowing over the banks, in time of raine did drowne the country and many villages.<sup>40</sup>

While passing through the decaying capital of Gaur,<sup>41</sup> at that time it was abandoned, he saw the adjacent village area and described it in the following manner:

We went through the wildernes because the right way was full of thieves where we passed the country of Gouren, where we found but few villages, but almost all wildernes, and saw many buffes, swine and deere grasse longer than a man and very many Tigers. 42

What Fitch saw and described in his travelogue probably was the rural settlements built on the abandoned area of the wealthy city of Gaur.

Christianity was introduced in Bengal by the Jesuit Fathers in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Among the initial missionaries Fr. Francis Fernandez, Dominic Sosa, Melchoir Fonseca and John Andrew Boves were leading. They were sent to Bengal to open the door for the preaching of the Gospel. The letters of the initial Jesuit missionaries were compiled by Father Pierre du Jarric. His book titled Histoire des choses plus memorables advenues tant ez Indes orientales, autres que païs de la descouverte of Portugois. 43 In 1598, Father Nicholas Pimenta sent Francis Fernandez and Father Dominic Sosa from the Society of Jesus in India to preach the faith of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles and other infidels in Bengal. They left Cochin on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May 1598, in a Bengali (Bengalios) Ship bound for a certain harbour called the small harbour. 44 Actually the ship sailed for a port called *Porto* Pequeno, which is very frequently used in the Portuguese writing. It has been identified with modern city of Hugli of Paschim Bangla. They reached the Portuguese colony (Peuplade) in Hugli and stayed there from the end of May to the beginning of October. At the end of the winter (in the sense of 'rainy season') they set off for another place called the Great Harbour<sup>45</sup> (*Porto Grande*, frequently used by the Portuguese, identified with the present Chittagong sea port

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Wakil Ahmed, Op. cit., p. 113.

<sup>41</sup> Gaur was the capital city of Bengal from c. 1450 AD to 1565. It was one of the largest medieval cities in the Indian subcontinent, located between two modern districts of Maldah, Paschim Banga and Chapaannawabganj, Bangladesh. For details see, Md. Akhtaruzzaman, *Society and Urbanization in Medieval Bengal*, Dhaka, 2009, pp. 157-158; http://www.banglapedia.org/HT/G\_0061.htm, accessed on 18 December, 2014.

<sup>42</sup> Wakil Ahmed, Op. cit., p. 113.

<sup>43</sup> The book was translated to Latin by Mathias Martinez, Cologne in 1615. For details, Rev. A. Sauliere, S. J., 'A Missionary Tour in Bengal in 1598', in *Bengal Past and Present*, Vol. XIV, serial No. 8, April-June 1017, Calcutta, 1917, pp. 147-158.

<sup>44</sup> Rev. A. Sauliere, S. J., Op.cit., p, 152.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

of Bangladesh). On their way from Hugli to Chittagong they stopped in the Bacala (Bacola of Ralph Fitch), the Kingdom of Chandecan (identified with present Jessor, Bangladesh) and Siripur (Serrepore of Ralph Fitch).

Fr. Melchior Fonseca, in a letter dated 20 January 1600 A.D. while describing his journey from Bacala to Chandecan writes:

The way from Bacala to Chandecan is wonderfully pleasant. All along flow deep rivers of sweet clear water; on the one side are dense shady wood and herds of stages and cattle roaming about the plains; on the other side fields covered with rice and displaying far and wide their joyful burdens. .... We were travelling by the Ganges or rivers; in many places and for very long distances they were so densely bordered with trees on either bank that the sun's ray could not pierce through. From the branches hung swarms of bees and honeycombs; while monkeys were playfully jumping from branch to branch. Here and there plantations of the much-prized sugar cane were to be seen. But there were Tigers too, and Crocodiles, which at times fed on human flesh. Rhinoceroses were roaming about the forests, but we did not see any. 46

Fonseca's description makes it clear that he was passing through forest area which in southern Bengal. When he was passing through the river he saw fields with cattle roaming around. This is a very common scenario of rural Bengal. His comment 'fields covered with rice and displaying far and wide their joyful burdens' also depicts a very familiar scenario of rural Bengal.

Abdul Latif, left a diary of his journey starting from Ahmadabad to Agra and then to Bengal. The Bengal portion of the diary includes description of his journey from Rajmahal to Ghoraghat with the imperial army.<sup>47</sup> It informs us that he left Rajmahal on 7 December 1608 A.D. and reached *pargana* Ghosh (situated midway between the cities of Murshidabad and Jalangi)<sup>48</sup> in Sarkear Narangabad and crossed the Ganges near Goash. After that the imperial army reached Alaipur, a village in *sirkar* Narangabad.<sup>49</sup> About Alaipur Latif remarked that it 'is an

<sup>46</sup> Rev. Father H. Hosten, 'Jesuit Letters from Bengal, Arakan, and Burma: 1599-1660: Translated from the Latin', *BPP*, Vol. XXX, part 1, Serial No. 59, p. 64.

<sup>47</sup> A copy of the diary was mad available to Jadunath Sirkar by his friend Abdur Rahman of Delhi. Sirkar translated the dairy both in English and Bengali. The English translation was published in *Bengal Past and Present*, Vol. XXXV, Nos. 69-70, pp. 143-146, and the Bengali translation was published in *Prabashi*, Aswin, 1326 B.S. and *Shanibarer Chiti*, Ashar, 1326 B.S. For details about Abdul Latif please see: Wakil Ahmed, *Banglae Bideshi Parjatak*, Dhaka, pp. 56-61, 117-122; http://www.banglapedia.org/ HT/A\_0006.htm.

<sup>48</sup> It is eight miles south of the Padma. In Renell's Bengal Atlas, sheet No. 10, Goash is placed just a little to the south of the Ganges. Abdul Karim, *History of Bengal Mughal Period Vol. 1*, Rajshahi, 1992, f.n.12, p.209.

<sup>49</sup> Jadunath Sirkar, 'A description of North Bengal in 1609 A.D.', in *Bengal Past and Present*, Vol. XXXV, Nos. 69-70, p. 143.

ordinary place and deserves no praise'. He informs us that one league from it there were two villages named Bagha in *pargana* Chandiabazu and Malik in *pargana* Alaipur. Abdul Karim identified *sirkar* Narangabad was synonymous with *sirkar* Audamber, commonly know as Tanda. This *sirkar* was mentioned in *Ain-i-Akbari* also. About the location of it Karim remarked, "The name exists in the modern maps also. It is situated on the Ganges (Padma), opposite Sar-daha (Sarda) and 12 miles to the south-east in Rajshahi district." Karim also identified the above mentioned two villages with two villages in the modern maps bearing the names of Bagha and Bagha Mulki located three miles away from Aliapur. S1

Abdul Latif gave a vivid picture of the landscape and the scenes and sceneries around these two villages. His narrates:

Hawada Miah, an old sage, aged about a hundred years, is living here [at Bagha]. In the centre of the village stands a beautiful tank, - is called *pukkar* in the Bengali togue, [sic.] – filled with a water that might excite the rivalry of the *Kausar* spring in heaven. Around this tank the sons and dependents of this holy man have constructed *chak-bandis* (house grouped round a quadrangle), which overlook the tank. There is a mosque here which was constructed in 930 A.H...In the house of Hawadha the wise, they have built a college with grass-thatched roofs and mud-plastered walls. <sup>52</sup>

Karim further commented that, "Abdul Latif has given an eye-witness account of the mosque, madrasah and tank of Bagha. It appears that when the imperial camp halted at Alaipur ... he visited Bagha ... a walking distance from Alaipur." Edward Adam, while preparing his *Report on the State of Education in Bengal* visited Bagha and described the madrasah. He saw the mosque, which was in tolerably good condition in his time. According to Adam's narrative it was a residential institution, teachers and students living in the same compound. But he does not give a description of the madrasah or the hostel building, which must have been thatched houses as seen by Abdul Latif more than two hundred years back. The earthquake of 1897 damaged the Bagha mosque and ruined the madrasah building with mud-thatched roof.

<sup>50</sup> Abdul Karim, 'A Fresh Study of Abdul Latif's Dairy (North Bengal in 1609 A.D.)', *The Journal of The Institute of Bangladesh Studies*, Vol. XIII, Annual 1990, Rajshahi, pp. 28-29.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid

<sup>52</sup> Sirkar, Op.cit., pp.143-144.

<sup>53</sup> For the history of the Madrasah, M. A. Rahim, Social and Cultural History of Bengal Vol. 2. (1576-1757), Karachi, 1967, pp. 291-292

<sup>54</sup> Karim, Op.cit, pp. 36-37

<sup>55</sup> Karim, Op.cit., p. 38.

Abdul Latif was very much overwhelmed by the natural beauty of the village. He writes:

....On the banks of the tanks are jack and mango trees,-green, flourishing and giving shade. Around the village the entire country side is green and refreshing [to look at]; ....in truth, it is a very delightful place. In this province we have not beheld any spot other than this....<sup>56</sup>

He visited Bagha in January-February, so he must have seen green fields with vegetation around. The portrayal of the village, situated in north Bengal, clearly shows that it was 'green and refreshing to look at'.

Fray Sebastien Manrique was a Portuguese missionary and traveler, who visited various countries of the East from 1628 to 1643. His travel account, in Spanish was published in 1653 under the title *Itinerate Rio Dila Missionery Del India Oriental*. The main purpose of Manrique's travel to the East was to preach Christianity and inspect the Missions abroad. His account provides important information about the political, economic and social life of Bengal. Due to a shipwreck he had to take shelter in Hijli. He was imprisoned by the local ruler by mistake and was released later on. From there he reached Hugli, which was a major Portuguese settlement at that time. On his way to Hugli he gives a pen picture of beautiful rural landscape. After leaving the city he stopped there for breakfast. He described the place as follows:

...two leagues beyond the city, to a place where there was a beautiful tank of clear, sweet water. Several big shady trees, of the kind called Pagoda-tree in those parts, formed a lovely embellishment to the tank.<sup>58</sup>

He made two interesting observations regarding the religious rituals of the Hindus in Bengal: (a) bathing in the Ganges river early in the morning and (b) celebration of the Durga Puja. Manrique also mentioned that those who lived far from the river also do the first one in their own village. He mentioned it in the following expression:

Bengalas living far from Ganges in the interior of the country, perform these ablutions in reservoirs, built at the common expense of a village, or else by rich or pious people and made either during their life time or after death on a testamentary disposition. Some reservoirs of this kind necessitate great labour and cost large sums of money.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Sirkar, Op. cit., p. 144.

<sup>57</sup> The Hakluyt Society of London published the English version of his book titled *Travels of Fray Sebastien Manrique* in two volumes edited by Luard and Hesten in 1926-27. For details, http://www.banglapedia.org/ HT/M\_0178.htm; Wakil Ahmed, *Op.cit.*, pp. 62-72.

<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Wakil Ahmed, Op.cit., p. 154.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid

His description of the Durga Puja is very interesting and very similar to present day rituals with a few exceptions. He narrated the rituals in the following manner:

These heathens at the new moon in the month of June, in all the large villages, hold a public procession, in honour of and idol named Durga. This strumpet is carried along in a highly ornamented triumphal car with a large band of dancing girls, who besides dancing gain a livelihood by prostitution. These dancers go in front, dancing and playing various musical instruments and singing festal songs. After several streets have been traversed in this fashion, these ceremonies in honour of the idol give place suddenly to others full infamy and dishonor. The idol being taken with all this pomp and circumstance to the river, or if there is no river to some reservoir, is hurled into it amidst the execrations of the people, who belt it with stones and earth, upbraiding it with being a wore and heaping the most ignominious epithets upon it, accompanied with shouts, yells, jeers and scoffs. When they have thus ended the festival they return home happy and contented.<sup>60</sup>

The depiction of rural life in Bengal by Manrique was very much connected to a village where Hindus were dominant among the inhabitants. On the other hand Abdul Latif's description of village Baga was an important center of Islamic learning. But both the descriptions contain a common phenomenon; that is the existence of a pond or big water reservoir in the villages.

Frans Jansz van der Heiden, a Dutch East India Company sailor, started his journey form Batavia, former principal trading settlement of the company to India on 3 September 1661 along with four ships and he was on board a ship named Ter Schelling. In a terrible hurricane the ship got wrecked on the coast of the Bay of Bengal. The sailor and his fellow shipmates after enduring so many plights managed to reach an island of Bengal. Fishermen rescued Van der. Heiden and his fellow shipwrecked men form the desolated island. They found them in a coastal village of Bengal named Sondip. From there they reached the Dutch factory at Dhaka. At the request of the then *Subahdar* of Bengal, Mir Jumla (1660- 1663), they had to participate in the Mughal campaign to Assam and Kuch Bihar. They served the Mughal army for fifteen months. This enabled Van der Heiden to visit Assam and adjoining areas. After returning home Van der. Heiden wrote his travel experience which was published in 1675 with the title

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, pp. 140-141.

<sup>61</sup> I express my great gratitude to Azizul Rasel for informing me about the account of Van der Heiden in 2011, while he was doing his M.A. at the University of Leiden. For details, Azizul Rasel, *The Seventeenth Century Dutch Travel Literature and the Production of Knowledge on Asia*, Lambert Academic Publishing, Germany, 2013.

<sup>62</sup> Rasel, Op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>63</sup> For details about Mughal campaign to Assam and Kuch Bihar, Abdul Karim, *History of Bengal Mughal Period Vol. 2*, Rajshahi, 1995, pp. 436-507.

*Vervarelyke schip-breuk van'T Ost-Indisch Jacht Ter Schelling.* The book provides information about the Mughal army, war tactics and information on rural economy and life of 'subaltern' people of these regions. <sup>64</sup>

Van der Heiden described the village as a small one and not that much populated. "Houses were small and mushroomed in a particular place which was in the middle of the village." He compared it with the old people's house in Amsterdam. He has left a wonderful depiction of the village as follows:

We came to a large gate and were allowed to enter into the gate. When we were there, it seemed to us that the houses here are made almost like the old home in Amsterdam. The construction and design of the houses are just like old home in Amsterdam: in the middle they kept a big open space and around this big space small houses were made in a circular way. 66

Van der Heiden was probably describing a Zaminder's resident. He was cordially welcomed by the *Orangkay* (village headman) and treated with very fine quality of rice, milk as and various kinds of meat such as beef, ox meat etc. and banana, jackfruit, honey and other food stuffs made with tasty spices. He was amazed by the gracious behavior of the village headman and remarked:

....We all, twenty eight men, after five days of our stay in the village Sondip, said good bye to the *Orangkay*, the headman of the village, and thanked for everything good he did for us. Then we called the skipper. The *Orkangkay* was a Bengali man, a very good man; because among the Bengali people and Muslim one can find many good people.<sup>67</sup>

According to the narration of Van der. heiden the local market was "very close to headman's house. It recounts that different kind of commodities like banana, honey, chickens, beef, fishes, eggs, spices and textiles were sold at an incredibly cheap price in the village market." 68

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Niharranjan Ray in his *Bangalir Itihas, Adiparva* has spoken about the "pre-Aryan foundations of the civilization of Bengal. This civilization and the social structure of the agricultural Austric-speaking peoples were entirely village-centered". <sup>69</sup> According to him very clear idea of the form and structure of the

<sup>64</sup> Rasel, Op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p. 41.

<sup>66</sup> Van der Heiden, Vervarelyke schip-breuk van 'T Ost-Indisch Jacht Ter Schelling, p. 74 quoted in Rasel Op.cit., p.41.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, p. 42.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Niharranjan Roy, *Bangalir Itihas Adiparva*, translated by John w. Wood, *History of the Bengali People(Ancient Period)*, 1994, p. 231.

villages of Bengal can be gleaned from the inscriptions of grants and sales of land and the villages contiguous to such land. Inscriptions clearly revealed that all the cultivable lands were contiguous to one another. Where ever a new village was built, all the dwelling and cultivable land was taken to be a block."<sup>70</sup>

Niharranjan Ray also elucidated some aspects the ancient rural Bengal. He stated that villages were not same in size and population. Small villages or parts of villages were known by the word *pataka*. There is no doubt that the villages which were greater in area and in population enjoyed greater prestige and importance.<sup>71</sup> It is evident from the Pala-Sena epigraphic records that most villages were situated besides some waterway of catchment, and that most also had a *ghat* and a pond.<sup>72</sup> Ray concluded about the villages in Bengal in the following manner:

Although in size and appearance each village was different from the other.... the villages of Bengal were, ... much the same in shape and layout; indeed, it cannot be said that there was any particular change in shape and layout until about the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>73</sup>

Shahnara Husain, another prominent historian of ancient Bengal has elaborated the village life in Bengal on the basis of the Sanskrit anthologies. The had depicted the natural scenario and the beauty of the crop-fields in the rural areas from the verses contained in the anthologies. Poet Yougesvara, the most prominent of the all the poets of the Pala period described the paddy fields flooded on river banks which make the heart of the poet gay. Another verse of the same poet depicts a village as follows:

Getting profuse water the paddy has grown excellently. The luxuriant growth of the sugarcanes is also seen. So there is nothing to worry. <sup>76</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 233

<sup>71</sup> Ibid p. 234.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid p. 235.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, p. 254.

<sup>74</sup> Three articles of Sahanar Hussain are very focused on rural life in Bengal in the ancient period. These are 'Poet Yogesvara and Some of his verses depicting village life in Early Medieval Bengal', 'Village life in Early Medieval Bengal: A Study Based on the *Subhasitaratankosa'*, 'Some verses on country life in the *Aryasaptasati* of Sri Govardhanacarya', in *History of Ancient Bengal*, Rajshahi, 2011.

<sup>75</sup> Shahanara Hussain, 'Village life in Early Medieval Bengal: A Study Based on Subhasitaratankosa', in History of Ancient Bengal, Rajshahi, 2011, p.295.

<sup>76</sup> The *Saduktikarnamrta*, V.893, p. 238, ed. By S.C. Banerji, Calcutta, 1965 quoted in Shahanara Hussain, 'Poet Yogesvara and some of his verses depicting village life in Early Medieval Bengal' in *History of Ancient Bengal*, Rajshahi, 2011, p.287.

Following the same trail A M Chowdhury spoke about the natural setting, continuity and 'eternity' of Bengal villages. 77 He stated, "life in Bengal does not seem to have changed very much in the last thousand years or so. ... some aspects of life pattern which do not seem to have changed very much: the dependence on agriculture and the time old use of plough; the life pattern of the village folk and their joys and sorrows; even the landscape pattern and modes of communication in rural Bengal- these are a few of the areas where the 'eternal' aspect of life in Bengal may be seen apparently. He elaborated this eternal character and continuity of village life: The seasonal pattern and the natural setting, such as 'the cuckoo singing the blossoming of the mango, the buzzing of the bees and lily buds in the tanks and the ponds in springtime, or the monsoon rains, the village children smeared with mud and with sticks in their hands, running after the rising fish in the flooded paddy fields which are full of croaking fogs' or 'the happy village young man in the nights of monsoon lies with his wife in his thatched pavilion over the roof of which grows pumpkin vines and he listens in her embrace to the constant downpour of rains' or 'the peasant houses are happy in the harvest of the winter rice and sweet with perfume from jars of new-stored grain' – all have an 'eternity' about them.<sup>78</sup>

If we try to compare the description of villages in the ancient period with those in the period under discussion, we will notice some similarity and continuity of the salient features. The rural areas mentioned by Ibn Battuta on both side of the river; the location of village Aluia, Jogdia and Meamgar mentioned by the unknown Portuguese interpreter; village described by the Jesuit Father Melchior Fonseca and temporary village mentioned by Caesar Fredrick in Buttor have a very common phenomenon in terms of their geographical setting and location. All these villages mentioned by them were located on the river side or some of them had water tanks in the middle of the village. Abdul Latif's description of village Baga contains the existence of *pukkar* or a 'beautiful tank located in the centre of the village' and subsequently Fray Sebastien Manrique's mention of a 'beautiful tank of clear sweet water' or 'reservoirs built at the common expense of a village, or else by rich or pious people' indicate another common ingredient of rural Bengal, i.e., the existence of a water reservoir located in the middle of the village or nearby areas.

<sup>77</sup> Abdul Momin Chowdhury, 'Aspects of Ancient Bengal Society and Socio-religious Attitudes: Tradition and continuity', Dhaka University Studies, Vol. XXX, December, 1982, pp. 148-160.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

Location of green crop fields and various trees in the village and its surrounding areas is also apparent from their description. If we try to analyze the mental map of Bengal villages created in the mind of these foreign travelers then we will find that all of them have agreed that rural scenario in Bengal was very pleasant and charming. They have expressed it in different ways such as Ibn Batutta compared it with 'a mart'; while Wang Dayuan termed it 'a very beautiful farm view'; Father Melchior Fonseca expressed that the villages are 'wonderfully pleasant' and 'displaying far and wide their joyful burdens'; Abdul Latif described it 'green and refreshing' and 'very delightful place.'

People living in the villages were very nice and friendly. Van der Heiden had spoken exceedingly well about the village *Orangkay* (headman) and called him 'a Bengali man, a very good man'. He further commented that: '...among the Bengali people and Muslim one can find many good people'. Self respect and attitude of cooperation among the villagers was termed as 'sense of righteousness' by the Chinese ambassador Fei Shin.

On the basis of above discussion, it can be assumed that the over all look of villages in Bengal have not changed over a long period of its history. It was very pleasant and charming. Village settlements and the natural beauty of the surrounding attracted the foreigners and they expressed it loud and clear. It can be concluded that during the pre-colonial period changes in village life and settlement pattern were absent. Rivers or the water courses nearby were the main feature of rural life. Cattle roaming in the field or open spaces and the green crop fields around the villages were common in the Bengal Villages. The entire panorama of rural Bengal had an eternal character. This is also reflected in the writing of a twentieth century historian Bradley-Birt, who wrote in 1906:

Throughout the centuries it has preserved a charm unique among all the wonders of the East....Small wonder that ancient chroniclers, reveling in picturesque description, called it 'a land of emerald and silver' 'a garden fit for kings'. Even in the official documents it is styled 'Jannat-ul-bilad', the paradise of countries....its wealth of green, in every wonderful shade, from the deepest of olive to the tender green of the earliest rice, cover the earth like a carpet lovingly spread by the gods. <sup>79</sup>

What we are watching now is a changed scenario of villages. It happened in the late colonial and post colonial periods. The serene green fields, the water channels and tanks, homesteads clustered in close proximity to each other, the edges of the homesteads surrounded by fruit trees were common in the

<sup>79</sup> F. B. Bradley-Birt, *Dacca: The Romance of an Eastern Capital*, Second Edition, Guwahati, Delhi, 1992, pp. 4-5

descriptions of almost all the accounts of foreign travelers. The eternal character of the Bengal villages was very much noticeable up to the eighteenth century. With the colonial rule, especially after the Permanent Settlement, the serene and green landscape of the villages was largely interrupted by the palaces of the Zamindars. The colonial education system introduced the schools in the rural areas and thus an air of change started blowing and in the post-colonial industrial development and the crisscross roads constructed for convenient and fast movement of both men and goods could not but changes the eternal character of the villages.