Asiatic Society of Bangladesh

Asiatic Society of Bangladesh

Vol. 68   No. 1   June 2023

JOURNAL
OF THE ASIATIC SOCIETY OF BANGLADESH
HUMANITIES

Editor

Ahmed A. Jamal

Associate Editor

Mohammad Abul Kawser

ASIATIC SOCIETY OF BANGLADESH

Guidelines for Contributors

The *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh* (Humanities) is a peer-reviewed journal. Manuscripts submitted for publication in the journal should be printed, double-spaced on one side of A4 size paper with generous margins, and should not normally exceed 10,000 words using British spelling. In addition, a soft copy of the manuscript should be submitted. A *quotation* that will run more than fifty words should be set off as a single-spaced, double-indented paragraph. ***Notes and references* should be numbered consecutively throughout and be placed at the foot of the page.** *Tables* should be given separate numbers in the manuscript, such as Table 1, Table 2, etc. with running headings.

Notes and References should be cited as follows:

1. P.J. Marshall, *Bengal: The British Bridgehead, The Cambridge History of India,* (Cambridge 1987), p. 77.

2. Willem Van Schendel, 'Economy of the Working Classes'. Sirajul Islam (ed.), *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. II, (Economic History), (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh 1992), pp. 542-99.

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

DECLARATION

A manuscript which is concurrently under consideration by another journal or press or which has been published elsewhere will not be considered for publication in the Journal.

The author of each paper agrees that (i) the work submitted has been written by her/him and that its similarity with any other published work/unpublished thesis does not exceed 25%; (ii) s/he takes all responsibilities for the content of the paper; (iii) the content of the paper has not been published before in any referred journal or has not been submitted to any such journal for publication; and (iv) s/he accords consent to the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh to publish the paper.

BOOK REVIEW
Books sent to the journal for review should be given in duplicate.

We are happy to inform you that the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh* (Humanities) has recently acquired DOI (Digital Object Identifier). We are now entitled to assign DOI to all individual papers starting from the current issue of the Journal (i.e., June 2023). This will help scholars all over the world to easily locate the published papers. It will also increase the visibility and facilitate citation of the papers. With this, the Journal is taking another step forward in terms of academic excellence as well as international recognition. On this auspicious occasion the Editorial Board of the Journal expresses its heartiest gratitude to the ASB Council and all concerned.

CONTENTS

An Enquiry into how Political Sufi-Regimes Evolve in Contemporary Bangladesh

Mamun Al Mostofa[*]

Abstract

Contrary to the commonly held notion that Sufis are generally apolitical, contemporary scholars on Sufism, in general, have reached a consensus that Sufism has always been tinged with political colour. However, this perspective, though dominant, seems to under-appreciate the nuances of Sufism and at the same time denies Sufis' capacity to remain non-partisan whenever they choose to be. Against this backdrop, this article attempts to investigate four Sufi-regimes that have been politically active in contemporary Bangladesh. Analysing their evolution, it explains the stage in their growth when such regimes are likely to remain non-partisan and when they are likely to shed their visibly apolitical stance, take noticeably more political positions and/or form political party. It argues that before taking on an explicitly political character, a typical Sufi-regime usually undergoes at least three identifiable phases – namely, recognition, expansion and stabilisation, and lastly discipline through organisation. According to the analytical model presented here, Sufis in the recognition and expansion phase are unlikely to join politics, while those with a disciplined group of followers and murids can participate in the political process with a minimum level of encouragement from their respective surroundings.

Key words: Sufi Orders, Political Sufis, Pir/Sufi Regime, Apolitical Spirituality, Explicit Politicisation.

Historically, Sufis[1] have been engaged in politics in every conceivable way.[2] And, therefore, contemporary scholars seem to denounce the idea of apolitical Sufism.[3]

---

[*] Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh.

[1] This article uses the words 'Sufi' and 'Pir' interchangeably.

[2] See, among others, Isabelle Werenfels, 'Beyond Authoritarian Upgrading: The Re-emergence of Sufi Orders in Maghrebi Politics', *The Journal of North African Studies*, 19, 3 (2014), p. 283; Barbara Degorge, 'Millennial Islam in Africa: Sufi Politics in the Sudan', *The European Legacy*, 5, 2 (2000), p. 205; Paul L Heck ed., *Sufism and Politics: The Power of Spirituality* (Princeton: Markus Weiner Publishers, 2007), pp. 1-2; Fait Muedini, 'Sufism and Anti-Colonial Violent Resistance Movements: The Qadiriyya and Sanussi Orders in Algeria and Libya', *Open Theology*, 1 (2015), pp. 134-45; Fait Muedini, 'The Promotion of Sufism in the Politics of Algeria and Morocco', *Islamic Africa*, 3 2 (2012), pp. 201-26.

[3] See Ismail R al-Faruqi and Lois Lamya al Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam* (London: Collier Macmillan Publishers,1986), p. 304; Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi, *A Short History of the Revivalist Movement in Islam,* trans. Al-Ashari (New Delhi: Markazi Maktaba Islami Publishers), p. 94; Muhammad Iqbal, quoted in Clinton Bennett, 'Introduction', Clinton Bennett and Sarwar Alam eds., *Sufism, Pluralism and Democracy* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2017), p. 5.

However, scholars' extreme views – such as Sufi orders "are never apolitical",[4] and "there is hardly the possibility of an apolitical saint"[5] – deny Sufis' the freedom to choose their "way of life", as Ansari puts it.[6] Such claims disallow Sufis' social agency alongside the capability to choose any position in the spectrum between 'seemingly apolitical' to 'noticeably political mode of being'. Again, while the following generalisations – such as Egyptian Sufis are "traditionally apolitical",[7] certain Moroccan Sufi-organisations propagate "apolitical spirituality" while others practice "militant mysticism",[8] Pakistani "pir has no sectarian preference and is never involved in political controversy *unless it is absolutely necessary* to protect his power and privilege"[emphasis added],[9] indicate that some scholars are willing to allow Sufis some agency, we still lack clear explanations about when Sufis maintain their apolitical persona and when they may possibly shun it. Furthermore, some researchers are inclined to present Sufis' political engagement as a contradiction. For instance, in relation to Bangladeshi Pirs, one scholar wrote, "Many Sufis may well conform to the general perception of Sufism as apolitical. *However,...*some Sufis are entering the political arena"[emphasis added].[10] As regards Chishti, Naqshbandi and Nimatullahi Sufi orders, another claimed, in a similar fashion, that they "abstain from what is generally or conventionally conceived as socio-political, *but* at the same time they do engage and maintain an interface with it"[emphasis added].[11]

Therefore, it could be argued that literature on Sufis' political engagement suffers both from extremism and confusion, a problem that stems possibly from a general reluctance to look sufficiently closely at how political Sufis emerge in their

---

[4] Degorge, 'Millennial Islam in Africa', p. 205.

[5] Rosemary R Corbett, 'Conclusion: Thinking Otherwise', in Katherine Pratt Ewing and Rosemary R Corbett eds., *Modern Sufis and the State: The Politics of Islam in South Asia and Beyond* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), p. 242.

[6] Sarah Ansari, '"A Way of Life Rather Than an Ideology": Sufism, *Pīr*s, and the Politics of Identity in Sindh', in Katherine Pratt Ewing and Rosemary R Corbett eds., *Modern Sufis and the State: The Politics of Islam in South Asia and Beyond* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), pp. 127-39.

[7] Kristin Deasy, 'The Sufis' Choice: Egypt's Political Wild Card', *World Affairs*, 175, 3 (2012), p. 45.

[8] Khalid Bekkaoui and Ricardo René Larémont, 'Moroccan Youth Go Sufi', *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, 2, 1 (2011), p. 32.

[9] Saifur Rahman Sherani, '*Ulema* and *Pir* in the Politics of Pakistan', in Hastings Donnan and Pnina Werbner eds., *Economy & Culture in Pakistan: Migrants and Cities in a Muslim Society* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), p. 224.

[10] Sarwar Alam, 'Encountering the Unholy: The Establishment of Political Parties by Sufi Masters in Modern Bangladesh', in Clinton Bennett and Charles M Ramsey eds., *South Asian Sufis: Devotion, Deviation, and Destiny* (London: Continuum, 2012), p. 176.

[11] Milad Milani and Vassilis Adrahtas, 'Modern talking: Sufi socio-political discourse', *Journal of Religious and Political Practice*, 4, 2 (2018), p. 193.

respective milieu. As a result, the extant literature largely fails to answer the following questions: do recognised Pirs always show their political face publicly? Is it possible for an individual Pir to remain visibly apolitical for some part of his career and then gradually emerge as political as his career advances? Or is it possible for a Sufi-regime[12] (or family) to emerge with apparent apolitical mode of being and then take a political turn in successive generation(s)? At which stage of their journeys Pir-regimes choose to remain seemingly apolitical and when are they likely to take noticeably political stand and engage in the political process? A closer look at politically engaged Pirs in contemporary Bangladesh may help us find answers to the questions raised above.

Therefore, this article places the following currently active political Bangladeshi Pirs– Sarsina, Maizbhandar, Atroshi and Charmonai Pirs – under the scanner. Since previously active prominent Pirs such as Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani and Maulana Muhammad Ullah alias Hafezji Hujur currently have little impact, they are not discussed in this paper.[13]

Political Pir-regimes in Bangladesh

As indicated above, the following section analyses four currently active nationally known Pir-regimes in Bangladesh to better understand the phases through which they have travelled in the process of becoming overtly politicised. The comparative analysis of their evolution helps to explain when, after obtaining social recognition, a Pir is likely to leave aside his apparent non-partisan stance and take on an explicitly political colour. Short descriptions of contemporary political Pir-regimes are accordingly furnished below.

Sarsina Darbar

Sarsina darbar emerged during the first half of twentieth century in the remote village of Sarsina in south-western district Pirojpur (see Figure1) which was just within fifty-kilometre radius of Madaripur, the epicentre of the nineteenth-century Faraizi movement.[14] The founder of the Sarsina tradition Shah Muhammad Nesaruddin

---

[12] Mart Bax's idea of religious regime has been borrowed here. We define a Sufi/Pir regime as. "a formalized and institutionalized constellation of human interdependencies of variable strength, which is legitimized by religious ideas and propagated by religious specialists". Please see, Mart Bax, 'Religious Regimes and State Formation: Toward a Research Perspective', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 60, 1 (1987), p. 2.

[13] For detailed discussion on the Pir-career of Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani please see, Saiful Islam, *Shadhinata, Bhashani O Bharat* (Dhaka: Bartoman Shomoy, 2005); for Maulna Muhammad Ullah see, Muhammad AbdulHuq, *Hazrat Hafezji Hujur (r) Jivani* (Dhaka: Maktabatut Taqwa, 2020).

[14] Muin-ud-Din Ahmad Khan, *History of the Faraidi Movement in Bengal, 1818-1906* (Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society, 1965); Nurul H Choudhury, *Peasant Radicalism in Nineteenth*

Ahmed (1873-1952) was thus born at a time when the memories of this revivalist movement of Muslims in Bengal were still fresh in his birthplace.

Nesaruddin had a difficult childhood. At the age of fourteen he lost his father while his grandfather was still alive and hence was deprived of any inheritance.[15] As a student he travelled to several places – Madaripur, then Dhaka, then Kolkata and finally to Hooghly – for religious education. While studying, he received financial assistance from several local businessmen.[16] In 1895, while at Hooghly Madrasa, Nesaruddin accepted the spiritual discipleship of Furfura Pir Abu Bakar Siddique (1845-1939). Having received *ijajat* (permission to practice spirituality) from his Pir in 1901/1902, he along with his family members went to Mecca on pilgrimage. They stayed there for three years and returned to their native village when Bengal was partitioned (1905) and at the point when the All-India Muslim League was emerging.[17]

After his unceremonious homecoming, a couple of years passed uneventfully. He then succeeded in setting up a small *keratia* madrasa (where students are taught only how to read and recite Quran), which was constructed with betel nut tree and *golpata*. As late as 1918, it was converted into a new scheme madrasa that followed government-approved syllabi.[18] In the meantime, in 1911 his Pir Abu Bakar launched the Anjuman-e-Wayejen-e-Islam (association of preachers of Islam), a platform of ulema who travelled across Bengal offering both paid and unpaid public sermons. As a member of this network, Nesaruddin journeyed extensively through his neighbouring areas offering free sermons.[19] This is possibly how he earned his initial reputation. Over time, his madrasa grew both in terms of student size and infrastructure. Finally, in 1942, with the patronage of the then Chief Minister of Bengal AK Fazlul Huq, his madrasa – Sarsina Darussunnat Madrasa – obtained the

---

Century Bengal: The Faraizi, Indigo and Pabna Movements (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2001).

[15] Hakir Muhammad Abdul Bari Khondkar, *Shah Sufi Nesaruddin Ahmed (Rh)-er Jīvanī* (Pirojpur: Sarsina Darussunnat Library, 6th ed., 2015), p. 13; also see, Muhammad Ismail Hossen, *Śatabdir Oitijyabahi Sarsina Darbar Sharif* (Pirojpur: Sarsina Darussunnat Library, 2020/2011), p. 16.

[16] Khondkar, *Shah Sufi Nesaruddin*, p. 15.

[17] Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada, *Foundations of Pakistan: All India Muslim League Documents: 1906-1947*, vol. 1 (Karachi: National Publishing House, 1969), pp. i-lxxiv.

[18] As part of the reform of madrasa education in 1915, the British government introduced new syllabi which a section of the ulema whole-heartedly accepted while those who opposed the initiative clung to the old syllabi. The madrasas under the opposing ulema were categorised as old scheme madrasa. For a detailed discussion, see Ali Riaz, *Faithful Education: Madrasahs in South Asia* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008).

[19] Abu Fatema Muhammad Ishaque, *Furfurar Peer Hazrat Maulana Abu Bakar Siddiqui* (Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1980), p. 31.

necessary approval to award *kamil* qualifications (MA equivalent degree), in the same way as the Kolkata Alia Madrasa.[20] Huq's involvement in madrasa affairs indicates that Nesaruddin maintained good relations with mainstream politicians.

Fig. 1: Locations of prominent political darbars in Bangladesh's map (Source: Google Maps).

---

[20] Khondkar, *Shah Sufi Nesaruddin*, p. 61.

Nesaruddin's teaching was also supplemented by the propagation of the *Nakshbandia tariqa* and writing Islamic books. At that time, most Islamic books were in Arabic, Persian or Urdu. Since there was severe dearth of Islamic texts in the Bangla vernacular, he not only authored as many as forty books to meet existing demand, but also donated their copyright to Sarsina madrasa.[21] As for his Pir-career, he made himself available to any murid or visitor on an almost daily basis, before and after mid-day (*zuhr*) prayers. After evening (*maghrib*) prayers, he used to lead collective *zikr* and give *tariqa* lessons.[22] It took him almost a decade to win a sufficiently sizable following to organise the first yearly gathering (*mahfil*) involving his murids – *Isāle Sauāb Mahfil* (1914). At that time, it was arranged once a year: on 14-16 *Agrahayan* according to the Bangla calendar.[23] Over the next two decades the number of his devotees increased to such an extent that from 1932 he started arranging second *Isāle Sauāb Mahfil* (27-29*Falgun*, Bangla year).

With *kamil* approval and the number of his murids growing exponentially, Nesaruddin instructed his followers to unite under an organisation – theAnjuman-e-al-Islah –headquartered in Sarsina. In 1944, this was renamed the Anjuman-e-al-Islah Hijbullah, popularly called Hijbullah. In the words of Nasiruddin,

> Those who accept only Islamic ideals and principles for the guidance of their personal, social and state affairs constitute Hijbullah – the party of Allah. On the other hand, those who are against it, constitute Hijbusśhaetin–the party of the evil. For the protection and advancement of Islam, it is obligatory [*wajib*] to join Hijbullah…. You all would admit that the importance of such a group has increased manifold these days. Therefore, I solicit all pious Muslims, be they are madrasa educated, English educated, student of madrasa as well as schools, wealthy people, merchants, servicemen, intellectuals and wage earners to join Hijbullah.[24]

Hijbullah's clear objective was to mould the individual, society and the state according to the ideals of Islam.[25]His Anjuman also had a student wing – Jamiat-e-Tulaba-e-Hijbullah – which in 1987 was renamed the Bangladesh Chatra Hijbullah.[26]

---

[21] Ibid, p. 54.

[22] Ibid, pp. 49-50.

[23] The Bengali calendar was introduced during the reign of Mughal Emperor Akabar and is different from both Gregorian and *Hijri* calendars. It is used mostly in Bangladesh in parts of India (West Bengal and Assam).

[24] Muhammad Azizur Rahman ed., *Osiatnama O Malfuzat-e-Nesaria* (Pirojpur: Sarsina Darussunnat Library, 12th ed., 2016), p. 20.

[25] Khondkar, *Shah Sufi Nesaruddin*, p. 75.

[26] Ibid, p. 76.

Along with the growth in murids and admirers, the size of their contribution (*najar*) to the Pir's fund and his madrasa-centred establishments expanded. According to his last wishes (*wasiat*), after *falgun mahfil* had been successfully completed, the remaining fund – made up, again, from public subscriptions – was to pass into the hands of his two sons.[27] Similarly, any left-over of *Agrahayan mahfil* funds were to be spent on the maintenance of the madrasa and related establishments. As such, funding for his religio-political mission, too, came from murids' donation.[28] He also urged all his murids to continue their material and moral support for the darbar even after his death.[29]

That Nesaruddin's activism resulted in certain degree of social influence in the neighbouring villages is testified by several instances drawn from his biographies.[30] Over time, his influence grew to the extent that he started enforcing different aspects of the sharia among Muslims in the locality:

> At initial state he [Nesaruddin] used to use politely ask the interest-taking, non-praying as well as unveiled Muslims. If they were not corrected, he used to *ostracise* them from society. *Being excluded and being under pressure, people used to comply* [emphasis added].[31]

Nesaruddin's long association with the politically-conscious Pirs of Furfura, his background as a public speaker and also his own organisation Hijbullah made him a suitable candidate to become one of the co-organisers of All-India Ulema Conference that was held in Muhammad Ali Park in Kolkata in October 1945.[32] It was at that conference that the Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam, the pro-Muslim League organisation of ulema in British India, was formed.[33] Both Nesaruddin and his son Abu Zafar Muhammad Saleh (1915-90) then played an active role in the Sylhet referendum in 1947.[34] Furthermore, Nesaruddin organised an all-party ulema conference at Sarsina in 1951 that ultimately gave birth to the Nezam-e-Islam (NI) party in 1952.[35] He also

---

[27] A copy has been obtained by the author from one of his grandsons.

[28] Rahman, *Osiatnama*, pp. 13, 19, 21.

[29] Hossen, *Śatabdir Oitijyabahi Sarsina*, p. 95.

[30] Khondkar, *Shah Sufi Nesaruddin*, p. 24.

[31] Ibid, p. 21.

[32] Amalendu De, *Islam in Modern India* (Calcutta: Maya Prakashan, 1982), p. 222.

[33] See, Sayyid A. S. Pirzada, *The Politics of Jamiat Ulama-i-Islam Pakistan 1971-1977* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1999); Mohamed Nawab bin Mohamed Osman, 'The Ulema in Pakistani Politics', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 2009, pp. 230-47.

[34] Hossen, *Śatabdir Oitijyabahi Sarsina*, p. 48.

[35] *Pariciti: Bangladesh Nezam-e-Islam Party* (Dhaka: Undated), p. 2.

played an active role in framing the 22-point basic principles that eventually helped to shape the constitution of Pakistan (1956).[36]

Following Nesaruddin's death, his son Shah Abu Zafar Muhammad Saleh (1915-1989) became the *gadiniśīn* and also the Amir (chief) of Hijbullah. Conflict with his brother Shah Muhammad Siddique over succession did not surface, possibly because, as indicated earlier, Nesaruddin had decided who would get what during his own lifetime. Saleh is now remembered for making Hijbullah stronger, maintaining good relations with almost all subsequent political regimes except that of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (1972-75), his collaboration with the Pakistani army's atrocities against what were then East Pakistani civilians in 1971, and his efforts at modernising madrasa education in post-independence Bangladesh. As he is reported to have instructed his followers,

> If three Pir-brothers [who are murids of the same Pir] live in a particular area, you [should] open a branch of Jamiat-e-Hijbullah and regularly perform *zikr* and *talim*[lesson]. You would participate in weekly and monthly lessons. You should bring your sons, brothers, friends and relatives within the fold of this organisation and lead them towards the straight path.[37]

During his tenure, the number of murids grew so large in so many different places that it became unfeasible for him individually to instruct them on *tariqa*, let alone provide personal attention. Hence, he started instructing *tariqa*-trainers who used to give *tariqa* lessons across the country. The training of these instructors was usually three to four days' long. Any participation by lay murids was forbidden in those sessions.[38]

By 1950s, Sarsina had earned the reputation of being both a Sufi centre and a centre for Islamic learning. At that time, as many as 400 students from poor families used to receive free education, lodging and food.[39] Notably, few madrasas in East Pakistan could boast as many students. When in the mid-1960s Pakistan's military ruler Ayub Khan started to play the Islamic card, seemingly with a view to broadening his support base, he developed good relations with Sarsina darbar.[40] Ayub visited Sarsina

---

[36] Hossen, *Śatabdir Oitijyabahi Sarsina*, p. 49; also see Leonard Binder, *Religion and Politics in Pakistan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), p. 212.

[37] Hossen, *Śatabdir Oitijyabahi Sarsina*, p. 95.

[38] Muhammad Ismail Hossen, *Bir Mujahid Pir Shah Abu Zafar Muhammad Saleh (Rh)* (Pirojpur: Sarsina Darussunnat Library, 2016/2005), p. 31.

[39] Rhaman, *Osiatnama*, p. 12.

[40] Manzooruddin Ahmad, 'The Political Role of the 'Ulama' in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent', *Islamic Studies*, 6, 4 (1967), pp. 342, 353 (footnote no. 120).

several times, sought the blessing of the Pir,[41] and allocated 7.71 acres of government land to the darbar. However, Saleh's Pir-career suffered a setback due to its later association with the Pakistani military's atrocities in the locality,[42] leading to him spending twenty-three months behind bars.

In his old age, Saleh had a pioneering role in streamlining and modernising madrasa education. For him, religious clerics who offered expert opinion without considering the demand of time were 'ignorant'.[43]Accordingly, he came up with suggestions on how to achieve these goals:

> There should be different streams in madrasa. A group will emerge as *mufti* [expert in Islamic law], *fakih* [expert in Islamic jurisprudence], *mufassir* [expert in Quranic exegesis] and *muhaddis* [expert in Hadith] while another group will emerge as physicians, engineers, economists and sociologists.[44]

Following this approach, not only did he work relentlessly with the regimes of General Ziaur Rahman (1976-81) and General Hussain Muhammad Ershad (1981-90) to reform madrasa education, but he proved to be one of the few Pirs who supported Zia in consolidating his regime.[45] As a result, he was awarded the Independence Award in 1980 in acknowledgement of his contribution to madrasa education. He was also one of the chief patrons of the association of madrasa teachers, the Jamiatul Muderresin Bangladesh.

Occasionally, Saleh also urged Muslims to observe *jihadi sunnah* (follow Prophet in matters of jihad).[46] Regarding the political role of his organisation Hijbullah, he emphasised that "Bangladesh Jamiat-e-Ulema and Jamiat-e-Hijbullah do not do partisan politics. We support neither any party nor any individual. Our support or opposition is for the sake of ideology".[47]

After Saleh, his son Muhammad Muhibbullah became the *gadiniśīn*. His mission was to spread the message of Islam through establishing qawmi madrasas[48] across the

---

[41] 'Ayub Assures Govt's Loyalty To Islamic Principles', *Pakistan Observer*, 15 March 1963; also see Md Nazrul Islam and Md Saidul Islam, *Islam and Democracy in South Asia: The Case of Bangladesh* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), p. 202.

[42] 'Ekti marmantod hatyakānda o sarsinar rākshash pir', *Purbodesh*, 19 February 1972.

[43] Hossen, *Bir Mujahid Pir*, p. 45.

[44] Ibid, p. 50.

[45] Taj ul-Islam Hashmi, 'Islam in Bangladesh Politics', in Hussin Mutalib and Taj ul-Islam Hashmi eds., *Islam, Muslims and the Modern State* (London: Macmillan Press, 1994), p. 112.

[46] Ibid, pp. 48-9.

[47] Ibid, pp. 109-10. This was an excerpt of his speech given to the *Majlish-e-Shura* of Jamiat-e-Ulema and Jamiat-e-Hijbullah on 12 March 1982.

[48] These are unregulated by government and run with donations from their well-wishers and sympathisers.

country, because, in his view, the *alia* madrasa system was no longer capable of producing practising ulema. As of 2022, more than 2000 such madrasas have been set up. Though Muhibbullah has made repeated statements that Hijbullah is a "non-political and religious organisation",[49] its past and present activism stands in contrast to this claim. On 3 June 1971, three months after the liberation war had started, the then secretary of Hijbullah, Azizur Rahman, issued a public statement urging the Pakistan government to offer military training to its loyal and pro-Islamic citizens to combat anti-Muslim forces.[50] Moreover, the Jamiat-e-Ulema and Hijbullah have been among the organisations taking the lead in campaigns against the Ahmadiya community, the noted author Taslima Nasreen in 1992-93, and in the 2020 Boycott France movement for its alleged anti-Muslim policies.[51]

Notably, at least two other grandsons of Nesaruddin have been active in the contemporary political arena. *Mejo* (junior) Pir of Sarsina Shah Muhammad Mustakim Billah Siddique (Muhibbullah's first cousin) have maintained good relations with the Sheikh Hasina regime.[52] In 2021 he was also planning to form a new political party, the Jamiat-e-Darussunnat Bangladesh.[53]*Sejo* (junior-most) Pir of Sarsina Shah Muhammad Arif Billah Siddique in contrast maintains close contact with the key opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).[54]

Maizbhandar Darbar

Maizbhandar *tariqa* is arguably Bangladesh's only indigenous Sufi order that emerged in Maizbhandar village in Chittagong in the late nineteenth century. Its founder Syed Ahmad Ullah (1826-1906) received his religious education in Chittagong and at the Kolkata Alia Madrasa. Being graduated from the madrasa in 1852, he was appointed as a *Qazi* of Jessore district (in 1853). After one year, he quit

---

[49] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bu9mOWIynF8, accessed 25 April 2021; also see https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=3397411110367054, accessed 25 April 2021.

[50] 'Dash jan biśishta ālemer bibriti: deshpremikder samarik training pradān karun', *Dainik Pakistan*, 4 June 1971.

[51] Jugantor Desk, 'France mahanabi(sa)-er bangachitra pradarśan: bikshobh samābeś abyahata', *Daily Jugantor*, 6 November 2020.

[52] 'Naukai carte jot bendhe islami dalgulur torjor', *bdnews24.com*, 29 July 2017, available at https://bangla.bdnews24.com/politics/article1371377.bdnews, accessed 1 March 2021.

[53] Shah Muhammad Mustakim Billah Siddique interviewed at his residence on 3 March 2021; see, also, Salman Tareque Sakil and Chowdhury Akbor Hossain, 'Eight Islamist parties to merge', *Bangla Tribune*, 16 May 2019; Bangla Tribune Report, 'New Islamic coalition launched', *Bangla Tribune*, 15 September 2018.

[54] 'Ulema maśayekhder sange khaleda ziar baithak', *bangla.bdnews24.com*, 4 December 2010, available at https://bangla.bdnews24.com/politics/article453302.bdnews, accessed 26 April 2021.

his post and instead started teaching in a madrasa in Kolkata. In the meantime, he also accepted spiritual apprenticeship from a Pir, Sheikh Abu Shahmah. But, then, after the death of his father in 1858/1859 (*hizri* 1275), he returned to his village permanently.

Ahmad's first biography, first published (in 1967) long after his death, reports that during the initial two years following his return from Kolkata, he occasionally preached. For next decade or so, however, he abstained from preaching, maintained a low profile, and remained in relative seclusion. Once he had received *belāet* (experience of Allah), people apparently began to witness his miracle works, and his reputation spread like wildfire.[55]

His reputation even inspired a Hindu religious guru Monomohan Datta to visit Ahmad at Maizbhandar in 1903-4 (Bangla year 1310). On reaching the courtyard of Ahmad's residence, he noticed a large crowd that was divided into sub-groups, each consisting of three to four persons. Some were discussing religious texts, and others engaged in performing and enjoying music. In one corner, a mendicant was doing *zikr* sitting inside a mosquito net. After waiting for long hours, the guru along with his companions were permitted to meet with Ahmad face-to-face. All members of the entourage presented something to the Pir who was very old and had a dark complexion. His eyes were deep-set, and his hair had yet to turn grey.[56] Moreover,

> Fakir Sāheb [Ahmad] had miracle-making power. It is said that he performs his Friday congregational prayers in Mecca…. Many kings and emperors are obedient to him. His [miracle making] powers were manifested even in Bombay and Madras.[57]

No witness has so far testified that Ahmad performed his Friday congregational prayers in Mecca, nor there is any evidence that he ever had any connection with kings or emperors. But such accounts of his widely believed miracle-making capacity indicate that Ahmad had earned some reputation as a Pir during his own lifetime. Furthermore, according to available accounts, people belonging to other religious denominations also used to pay him visits and provide *najar*s (gifts). That Maizbhandar celebrations and practices could appeal to people from different religions was attested by an account by the renowned folk musician Romesh Shil

---

[55] Muhammad Faiz Ullah Bhuiyan, *Hazrat Gausul Azam Shah Sufi Maulana Syed Ahmad Ullah (K) Maizbhandarir Jīvanī O Keramat* (Chittagong: Maizhandari Prakasani, 6th ed., 2012/1967), pp. 30-5.

[56] Monomohan Datta, *Lilarahasya* (Brahmonbaria: Anonda Ashrom, 1978 [1384 Bangla Year]), p. 133.

[57] Ibid, p. 134.

(1877-1967).[58] One of its distinctive features included being open to all religious denominations, and the unambiguous propagation of *tariqa* even among non-Muslims. The *tariqa* appealed to all *jātidharmanirbiśeshe*, i.e., it was applicable to all irrespective of caste, class, race, religion, and other backgrounds.[59]

Maizbhandar traditions offer people three broad pieces of advice: first, reserve a certain amount of time every day to assess one's detailed daily activities; second, avoid all unnecessary thinking and activities and shun reliance on others; and third, submit the ego to the Will of Allah and keep Him in constant contemplation.[60] It approves of music and the playing of instruments at times of celebration, and also of prostrating in honour of one's mother, father, teacher, Pir and a just king.[61]

Ahmad had fifty-one *khalifa*s in the southern districts of today's Bangladesh and three in what is now Myanmar. Of his Bangladeshi *khalifa*s, forty-two hailed from Chittagong district, five from neighbouring Noakhali and one each from Barisal, Comilla, Chandpur and Faridpur districts.[62] This geographical distribution of *khalifa*s suggests that, during Ahmad's lifetime, the *tariqa* had only gained popularity in Chittagong and its neighbouring districts. Ahmad appointed four *khalifa*s from among his close family members – his son Syed Foyzul Huq, his grandson Syed Delwar Hossain and two nephews, Syed Aminul Huq and Syed Gulamur Rahman. Of them, Syed Gulamur Rhamn (1865-1937) was regarded as Ahmad's principal *khalifa*.[63] Rahman's biographer Nabi listed as many as 148 *khalifa*s who were scattered across different districts of the country,[64] implying that it was under the leadership of Gulamur Rahman that the Maizbhandari Pir-regime expanded throughout Eastern Bengal.

From the late nineteenth century, the families of Ahmad and his nephews swelled hugely in size. Each of their sons and grandsons were similarly regarded as Pirs and *śāhjādā*s. The current Maizbhandar Pirs broadly belong to three different streams – Pirs of Ahmad Manzil (Palace of Ahmadullah), Rahman Manzil (Palace of Gulamur

---

[58] Romesh Shil Sarkar, *Asek Mela* (Chittagong: 1992); Bhuiyan, *Hazrat Gausul Azam*, pp. 136-7.

[59] Hans Harder, *Sufism and Saint Veneration in Contemporary Bangladesh* (London: Routledge, 2011) p. 311.

[60] Syed Delwar Hossin Maizbhandari, *Manab Sabhyatā* (Chittagong: Gausia Ahmadia Manzil, 6th ed., 2012/1974), p. 9.

[61] Bhuiyan, *Hazrat Gausul Azam*, pp. 129, 131.

[62] Ibid, pp. 68-70.

[63] For details see, Shah Ahad Nabi Garibi Maizbhandari, *Syed Gulamur Rahman Baba Bhandari: Jīvanī O Kārāmat* (Chittagong: Maizbhandar Manzil, 2011), pp. 48-67.

[64] Ibid, pp. 241-52.

Rahman) and Huq Manzil (Palace of Ziaul Huq). In the twentieth century, three Pirs belonging these three Manzils earned much fame – Syed Delwar Hossain (1893-1982), Syed Shafiul Bashar (1919-2002) and Syed Ziaul Huq (1928-88). By the end of twentieth century, almost all male living successors of these lines were claiming the spiritual successorship of their forefathers. Even Shafiul Bashar's son and the Chairman of the Bangladesh Tariqat Federation (BTF) Syed Nazibul Bashar Maizbhandari, a full-time politician since late 1980s, admitted that he made murids and devoted at least one day a week to the interests of the *tariqa*.[65]

Although a certain level of competition has existed among the extended family members of the Maizbhandar Pirs,[66] presently they maintain a negotiated distance from each other. Due to internal competition among members of extended Maizbhandar family and external competition with other *tariqa*s and religious movements, the prominent Pirs of the last century – Syed Delwar Hossain and Syed Shafiul Bashar among others – took initiatives to institutionalise the Maizbhandar phenomena: compiling the sayings and teachings of Ahmad and Gulam Rahman, publishing hagiographies and devotional songs, and writing expositions about core Maizbhandar values. During this period of institutionalisation, the number of annual festivities in Maizbhandar increased. For instance, along with the *urs* of deceased Pirs (of course, there are so many of them), there were celebrations of Prophet's birthday, celebrations of different nights – *shab-e-barat*, *shab-e-qadar*, *shab-e-meraj* etc. – and even the birthday celebrations of Pirs and *śāhjādā*s (sons of a Pir) during their own lifetime.

In due course, Maizbhandar *tariqa* practitioners formed organisations for the spread of their versions of *tariqa*. The prominent among them included Anjuman-e-Tariqat-e-Islam, Anjuman-e-Muttabeyon-e-Gaus-e-Maizbhandari, Maizbhandari Foundation, Anjuman-e-Islah-e-Tariqat Bangladesh, Anjuman-e-Rahmania Moyeenia Maizbhandari and Ashek-e-Gausia Rahmania Moyeenia. In general, these have aimed at inculcating religious feelings, carrying out social work, serving humanity, keeping vigilance so that 'credulous' Muslims of the country were not deceived in the name of religion, preventing the misinterpretation of Islamic texts, and standing against injustices by forging a united front among Sufi-minded Muslims.

---

[65] Syed Nazibul Bashar Maizbhandari in his interview at BTF Office in Dhaka on 30 December 2020.

[66] Samuel Peter Landell Mills, *An Anthropological Account of Islamic Holy Men in Bangladesh* (unpublished PhD dissertation, 1992, University of London), p. 292.
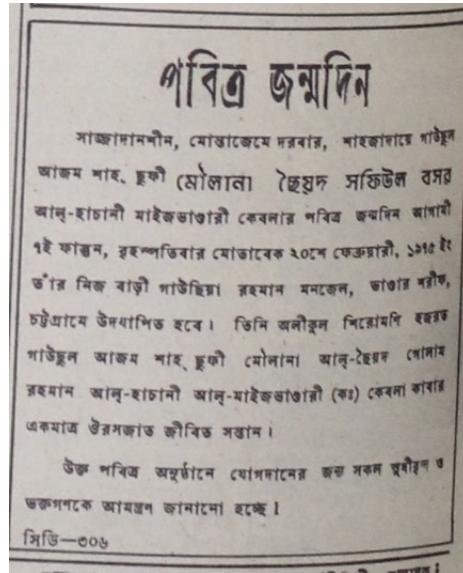
Fig. 2: Notice inviting all to the celebration of a Maizbhandariśāhjādā's birthday during his lifetime
(Source: *Daily Ittefaq,* 18 February 1975).

Meanwhile, to overcome the legitimacy crisis that his regime (1982-1990) was suffering, Ershad desperately searched for new sources of popular support.[67] By the late 1980s, he had managed to bring a number of Pir-regimes including those of Sarsina and Atroshi traditions within his fold. He also obtained some level of control of the madrasa teachers' association – the Jamiatul Muderresin – that was led by the Religious Affairs Minister of his cabinet, Maulana Abdul Mannan. With a view to taking advantage of apparently non-partisan shrine-centric Islamic forces, Ershad regime revealed its plan to take charge of the dargahs and *majar*s that had become the "hotspots of anti-Sharia activities" by enacting the Scheduled Dargah (Administration and Management) Bill (1990).[68] The existing stakeholders of shrines across the country recognised that the bill, if passed, would result in complete loss of their autonomy as *gadiniśīn*s on *majar*-related affairs. Undeniably, the bill had the potential to end their exclusive monopoly over the charity and donations that *majar*s received.

---

[67] Muhammad A Hakim, 'The use of Islam as a political legitimization tool: The Bangladesh experience, 1972-1990', *Asian Journal of Political Science*, 6, 2 (1998), pp. 98-117.

[68] Sangsad Pratibedak, 'Tafsilbhukta dargah (paricālanā o byabasthapanā) bill pass', *Azad*, 1 February 1990; also see Saṃsad Reporter, 'Dargah bill pass', *Banglar Bani*, 1 February 1990.

Amid the hue and cry that the bill created among *tariqa* circles, the Anjuman-e-Tariqat Bangladesh, that was being led by Nazibul Bashar Maizbhandari at that time, mobilised stakeholders to forge a united movement against the legislation. Perceiving that the bill posed an existential threat to the *majar*-centred *tariqa* practitioners across the country, 874 dargah and *majar* committees formed a new platform for themselves – the Bangladesh Dargah Majar Federation (BDMF) – with Nazibul as its chairman. Their movement acquired additional momentum thanks to support from opposition political parties that were themselves agitating against Ershad. After the fall of Ershad in December 1990, the BDMF Chairman successfully contested the parliamentary elections on an Awami League (AL) ticket in 1991 and became an MP. A key reason why Nazibul was able to secure the AL nomination was the BDMF's evidently pro-secular stance. After all, one of its slogans had been *Islam-i satyikār dharma nirapeksha dīn* (Islam is the real secular religion) which was in line with the officially declared values of the AL.[69]

In 1995, Nazibul left the AL and joined the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), within whose hierarchy he secured the position of International Affairs Secretary. After ten years, Nazibul again parted ways with the BNP over the issue of forming an electoral alliance with the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), which was accused of patronising militancy. The following month, he launched his own party – the BTF. Although the party was founded and led by one of the Maizbhandar *tariqa* practitioners, its relationship with other Maizbhandar Pirs has been far from straightforward. BTF chief claim that they believe in Sufi ideology and their party has brought all the *tariqas*, including the Maizbhandar order, on to a shared platform.[70] In reality, other politically ambitious members of Maizbhandar family, who are inevitably Pirs in their own right, have tried their luck in the political arena from time to time.[71]

Charmonai Darbar

The founder of Charmonai Pir-regime Maulana Syed Muahmmad Ishaq (1915-77) was born inBakarganj (now Barisal) district in Southern Bengal. He obtained Islamic education from Darul Ulum Deoband in India and received spiritual training in the *Chistia Saberiatariqa* from his Pir Muhammad Ibrahim.[72] He was also active in

---

[69] Ibid, p. 26.

[70] Nazibul Bashar Maizbhanari interview.

[71] Bangla Tribune Report, 'Cattagrām-2 āsane manonayanpatra jamā dilen maizbhandarier syed saifuddin', *Bangla Tribune*, 27 November 2018, available at https://www.banglatribune.com/390963, accessed 13 April 2021.

[72] Muhammad Eusuf Ali Khan, *Charmonai'r Marhum Pir Syed Muhammad Ishaq Saheb Kebla (Rh)-er Sangkshipta Jīvanī* (Dhaka: Al Ishaq Prakāśanī, 2012), pp. 12-3.

Nezam-e-Islam party.[73]Ishaq's biographies indicate that despite huge effort on his part he earned little fame as Pir in his lifetime.[74] Near his residence, he founded a humble madrasa which is now one of the largest of its kind in the country: Charmonai Ahsanabad Rashidia Alia Madrasa. At the outset, it was a qawmi madrasa.[75] But when it failed to attract students, he changed its syllabi to make it an *alia* madrasa.[76] During Ishaq's advanced years, the Pir used to hold yearly *mahfil*s, which usually comprised a gathering of a few hundred people. When Ishaq died, barely a thousand people had gathered at his funeral prayers.[77] It seems that Ishaq devoted much of his energy to expanding the madrasa and propagating his faith both by giving public sermons and through initiating murids into his *tariqa*. He also wrote as many as twenty-seven books on Islamic rituals and theology in the Bangla language. Possibly because of his orientation with formal political organisation, he recognised the strength of associations, and so encouraged his murids to form the Muhammadia Ishaqia Zakerin Samiti and meet at least once a week in their respective localities.[78] But in this venture too, he had limited success: during his entire lifetime his murids only formed two such committees, one at Dayaganj in Dhaka and the other at Nurnagar in Khulna.[79] The Samiti was renamed as Bangladesh Mujahid Committee in 1982.

Ishaq, thus, left behind no empire. This meant that when it came to the position of his successor there was hardly any competition between his two sons – Syed Muhmmad Mubarak Karim and Syed Muhammad Fazlul Karim (1935-2006) – and so the younger, Fazlul, a religious cleric who had been trained in Lalbagh Alia Madrasa at Dhaka, became *gadiniśīn*. If Ishaq is regarded as the founder of Charmonai madrasa and darbar, then Fazlul was its expander and consolidator. He joined the Charmonai Madrasa as a teacher in the mid-1950s and from that poin the was an NI activist until he joined Maulana Muhammadullah's party Bangladesh Khelafat Andolan (BKA) in

---

[73] Muhammad Zafar Imam ed., *Pir Saheb Charmonai er Jīvanī* (Dhaka: Mujahid Prakāśanī, 2013), p. 88.

[74] Muslim Ali Hawlader, village Pashurikathi of Charmonai Union, interviewed on 28 February 2021. He married at least one and half years before the death of Ishaq and in the year that Ishaq died Muslim's eldest daughter was born.

[75] These are managed and run by private persons or by faith-based organisations and modelled after the Deoband Madrasa.

[76] Alia madrasas follow government regulated syllabus and receives public funds. They are modelled after the Calcutta/Dhaka Alia Madrasa.

[77] Muslim Ali Hawlader's interview.

[78] *Ittefaq*, 2 March 1976.

[79] Islam, *Pir Saheb Charmonai*, pp. 68-69.

1981.[80] Indeed, Fazlul provided his family's Pir-regime with a strong foundation by pursuing two strategies: first, introducing organisational discipline by making what had been relatively passive murids into active mujahids, while at the same time using the existing murid-base to bring more people within the fold of the *tariqa*; and, second, establishing hundreds of qawmi madrasas throughout Bangladesh.

Fazlul would travel extensively in the country, deliver sermons and organise people. As a routine, he spent only three days a month at his Charmonai residence and reserved the remainder of his time for organisational and religious tours. By the mid-1980s, a good number of branches had been constituted in different locations. As of 2022, the Mujahid Committee is registered as a non-political organisation with the Ministry of Social Welfare, with Fazlul's son Syed Muhammad Rezaul Karim (b. 1971) as its chief. All his murids are members of this Committee and are also individually charged with undertaking five specific tasks.[81]

Branches of the Committee, meanwhile, have been set up across the country. According to its constitution, the task of committee members is to develop a close and sincere relationship between murids, well-wishers, and all Muslims.[82] Most importantly, providing the financial strength of the darbar is also the murids' task. As a norm, they are required to contribute one-day's income a month as subscription to the Pir's fund, though unemployed murids need only contribute one-day's expenditure.[83]

Each of these grass-roots level committees consists of fifteen members, of whom five have the rank of 'commander' who are required to perform tasks as specified by Ishaq in his book *Jihad-e-Islam*.[84] In Ishaq's words, "Commanders are those who have made commitment to call people towards Allah",[85] and he spelled out their responsibilities as follows:

> You should keep an eye on each household in your locality. You should notice who does not perform five times prayers, who does not fast, who does and listen to music and who does not maintain veils. You should hand this list to the Imam of the committee. The Imam along with other members of the committee would visit the formers' houses and

[80] Ibid, p. 89.

[81] *Mawaez-e-Karimiya* (Dhaka: Mujahid Prakāśanī, 2018), p. 100; also see, *Tarikar Pãc Oushadher Nītimālā* (Dhaka: Mujahid Prakāśanī, 10th ed., 2020).

[82] *Gaṭhantantra: Bangladesh Mujahid Committee* (Dhaka: Al Medina Plazza, 5th ed., 2008), p. 9.

[83] Shamsudduha Talukder, Secretary of QSB interviewed at his Charmonai office on 28 February 2021.

[84] *Gaṭhantantra*, p. 17, 20

[85] Syed Muhammad Ishaq, *Jihad-e-Islam* (Dhaka: Al-Ishaq Publications, 2006), p. 10.

solicit them to live according to Sharia. If this does not work, then they will circulate among people that such and such person do not comply with Sharia; please pray for them (if possible, you may also beat drums in the village markets to circulate such information). If this too fails, you should send their name along with their father's name [to us]. All the students and teachers would collectively perform *darud-e-naria* [special prayer for the actualisation of wishes] and pray for them. [Then] either Allah would give guidance, or they will not be able to live normal life; they must fall in some difficulty.[86]

A speech given by Fazlul on 27 February 1987 provides further insight into how these grass-roots level committees performed:

I have seen in Rangpur. They renamed a village as Mujahid Mahalya. *Mujahid*s there told me that not a single person can be found in the village who is not a *mujahid*. None of them is without regular daily prayers, none of them do music, none of them remains unveiled. Out of eleven hundred villagers, only eighteen do not say regular prayers every day. We have decided that they must start saying daily prayers. Otherwise, they will not be able to remain in the village. We shall oust them.[87]

As such, applying his father Ishaq's roadmap, Fazlul empowered his murids-cum-*mujahid*s by turning them into a community 'religious police' that exercised certain levels of coercion. As the excerpt above indicated, in some places these committees were hyperactive. In others, they could be more passive. Occasionally, Fazlul criticised such passivity and expressed his frustration that if all the *mujahid*s of the country worked seriously for the propagation of *tariqa*, it would not take more than a year for it to reach every corner of Bangladesh. He also observed that while the poor worked for the *tariqa* with integrity, rich *mujahid*s suffered from an excess of ego.[88]

As indicated earlier, with a view to expanding his support base Fazlul began a campaign in 1983 to establish qawmi madrasas. Their much-publicised objective was to keep children out of the reach of NGO-operated schools that had been offering non-formal education to children who could not access mainstream education. Accordingly, in 1989, Fazlul set up the *Quran Shikkha Board* (QSB) to bring all these madrasas into a common network. By 2020, it had affiliated some 3,000 madrasas, *maktab*s, Islami kindergartens and *hifz* (Quran memorising) centres, involving around 300,000 students and 2,500 teachers. Indeed, the large number of its murids coupled with these institutions has contributed hugely to the dominance of the Charmonai tradition within Bangladesh's twenty-first century religious space.

Based on the steady flow of charitable contributions from murids and admirers, the Charmonai Pirs managed to put in place a composite institutional model that has so

---

[86] Ibid.
[87] *Mawaez-e-Karimiya*, p. 310.
[88] Ibid, p. 370.

far proved sustainable and produced regular graduates-cum-murids and murids-cum-*mujahid*s. Inevitably, there have been some challenges. During mid-1980s, for instance, Fazlul had to face invective and verbal assaults from other Pirs belonging to his own *tariqa*, including some who were *khalifa*s of his father. They alleged that the late Pir Ishaq had not given *ijajat* to Fazlul, an allegation that posed a threat to the latter's Pir-career.[89] But he overcame all such challenges by his continuous activism, on both a spiritual and an organisational level.

As mentioned above, Fazlul had been involved with the political activism of NI and BKA. After Hafezji's death, the BKA split. In these changed circumstances, Fazlul decided in 1987 to join hands with other Pirs and Islamist leaders to form the Islami Shashontantra Andolan (ISA). Within few years, some of its top leaders had either died or left the party, paving the way for the ISA to become synonymous with Charmonai Pir. When in 2006 Fazlul passed away, he left behind a consolidated Pir-regime, seven sons, one daughter and seventeen *khalifa*s. No sign of factionalism or split within the Charmonai regime has surfaced so far. That this Pir-regime continues to thrive is reflected in the participation of millions of Muslims in its annual *mahfil*s. As the Election Commission of Bangladesh has cancelled the registration of JI as a political party,[90] the ISA – renamed as Islami Andolon Bangaladesh (IAB) in 2008 – is currently considered one of the country's leading Islamist parties.

Atroshi Darbar

Founder of Atroshi darbar Maulana Hashmatullah was born in Sherpur district and then was brought up under the tutelage of Pir Khwaja Eunus Ali Enayetpuri in Sirajganj. Having completed his religious and spiritual training at his Pir's residence, Hashmatullah came to Atroshi (in 1946) accompanied by Muhsin Uddin Khan, a member of an emerging elite family in the village. Soon after his arrival, he married Muhsin's niece and started living in his in-laws' house.

From the perspective of the newcomer, things were strange at Atroshi. Not only was the area Hindu-dominated in terms of literacy, economy, and culture, but there was no mosque or madrasa in the neighbourhood. Hashmatuallah was shocked at the way that he had to observe his first Eid day in that village, where there was no celebration at all, not even the usual congregational prayer.[91]

---

[89] *Mawaez-e-Karimiya*, pp. 307-308.

[90] Staff Correspondent, 'EC scraps Jamaat's registration: Issues gazette 5 years after HC declared the party unfit for polls', *The Daily Star*, 30 October 2018.

[91] Rafiqul Alam, 'Samasamaik biśwae janakalyaner janak hazrat baba shah sufi faridpuri', *Ittefaq*, 12 February 1998.

He started his religio-spiritual venture just as British rule in South Asia formally ended. Muhsin had a tiny, thatched house where he kept a cow-calf. When the new groom asked for it for the sake of his religious mission, Muhsin spontaneously donated it and so the propagation of the *tariqa* commenced from those humble beginnings.[92] As regards his initial activities, Hashmatullah later explained,

> Each week I arranged a *jalsā* [gathering]. I taught the participants about the basics of Islam and the *tariqa* as well. Having listened to the narrative of Allah's and His Prophet's love for human being people shed tears. They felt uplifted in each session. The households of *zaker*s [who do *zikr*] and *ashek*s [spirituality lovers] of Atroshi, Sarhesatroshi, Chouddaroshi, Arairoshi and Brahmandi villages donated a morsel of rice each…. Their collective subscription was enough to arrange for meals that followed each weekly *jalsā*. Gradually, the number of participants increased, spirituality seekers thronged to the area. Consequently, within one year I bought a house in the neighbouring village with only eight taka and named it *Zaker* Camp.[93]

Within the next few years, the thatched house was replaced by one with a corrugated iron sheet roof and was also renamed as Bishwa Zaker Manzil (global destination of the people who do *zikr*).[94] The *Manzil* imparted practical training of both the manifest and the hidden sharia that, Hashmatullah claimed, no educational institution did:

> My entire programme is based on Shariat. No anti-Shariat activity is permissible here…. Complete Shariat contains Shariat (exterior shariat), Tariqat [spiritual learning], Hakikat [essence of reality] and Marifat [attaining spiritual truth] and if one of these is out, Shariat loses its completeness…. If you like to realise the hidden mystery of the Creator you are to observe complete these four paths. And nobody can guide you towards the real path except the spiritual guide…. It is not possible to learn these from the educational institutions or printed books.[95]

This particular spiritual guide, however, was also concerned with the material well-being of people. In his own words,

> I give advice to solve mundane problems that make people suffer and, in doing so, teach them spirituality and guide them towards Allah. I give a drop of spiritual nectar in their tongue. In its attraction they keep coming to me in order to have more.[96]

Every day he made himself available in *hujrā* (chamber) to listen to the problems of *zaker*s and offer solutions: after breakfast till mid-day (*zuhr*) prayers; before and after

---

[92] Hazrat Shah Sufi Faridpuri, *Bishwa Zaker Manziler Paricalanā Paddhati* (Faridpur: Bishwa Zaker Manzil, 2020/1995), p. 17.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid, p. 18.
[95] 'Where Lies Salvation?', *Bangladesh Observer*, 18 February 1988. It was the transcribed speech of Hashmatullah that was broadcast on 21 December 1986 on Radio Bangladesh.
[96] Faridpuri, *Bishwa Zaker Manziler*, p. 9.

asr (afternoon) prayers.[97]According to one of his admirers, people used to come to him the whole day along with their *nāliś* (complain of suffering); and they never were disappointed. When somebody visited him, he enquired about their health, financial condition, family affairs – everything. He also enquired about other *zaker*s of the visitor's locality and sent well wishes through messengers.[98] During the initial years of his mission, he used to visit neighbouring villages to deliver public sermons. After the death of his own Pir in 1952, he stopped these visits, and instead stationed himself within the confines of his residence so that people could meet him with greater convenience. Moreover, he strictly monitored the twice-daily meal that the darbar offered free of cost. Even the insolvent household of the neighbourhood used to depend on those meals.[99]

Due to Hashmatullah's personal attention to individual murids, and also his concern for their material and spiritual well-being, his reputation rocketed:

> From Zaker Camp to today's Bishwa Zaker Manzil – is the outcome of half a century's continuous physical labour. I have built this establishment with millions of my spiritual children's labour…. This impossible is made possible because of the efforts of *zaker*s. I did not inherit this huge property. On my arrival to Atroshi my Pir's blessing was my only capital. Later, Allah has bestowed me property worth millions of taka.[100]

But the saga of Hashmatullah would remain incomplete without mentioning the opposition that he faced from other Islamist elements. As he himself recognised,

> My long preaching life had never been smooth. There were hundreds of hurdles and oppositions. There was false propaganda against the *tariqa* and against me. Ulema and Pirs with gross understanding of Islam made united front, organised meetings, seminars and symposiums, and publicly gave *fatwa* that I am a *kafir*[non-believer], circulated leaflets and ran advertisements.[101]

According to one contemporary journalist, throughout 1960s, a section of leading clergymen and theologians used to label him as an infidel.[102]At the same time, Hashmatullah did enjoy some advantages as well. He was married into a Khan family that had been politically influential since the 1960s. His eldest son-in-law Adeluddin Hawlader was elected MP from the constituency several times. All his adversaries were banished when Ershad, as President of Bangladesh, started paying occasional

---

[97]   Muhammad Shahjahan, *Maha Mujadded Hazrat Khwaja Baba Faridpuri* (Faridpur: Bishwa Zake Manzil, 2019/2013), pp. 80-81.

[98]   Ibid, p. 76.

[99]   Muhammad Ali Hawlader in his interview.

[100] Faridpuri, *Bishwa Zaker Manziler*, pp. 131-32.

[101] Ibid, p. 19.

[102] S Kamaluddin, 'The General's Holy Man', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 17 April 1983, p. 16.

visits to Atroshi in the 1980s. Then political leaders as well as civil and military bureaucrats also became regular Atroshi-goers. Thanks to their patronage, the remote village turned into a thriving town with government schools, colleges, post office, telephone office, banking services and different kinds of mill factories. Some of this support, of course, was in clear violation of long-established government policies. Take what Muhammad Ali Hawlader, an elected member of Sadarpur Union Parishad during 1988-1992, recalled about a ditch-like place near the Atroshi darbar that needed to be landfilled. The local council agreed to finance the project with BDT 160 allocated per truck (200 cubic feet) of soil. The challenge was that soil needed to be brought from several kilometres away and so, at one stage, the project was deemed not to be 'not feasible' as far as the council was concerned. Following a request from Atroshi Pir, Ershad himself intervened, and the rate was raised to BDT 1750 per truck, more than ten times than the government-set rate.[103]

However, it would be misleading to state that Hashmatullah's empire expanded simply because of political, especially Ershad's, benefaction, as some scholars have suggested.[104] What is more likely is that he received attention from aspiring political forces precisely because he had already earned people's attention. The case of Muhammad Ilias, the Zaker Party's joint Secretary General and Hashmatullah's murid underlines this point. This former captain in the Bangladesh Army once visited Ajmer Sharif in India in early 1970s. To try out if that place was divinely blessed, he fixed a goal in his own mind in the name of the great soul who had been lying in Ajmer. He said to himself that if that place had been blessed, then his wishes would be fulfilled. And, to his astonishment, his desire was very quickly fulfilled. As a result, he became an admirer of Pirs and their darbars. In 1976, when he was posted in Jessore cantonment, a colleague invited him to visit Atroshi for the *urs*. He accepted the invitation. One night, they all were awakened at 3:00am for instruction. That very morning, he fell asleep, had a bad dream, and immediately woke up. The dream made him utterly sad. Four and half years later, the exact dream came true – he was sacked from the army. In the meantime, he made several attempts to verify whether the Pir was authentic. After the incident of 1981, he concluded that the man was a 'genuine saint' and became his murid.[105] Ilias' account is an indication that

---

[103] Muhammad Ali Hawlader in his interview.

[104] Talukder Maniruzzaman, 'The Fall of the Military Dictator: 1991 Elections and the Prospect of Civilian Rule in Bangladesh', *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 65, No. 2, 1992, p. 211.

[105] Muhammad Ilias, Joint Secretary General of Zaker Party, interviewed at Zaker Party's Banani Office in Dhaka on 4 January 2021.

Atroshi Pir had been able to develop a sizable following in the military long before Ershad started paying him visits to encash political dividends.

While the 1980s were the heyday of Atroshi Pir, it was likely that he recognised that his darbar had reached its peak. His own Pir Enayetpuri's family had been influential in neighbouring Sirajganj district. Another famous disciple of Enayetpuri, Sultan Ahmad Chandrapuri, had his stronghold in Chandrapara, just a few kilometres from Atroshi. Besides, Maulana Saifuddin with the Mujaddedia Tariqat Mission in Mymensingh, Mukimuddin Ahmed with the Paradisepara Darbar in Tangail, and Badruddurza Haider with the Murshidpur Darbar Sharif in Sherpur, were also thriving at that time. Hence, realising that his darbar was less likely to grow further, he focused his energies on consolidating his already expanded enterprise by dividing his establishment into two parts: one strictly spiritual and the other socio-political. He entrusted his eldest son Mahfuzul Huq Mujaddedi with responsibility for giving guidance, propagating his *tariqa* from his khanqah, offering lessons to seekers of spirituality, and looking after the *zaker*s. The duty of the youngest son Mustafa Amir Foysal Mujaddedi was to organise meetings and demonstrations with *zaker*s, spread the *tariqa* at home and abroad, and carry out all the responsibilities of his trust, the Zaker Foundation.[106] The required institutional structure for spreading spirituality was already in place, but to organise meetings and demonstrations a new infrastructure needed to be developed. With that objective in mind, a 'non-political organisation' – the Bishwa Zaker Sangathan – was established in February 1987. Its branches were formed with devout murids across the country. However, there is ample evidence that this 'non-political organisation' possessed political ambition from its very inception. At least one year before formally declaring itself as a political entity – as early as February 1988 – in one of its advertorials it pre-emptively offered an answer to the following question: How would it be different to existing political parties and organisations that claimed that their mission was to establish Islamic rule?

> The reply to the question is: The organisation has no difference of opinion with anybody trying or eager to establish Islamic rule in Bangladesh. [But] the Muslims who do not understand the real meaning of Islam and are devoid of Bateni [manifest] Shariah, Sunnat [traditions of Prophet], Tariquat and Marifat, will not be able to bring about Islamic rule.[107]

---

[106] Faridpuri, *Bishwa Zaker Manziler*, p. 132.

[107] Abdul Kabir, 'Bangladesh Zaker Sangathan: An Organisation with Difference', *Bangladesh Observer*, 18 February 1988.

It justified this claim asserting that only its members knew the secret s*haria*. The Sangathan likewise expressed optimism that when it would "enter the political arena, its exceptional programmes will evoke widespread enthusiasm among people".[108]

Just after two years of its birth, the Sangathan was transformed into a full-fledged political party – the Zaker Party Bangladesh – with Mustafa Amir Foysal at its helm, though Hashmatullah himself remained the storehouse of all its power. Since detailed discussion of the party's promise and performance is beyond the scope of this article, it is sufficient here to mention that after Hashmatullah's death, the spiritual and political organs of the Atroshi darbar operated well together for about two decades. But by late 2010s there had developed tension between the two brothers with the result that the darbar split: Atroshi remains in the hands of Mahfuz while the younger brother is currently building another darbar in the birthplace of Hashmatullah, that is at Pakuria in Sherpur district.

Comparative Discussion: From the 'non-partisan' to the 'political'

Each of the above-discussed Pir-regimes emerged from distinct backgrounds, had their own journeys, and withstood diverse adversaries and struggles. Their competencies and, of course, limitations also varied. Despite their heterogeneity, however, they share some underlying patterns in terms of their movement towards manifest or visible politicisation. Indeed, four phases can be seen in their evolution: recognition, expansion and stabilisation, discipline through organisation, and, lastly, explicit politicisation.

Expansion and stabilisation

The cases explored in this articledemonstrate that a Pir's sphere of influence expands when he takes personalised care of his murids and followers, and through these satisfied customers they can reach out for new ones. To secure public attention, he also observes routinised collective rituals as spectacularly as possible. During this phase, a Pir remains relatively open, tends to show egalitarian approaches, and maintains non-partisanship as far as possible. Once such a Pir starts to earn a reputation, people visit him not only to become his murids, but also to secure *baraka*that, they believe, can resolve theirspiritual and worldly needs. To be available in times of need, all the founding Pirs discussed above, remained stationed mostly at their residence-cum-darbars in this early phase. While Clifford Geertz and Ernst

---

[108]   Ibid.

Gellner stand face to face as regards the territorial nature of the Sufi sphere of influence, our case studies indicate that during this expansion phase they remain territorial and the followings of popular ones are territorially discontinuous and scattered.[109]

Understandably perhaps, expanding one's sphere of influence takes much effort and time. Some spiritual licenseesdo not start their Pir-career at all. On the other hand, a majority of those who do pursue a Pir-career have a solemn mission to reach as many people as possible. In their determined bid to convey the message of their mission, they also write profusely. Of the four cases here, three of the founding Pirs – except for Ahmad who belonged to the Maizbhandar tradition – authored books. Of them, Nesaruddin and Ishaq were the most prolific. Again, except for Ahmad, all these founding Pirs established madrasas adjacent to their darbars that produced a steady flow of murids from among subsequent generations.

Publicising the cults and miracle-making stories of the founding Pirs by their successive *gadiniśīn*s and descendants can positively contribute to the expansion of such regimes, as the cases of Sarsina, Maizbhandari and Charmonai indicate. These three regimes even published separate books on the miracle-making capability of their predecessors. Pir of Atroshi Hashmatullah, a first-generation Pir who attained huge attention during his lifetime, seemed to offset this limitation by making repeated reference to the feats of his Pir Enayetpuri: when anything extraordinary happened, he used to say, "This happened because of the blessing of your grandpa Pir".[110]

Another important strategy for the expansion of second-generation Pirs was the establishing of madrasas, especially belonging to the qawmi stream. Successive Pirs of Sarsina and Charmonai have so far established several thousand qawmimadrasas. They express little interest in establishing *alia* madrasas possibly because of strict government regulations, while the qawmi stream remains unregulated – anyone can establish anywhere any such institution that offers their own versions of Islam. The advantage of these madrasas is huge. For a start, their graduates are oriented with the *tariqa* and trained as murids. The mathematics is simple. As the number of madrasas increases, so the number of students grows. In turn, large numbers of students mean

---

[109]   Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1971), p.8; Ernst Gellner, *Muslim Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 50.

[110]   Shahjahan, *Moha Mujadded*, p. 145.

many murids. And if any of their graduates do not become murids, they at least turn out to be their sympathisers. In practice, students of their madrasas automatically produce murids over time because they volunteer in almost all collective rituals and celebrations. Besides, most students at these madrasas receive religious education free of cost, and for their scholarships to continue, they are required, among other things, to demonstrate their allegiance to the *tariqa* and perform its rituals. Most importantly, these madrasas invariably recruit pro-*tariqa* teachers. It should also be noted that Atroshi and Maizbhandar Pirs have established only a few madrasas, and their mode of expansion has been different, namely via darbars and different socio-religious organisations, for example Zaker Sangathans and Anjumans.

The Islamic religious space of Bangladesh has been mostly competitive, and rarely monopolistic. This competition is both internal, between Pirs of the same and/or different *tariqa*s, and external, with other Islamic forces that discourage, if not altogether reject, Pir-centred activities. Amid such competition, it has never been an easy task for a Pir to win the hearts of Muslims and be their centre of attention. Once won, managing them has posed the next challenge. Unless the zeal of their murids and admirers has been properly taken care of, the growth of a Pir-regime may suffer. When new recruits mostly come from the existing pool of followers' family ties, a Pir-regime is stabilised. During the expansion and stabilisation stage, the entire establishment of a Pir-regime may even take on a commercial colour.[111] All the Pir-regimes explored here, for instance, have strongly encouraged their murids and followers to read only prescribed books published from their houses. To quote Pir Fazlul,

> Do not read books written by sinners and non-ulema [who do not have formal religious training]. Therefore, it is mandatory to read books of *walis* of Allah. Brethren, Mujahid Prakāśanī has published translated books of other Pirs [as well].[112]

When new books are produced by their designated publishers, such Pirs have insisted that their followers buy and read those books. Besides, Charmonai and Sarsina developed their own networks of madrasas, with distinct syllabi, spread throughout the country, with their publishing houses also supplying the required textbooks for their madrasas as well.

---

[111]   Peter Bertocci, 'Sufi Movement in Modern Bangladesh', *Oakland Journal*, 3 (2001), p. 60.
[112]   *Mawaez-e-Karimiya*, p. 375.
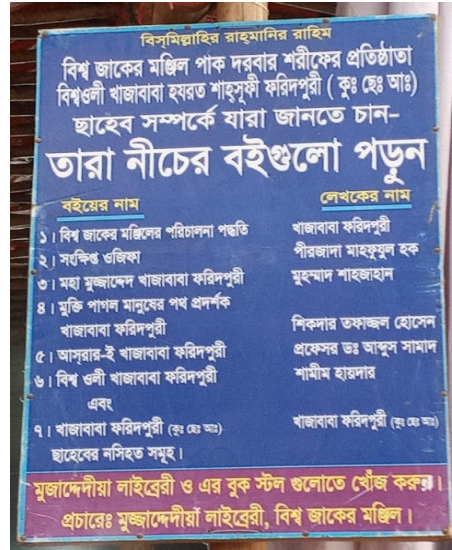
Figure 3: List of prescribed books for the murids
and followers of AtroshiPir.

As we have seen, when Pir-regimes achieve a sizable following they also earn a corresponding level of reputation and influence in their respective localities. In electoral politics, where every vote matters, public-office seekers frequent shrines, dargahs and *majar*s with the hope of gaining implicit or explicit blessing and support. It is not unusual for such office-seekers to try to manipulate Pir-establishments through a range of means. Evidence suggests that in their expansion phases, the Sarsina and Atroshi Pirs maintained connections with local political forces. It is important to note that organising festivals and other ceremonies without much hassle requires cooperation from local political forces and groups, who can disrupt the occasion, or at least break the sanctity of the rituals involved. Again, occasionally, Pirs may bargain with potential political contenders for specific favours. Thus, maintaining political neutrality or disengagement can pose difficulties for a Pir during this stabilisation phase.

Discipline through organisation

As discussed elsewhere, people are usually attracted to Pirs because of their perceived charisma which is, by its nature, unstable and therefore transient.[113] A Pir-

---

[113] Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, eds., Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 246.

regime can be consolidated both for sake of "the ideal" and "strong material interests" of the Pir, his disciples, administrative staff and others if charisma is routinised.[114] When the followers of a Pir grow so numerous that it become difficult for the latter to offer regular personalised care on a one-to-one basis, he puts in place a hierarchical institution for teaching, learning and counselling. As personalised care of individual murids infrequently happens at this stage, Pirs feel the necessity to create organisational structures to manage, discipline and mobilise their murids and followers. Such organisations were founded not only by the four above-discussed Pirs and their *gadiniśīn*s, but also by other noted Bangladeshi Pirs such as Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah and Dewanbagh Pir Mahbub-e-Khuda. Our cases suggest that the consolidated and strengthened Pir-regimes are highly likely to make their political positions known publicly and have the potential to become explicitly political.

Explicit Politicisation

By the time that these Pir-regimes were stabilised and had formed their own organisations, the descendants of founding Pirs had either inherited or were about to inherit the *gadi* along with the goodwill and image of their predecessor(s). In the face appropriate stimuli, they have then joined politics. But whether the Pir in question joins an established party or forms his own political party depends on the overall reputation of existing political parties.

If the mainstream political parties carry with them serious allegations of corruption and nepotism, then by launching new political platforms Pirs, such as those explored here, can claim to stand for some cause. Their party may give the impression to their followers that, at the very least, they are registering their symbolic protest against 'evil' elements in the existing political process. For example, Pir Fazlul used to say that "trying to establish Islamic rule is compulsory, establishing is not".[115] On the other hand, joining an existing party could have meant that they were associated with a corrupt band of politicians. It goes without saying that Pirs' primary support base is motivated by religious rhetoric and symbols. Therefore – as political actors – Pirs themselves are also "constrained by personal histories and cultural forms",[116] and, for the same reason, are less likely to attract the median voters.[117]

---

[114] Ibid.

[115] *Mawaez-e-Karimiya*, p. 503.

[116] Francis Robinson, *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 13.

[117] Randall G Holcombe, *The Economic Foundations of Government* (London: Macmillan, 1994), p. 96.

Wider applicability

It may be helpful to see if the analytical model that has been derived from this selection of nationally prominent Pir-regimes in Bangladesh can explain the stages in the politicisation of other Pir-establishments. Take the following two examples. First, Pir Abdul Latif Chowdhury (1913-2008), popularly known as Fultali Pir, and his descendants have been active both in spiritual and political space for around three decades.[118] Mainly stationed in Zakiganj in Sylhet, Latif spent most of his life in madrasa teaching and *Chishtia tariqa* preaching. In the expansion phase, we find that he established madrasas along with other religious organisations, and authored exegesis of the Quran and other theological books. At an advanced stage of his life, he then set up an organisation – the Anjuman-e-al-Islah and its student front thatAnjuman-e-Talamiz-e-Islamia – that quickly assumed a political character. After Latif's death, his son Imad Uddin Chowdhury took charge of spiritual affairs while another son Husam Uddin Chowdhury oversaw the Anjuman – the political affairs. In the eighth parliamentary elections in 2001, the candidate of this party bagged 12,000 votes in the Zakiganj-Kanaighat constituency.[119] However, in the eleventh parliamentary elections of 2018, Fultali Pir and the Anjuman extended their support to the ruling Awami League; as the Pir himself reportedly said, "For the sake of the country and Islam, we want that grand alliance government [to come] to power again".[120]

Second, our model can similarly explain the politicisation of noted Pakistani political figure Amin ul-Hasanat (1922-60), also known as Pir of Manki Sharif, grandson of Pir Abdul Wahab – a Pir of *Qaderia tariqa*. Amin became *gadiniśīn* at the age of twelve when in 1934 his father Pir Abdul Rauf died.[121] With a view to channelling the combined energy of two million followers, Amin formed the Anjuman-us-Asfia (Association of the Pure-hearted People), and it was this organisation that helped him become a political stalwart in pre- and post-independent Pakistan.[122]

---

[118] Ahmad Hasan Chowdhury, *Hazrat Allama Abdul Latif Chowdhury* (Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 2018); also see Sylhet Office, 'Sylhete fultalir pir saheber āhbāne biśal mahāśamābeśe ghoshaṇā: abilambe ahmad sharif ke fãsi nā dile sarkar badaler andolan śuru habe', *Inqilab*, 29 November 1992.

[119] Milad Joynul, 'Sylhete bhoter māṭhe fultali anusarīder prabhab', *Manobzamin*, 27 December 2018.

[120] Sylhet Bureau, 'Naukar pakshe samarthan dilen fultalir pir', *Jugantor,* 17 December 2018.

[121] 'Paraloke manki sharifer pir saheb', *Ittefaq*, 29 January 1960; 'Pir of Manki Sharif Dead', *Pakistan Observer*, 29 January 1960.

[122] Iftekhar Ahmad Yusufzai and Himayatullah Yaqubi, 'The *Pir* of Manki Sharif: His Role in the Pakistan Freedom Movement', *Pakistan Vision*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 2017, pp. 31-46; also see, Israj
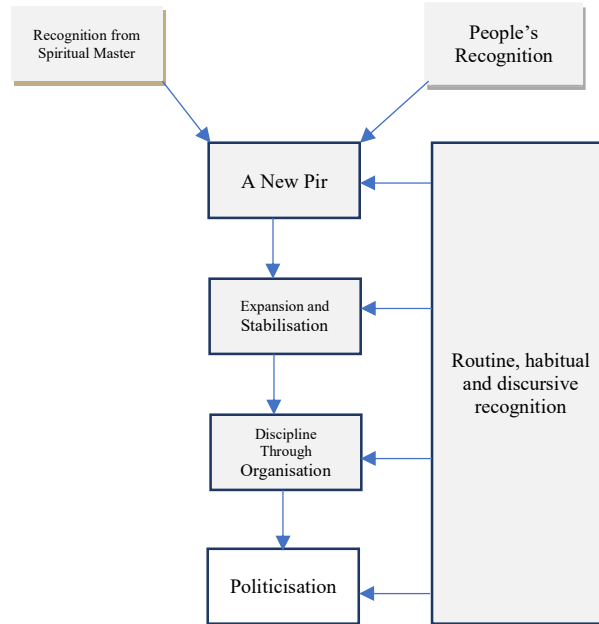
Figure 4: A simplified model of politicisation of Pir-regimes.

As earlier sections have highlighted, nationally renowned, explicitly politicised Pir-regimes all passed through four phases – recognition, expansion, organisation and politicisation. Initial recognition, as shown in Figure 4, is derived both from recognised spiritual masters and from lay Muslims, though it must be noted that in the subsequent stages of this proposed model, recognition can be characterised by spontaneity. Hence, it is both routinised and habitual on the one hand, and discursive on the other. Habitual recognition is manifested through the participation of murids and admirers in various rituals and celebrations, and likewise in the visits of newcomers and curious folks. Photographs, videos and other reports of Pir-centred rituals and celebrations that nowadays appear in print, electronic and social media,and in everyday conversation regarding them collectively offer discursive recognition to already known Pirs and their establishments.

Khan and Toheeda Begum, 'Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and *Pir* Amin-ul-Hasanat of Manki Sharif', *Abasyn Journal of Social Science*, Vol. 4, No. 2, (?), pp. 397-417; Erland Jansson, *India, Pakistan or Pakhtunistan?* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 1981), p. 166, quoted in Ishtiaq Ahmed, 'The Spectre of Islamic Fundamentalism over Pakistan (1947-2007)', in Rajshree Jetly ed., *Pakistan in Regional and Global Politics* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 157.

A cautionary note, however, applies. The model being proposed here may seem to indicate that all Pir-centred establishments follow a linear progression. A spiritual trainer may not feel like starting a Pir-career. For instance, Azhar Ali Anwar Shah, the son of the noted Pir-cum-politician Maulana Athar Ali, was a religious cleric and a non-practicing Pir. Again, any Pir-regime may remain at a certain phase for long or may even stumble. For instance, Ahsanullah's organisation remains non-partisan as of today and Bhashani's Khuda-e-Khedmatgar had become extinct by the end of twentieth century. Such examples refute any suggestion that Pir-regimes necessarily move in a set direction, nor that they remain static. Rather this does indicate the variability of Pir-regimes over time.

Conclusion

Analysing four nationally renowned political Pir-regimes in contemporary Bangladesh, this article has sought to identify the phases through which a typical Pir regime is likely to travel in its journey towards visible or overt politicisation. Hence, this paper suggests that after gaining social recognition a Pir first tries to reach out to the optimal number of people with his mission. When he achieves some success in expanding his murid-base, at a certain stage of its expansion it becomes difficult for the individual Pir to manage his murids and meet their expectations simply by way of personal contacts. Usually at this phase, the Pir forms some kind of hierarchical organisation to train, manage, discipline, and mobilise his followers. And it has been observed that those Pirs who are armed with organisational platforms get visibly political. Notably, none of these politically active Pirs had been visibly political from the beginning of their Pir career. Only after gaining a high degree of popularity, these Pir-regimes made their political faces known to all and formed their own political parties.

One of the implications of this article is that during the period of initial recognition and expansion Pirs remain focused on dealing with existential challenges, and hence are unlikely to engage in visibly political activities. At this stage, however, they may be forced to come to terms with local and even national political conditions. Being explicitly political is a feasible option for the members of those Pir families whose predecessors have earned and stock-piled the necessary religio-social capital that their successors can expend. Indeed, our cases suggest that – for political gain –later members of Pir families usually capitalise upon the hard-earned reputation of the first-generation Pirs involved.

Hence, this paper's four-phased model of the visible politicisation of Pirs offers a reliable, if not infallible, explanation of the stage in their evolution at which Pirs are likely, if not guaranteed, to join politics. This model, however, cannot predict precisely when a politically passive Pir may emerge from his apparent shell of political neutrality and become overtly partisan.

Multi-dimensional Feasibility of Bangladesh's Solar Power Target

Moshahida Sultana[*]

Abstract

The declining cost of solar technology and declaration of Japan, China, and Korea to not invest in new coal power plants has opened up new possibilities for the expansion of solar deployment worldwide. Bangladesh has also scrapped the plan to build new coal power plant like many other lower middle-income countries in Asia. However, the lower middle-income countries were not able to take the opportunity of the declining solar cost in last one decade and the growth of solar remained in the formative phase for most of the developing countries. Bangladesh has already missed the target to generate 10% from renewable by the year 2020. The increasing emphasis on solar globally and locally has pushed the government to set ambitious targets without considering the techno-economic, socio-technical, and political feasibility of solar. This research has used process tracing based on policy documents and interviews to explore the mechanisms through which solar deployment grew slowly in Bangladesh. Then, this paper found out the feasible, moderately feasible, ambitious, and highly ambitious solar targets of Bangladesh and identified the factors that can increase the multi-dimensional feasibility of solar targets. It shows that market mechanism alone cannot increase feasibility of the target and argues that socio-technical and political feasibility must also be considered in setting realistic target.

Key words: Solar growth, Solar in Bangladesh, Multidimensional feasibility of solar, Solar electricity Market, Technology diffusion

1. Introduction

Initially, the renewable energy policy 2008 had a target to produce 5% of the total electricity by 2015 and 10% by 2020 from renewable. Bangladesh missed the first target. Although the costs of different types of solar technology were higher than the current level at the time of setting those targets, later the cost came down gradually. Later, in 2016, the Power System Master Plan of Bangladesh[1] set a target to produce 10% of Bangladesh's electricity from renewable sources by 2041. To achieve this target, the renewable electricity needs to expand more than 10 times, from 648.7 MW

---

[*] Associate Professor, Department of Accounting and Information Systems, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

[1] GoB, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2018. *Revisiting Power System Masterplan-2016,* Power Division, Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources, Government of Bangladesh.

in 2020 to 7900 MW in low case scenario and 9,400 MW in high case scenario. None of these plans had explicitly set separate targets for expansion of solar, wind, hydro, biogas.

In 2020, Sustainable Renewable Energy Development Authority (SREDA), a coordination body for the development of the renewable energy in the country, working under Power Division of the Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources (MPEMR), prepared a draft National Solar Energy Roadmap, 2021–2041. This draft has proposed 6,000 MW solar PV capacity by 2041 under business as usual scenario. It is approximately 10% of the total generation capacity. Under medium case scenario, the roadmap proposed 20,000 MW by 2041, approximately 33% of total power capacity from solar energy. In high case scenario, the Roadmap[2] proposed 50% of total power capacity from solar energy, approximately 30,000 MW by 2041. However, this draft roadmap has not been officially declared as the national target yet.

In the meantime, in June 2021 the State Minister for Power, Energy and Mineral Resources informed that the government has decided to produce 40%[3] of the electricity from renewable energy by 2041. Besides, although the Minister mentioned solar as the most important potential energy resources, the declared target did not clarify the share of solar by 2041. Recently, in 2021 JICA has been assigned to make an Integrated Energy and Power Master Plan, which is targeted to be finished by the end of 2023. According to the project description, "The project aims to promote a low or zero carbon transformation of the total energy supply and demand system, by formulating a masterplan."[4]

The various existing and future renewable and solar targets in plans and oral declarations create an ambiguity in common understanding of the knowledge of actual solar target of Bangladesh. Therefore, in the absence of a clear and consistent national solar target, this research takes the base case, medium case, and high case scenario target of National Solar Energy Roadmap, 2021–2041, as the intended target

[2]   SREDA, 2020. Draft National Solar Energy Roadmap, Sustainable Renewable Energy Development Authority.

[3]   Tribune Report, 2023. Nasrul: Bangladesh targeting 40% of power generation from clean energy by 2041, Dhaka Tribune, February 23, 2023.

[4]   JICA, 2021. Signing of Record of Discussions on Technical Cooperation for Development Planning with Bangladesh: Contributing to a transformation to low or zero carbon energy system through formulating a comprehensive, long-term energy plan. *Japan International Cooperation Agency Website*, Available at https://www.jica.go.jp/english/news/press/2020/20210315_30.html [accessed on November 20, 2021]

up to 2041.The research will explore the multidimensional feasibility of base case scenario (10%) target, medium case scenario (33%) target, and high case scenario (50%) target by 2041 mentioned in the draft solar road map to identify the factors that can increase the feasibility of solar target of Bangladesh.

This research aims to analyze whether the base, medium, and high case scenario solar targets in Bangladesh are feasible in light of the worldwide experience of expanding solar electricity and detailed understanding of economic, technological and socio-political context of the country.

The specific objectives are:

(i)   To identify the economic, socio-technical and political mechanisms that shape the growth rate of solar power in Bangladesh;

(ii) Based on the factors and experience of other countries, to identify the factors that can increase the feasibility of solar power in Bangladesh;

(iii) Using the knowledge from (i) and (ii), examine whether the current solar targets are sufficiently ambitious and feasible under realistic assumptions about policies, economic conditions, and technology development.

Bangladesh is currently a lower middle-income country aspiring to become an upper middle-income country by 2030 and high-income country by 2041. According to the master plan[5] Bangladesh needs to generate 70,500 MW of electricity by 2041. Installed capacity in 2022 was 22,482 MW.[6] To keep pace with the growth the estimated required electricity growth is approximately 10%. To meet the growing demand Bangladesh has a plan to increase its dependency on imported LNG, coal, and nuclear. However, because of increasing difficulty in getting new investment in coal, Bangladesh has very recently scrapped the plan to build ten coal power plants. The techno-economic advantages of solar is growing with the world wide falling cost of solar equipment and local cost of deployment. However, the feasibility depends not only on the techno-economic feasibility but also on the institutional capacities of the country. Bangladesh has long history of adopting solar home system but its growth has been comparatively slow compared to other countries where solar technology was relatively new. Therefore, it is important to look at whether the

---

[5]   GoB, Power Systems Master Plan-2016, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Power Division, Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources, Government of of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

[6]   BPDB, 2022. Bangladesh Power Development Board Website, Available at https://www. bpdb.gov.bd/_ [Accessed on October 10, 2022]

experience of building solar home system has substantially contributed to developing institutional capacity of the country and whether there is a contribution of learning by doing. Lastly, there are other policies that facilitate cost reduction, profitability, and incentives to invest. And these policies are not market driven, but state has a role to decide what interest groups it wants to serve through what policies. Thus, it is important to also look at the political feasibility of achieving the target.

2. Literature Review

Feasibility of energy transitions

Assessing the feasibility of energy transitions requires analysis from different angles. For example, in climate change mitigation scenarios feasibility of energy transition is assessed with respect to the availability of low carbon technologies and the historically observed rates of their growth[7] But this does not ensure economic feasibility without answering the question about profitability, affordability, and availability of finance. Similarly, what may seem technically and economically feasible does not ensure that the solution is politically feasible if there is no supporting policies, regulations, and institutions. Therefore, to understand feasibility of energy transition there is a need for a multidisciplinary approach.

The cutting-edge framework for assessing feasibility of energy transitions[8]   is structured along three questions (i) feasibility of what, (ii) feasibility for whom? and (iii) feasibility of when and where?,[9] This framework considers an energy transition as feasible if there is an agent or a group of agents who are capable of pursuing a given set of actions in a given context. Jewell and Cherp (2020) mention:

> "[…] feasibility is not a question of the political will to undertake a single action but rather a matter of our ability to intervene in the economy in a myriad of interdependent ways. Some of these interventions and their combinations are more politically feasible than others."[10]

---

[7]   N. Bento and C. Wilson, Measuring the duration of formative phases for energy technologies. Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions, 21, 2016. pp. 95-112; *M. Sluisveld et al.,* Comparing future patterns of energy system change in 2°C scenarios with historically observed rates of change Global Environmental Change, 35 (Energy Econ. 31, 2009), 2015, pp. 436-449. https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2015.09.019

[8]   V. Vinichenko *et al.,* Delayed introduction of wind and solar power on technology periphery is not compensated by faster growth. Presented at *International Sustainability Transitions Conference-2020*, August 2020.

[9]   P. Gilabert and H. Lawford-Smith, Political feasibility: A conceptual exploration. *Political Studies*, Vol. 60(4), 2012. pp. 809– 825. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2011.00936.x

[10]   V. Vinichenko *et al*., Delayed introduction of wind and solar power on technology periphery is not compensated by faster growth. Presented at *International Sustainability Transitions Conference 2020*, August 2020.

In order to operationalize this definition, scholars use a metatheoretical framework which brings together economic, technological and political insights as well as a '*feasibility space*' tool to bring these insights together for assessing multi-dimensional feasibility.

"The three-perspective framework"

Energy transitions, such as expansion of renewable electricity, are co-evolution of techno-economic, socio-technical and political action systems,[11] which each encompass causal mechanisms that constrain or enable rapid deployment of renewable power. In the *three-perspective framework* proposed by Cherp *et al.* (2018), renewable electricity expansion will depend upon:

- Profitability as well as availability of capital and finance (techno-economic feasibility)

- Presence and interaction of relevant actors e.g. project developers, investors, suppliers, land-owners etc. (socio-technical feasibility)

- Presence of adequate policy support which in turn depends on supporting political forces such as state goals, relevant lobbies etc. (political feasibility)

The techno-economic perspective is associated with the market (cost, price, demand, supply, investment). In the formative stage a more expensive new energy technology should be subsidized by the government in order not to put upward pressure on energy prices that may provoke strong opposition.[12] On the other hand, the scope and intensity of government intervention in setting the price is influenced by economic capacities of the government. Bashmakov (2007) explains how the market mechanism keep the energy cost stable over time and introduced the first law of energy transition, according to which "stability of energy costs to income ratio results from the existence of energy affordability thresholds and behavioral constants".[13] If energy cost to income ratio exceeds the threshold, economic activities slow down. On the other hand, if price is low, suppliers are demotivated to invest. If government provide subsidies to keep the price affordable to consumers this may not be sustainable either because government cannot indefinitely fund the difference between the price and cost. When share of new energy (i.e. renewables) will

---

[11] A. Cherp *et al.,* Integrating Techno-Economic, Socio-Technical and Political Perspectives on National Energy Transitions: A Meta-Theoretical Framework. *Energy Research & Social Science,* Vol. 37, 2018, pp. 175–90. doi: 10.1016/j.erss.2017.09.015.

[12] Hourcade Grubb and Neuhoff. *Planetary Economics*: Energy, climate change and the three domains of sustainable development. Routledge, 2014.

[13] I. Bashmakov, Three Laws of Energy Transitions. *Energy Policy,* Vol. 35(7), 2007, pp. 3583–94. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2006.12.023

increases overtime in developing countries, it might be costly for the government to keep the price affordable for indefinite period of time. In this situation, the states often intervene in the market by increasing or decreasing subsidies or reforming power or energy sector to rearrange distributive efficiency according to its political need.

From the socio-technical perspective, technology diffusion occurs as a new technology is innovated and adopted in a place. It may depend on the technology receiving countries' institutional, economic, and other socio-technical capacity to learn a new technology. As a result of enhanced performance costs may also decline. Gradual cost decline explains adoption is not instantaneous. There are reasons why it takes longer time in one country and shorter in other countries. For, example renewable energy cost declined faster in India than in Bangladesh. Mechanisms of learning, as explained by Grubler *et al.* (1999)[14] through learning by doing, organizational improvements, or economies of scale may explain the pace of cost decline. Technological expertise in renewable electricity is diffused through specific actors such as project developers and equipment suppliers. Steffen *et al.* (2018) argued "international private developers are a key first mover in many developing countries"[15] and explored that home country policies of international developers and transfer of tacit knowledge from home country for market opening abroad is one of the key drivers for internationalization trend of RE technology.

"Feasibility Space" – The Space that Maps Feasibility

Feasibility space is a methodological tool first proposed by Cherp and Jewell (2020) in their article "On the political feasibility of climate change mitigation pathways: Is it too late to keep warming below 1.5C?" The political feasibility space illustrates how costs of decarbonization actions and capacity of actors involved in these actions can be used to map a feasibility frontier based on empirically observed phenomena. The feasibility frontier is dynamic because it evolves over time with the change in technologies, infrastructures and institutions.

This framework helps to integrate various components of feasibility into a dynamic multi-dimensional 'feasibility space' which helps to determine whether the proposed plans and targets are within reach. For example, feasibility space was created for coal phase-out in Jewell et al. 2019 and for the global expansion of renewables in Vinichenko *et al.* (2020).

---

[14]   A. Grubler *et al.*, Dynamics of energy technologies and global change. Energy Policy, Vol. 27, 1999, pp. 247-280.
[15]   B. Steffen *et al.,* Opening new markets for clean energy: The role of project developers in the global diffusion of renewable energy technologies. *Bus Politics,* Vol. 20, 2018, pp. 553–587.

Vinichenko *et al.* (2020) argued that the feasibility of rapid global expansion of a new low-carbon technology implies its timely introduction at the rim and periphery, subsequent fast growth, and high level of final market penetration.[16] They also developed a Feasibility Space for take-off of renewable electricity (i.e. the time when it reaches 1% of national electricity supply) based on national characteristics (such as GDP per capita and the size of economy) and the proximity of countries to the core region (such as membership in OECD or the EU). They emphasized that the scientific understanding of these challenges should be further developed based on the recognition of different causal mechanisms behind different phases of renewables deployment. Empirically, this understanding can be advanced through comparative studies of national conditions in the core, rim and periphery.

Technology Lifecycle: Formative and Growth Stage

Technology lifecycle is described as a sequence of different set of mechanism driven stages.[17] According to Grübler (1991), in case of energy infrastructures and other pervasive systems a regular S-shaped pattern does not have a single underlying mechanism, but is an aggregate of a variety of adoption processes. Therefore, diffusion of such systems is best described as a sequence of stages in a *technology lifecycle*, with each stage driven by a different set of mechanisms. Technology adoption processes go through different stages: formative stage and growth stage.[18]

In the **formative phase**, diffusion is slow and level of uncertainty and volatility is high. This stage usually ends with the formation of a technological style evolving from best technological practices, and emergence of a social and institutional framework suitable for expansion. Formative phase is driven by learning, innovation, experimentation and technology diffusion. Formative phase ends with the formation of a viable regime that starts self-sustaining growth.[19]

The **growth phase** begins with accelerated expansion of the technology which results in cost reduction from economies of scale.[20] Growth rates depend on economic

---

[16] V. Vinichenko *et al.,* Delayed introduction of wind and solar power on technology periphery is not compensated by faster growth. Presented at *International Sustainability Transitions Conference-2020*, August 2020.

[17] A. Grubler *et al.,* Dynamics of energy technologies and global change. *Energy Policy,* Vol. 27, 199, pp.247–280.

[18] J. Markard, The next phase of the energy transition and its implications for research and policy, *Nature Energy,* Vol. 3(8), 2018. pp. 628-633. https://dx.doi.org/10.1038/s41560-018-0171-7

[19] J. Markard, The next phase of the energy transition and its implications for research and policy, *Nature Energy,* 3(8), 2018, 628-633. https://dx.doi.org/10.1038/s41560-018-0171-7

[20] V. Vinichenko, *Mechanisms of energy transitions: National cases and the worldwide uptake of wind and solar power*. Budapest, Hungary: Central European University, 2018; A. Grubler,

characteristics of the projects, namely their profitability.[21] Schmidt *et al.* (2014) found quantitative evidence that the largest potential for cost reduction lies in local learning. The conditions that enable local learning, include skilled workforce, sustainable business models, a stable regulatory framework. The impact of local learning is more significant than the global technology learning on the cost of renewable energy in developing. Other scholars,[22] showed that the probability of a country introducing renewables increases over time.

3. Method

This research used quantitative data and interview for quantitative and qualitative analysis. In order to identify which economic, socio-technical and political factors have previously slowed down or accelerated the growth rate of solar power in Bangladesh, this paper used *process tracing* to explain the causal mechanisms of solar power uptake by reviewing the policy documents, planning documents, news reports, brochures, and interviews. The initial review of the documents helped to identify the main technological, economic and socio-political actors involved in solar power development. The review of secondary literature also identified the gaps in information, insights, codified knowledge, and developments required to explain the recent developments. Then I identified the relevant actors who could potentially fill the gapin information and codified knowledge that can help explain the mechanisms. The objectives of doing the interview was to find the causal mechanisms of slow growth of solar electricity in Bangladesh. The interviews particularly focused on exploring the techno-economic, socio-technical, and political factors shaping the solar electricity outcome so far.

I conducted 14 open-ended interviews. Although there were some common questions for all, I had to ask different questions to different interviewees because of their diverse backgrounds and professional engagements. Not all interviewees had similar access to information required and the ones who had greater understanding of rooftop

---

Diffusion: Long-term patterns and discontinuities. In: N. Nakicenovic and A. Grubler (eds.), "Diffusion of technologies and social behavior", Berlin Heidelberg: Springer, 1991. pp. 451-482.

[21] P. Lund, Energy policy planning near grid parity using a price-driven technology penetration model Technological Forecasting and Social Change, Vol. 90, 2015, pp. 389-399. https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2014.05.004

[22] T. S. Schmidt, Low-carbon investment risks and de-risking. *Nature Climate Change*, Vol. 4(4), 2014, pp. 237- 239. https://doi.org/10.1038/nclimate2112; C. Binz and B. Truffer, Global Innovation Systems- A conceptual framework for innovation dynamics in transnational contexts, *Research Policy,* Vol. 46, 2017, pp. 1284-1298

technology did not have similar expertise or understanding of utility scale solar projects. Besides, the actors also work at different capacities at different types of organizations. The interviewees include representatives from SREDA, BPDB, IDCOL, The World Bank, energy specialist in UNHCR and UNDP, an academician from the Energy Institute based in University of Dhaka, a solar power consultant, three project developers and supplier, engineers and project managers of solar power plants, and a young renewable energy entrepreneur to fill the existing gap in explaining the causal mechanisms. Since this research heavily relies on the evolving information and events, it is important to have access to the latest information and knowledge that are yet to be published. For example, there is no single number available for profitability and levelized cost of electricity for solar projects. These are project specific and needed to be collected after interviews and having access to unpublished codified knowledge.

To establish whether the solar power targets in Bangladesh are sufficiently ambitious and feasible this research has compared the historical growth scenario of early deployer with future target of late deployer. I have located the growth rates implied in Bangladesh's solar power targets to see whether they are beyond or within the two historical targets of a developed and a developing country having similar characteristics. The targets within the feasibility frontier can be thought of as feasible, the targets beyond the feasibility frontier – as ambitious and highly ambitious.

4. Mechanisms of Transition to Solar

There are multiple mechanisms through which an energy outcome is realized. To explain the mechanisms of transition to solar I try to find the causal relationship between techno-economic, socio-technical, and political factors and the low growth of solar. Identifying the mechanisms will reveal why solar did not grow in Bangladesh at high rate and why it is not growing fast even after some of the previous conditions have changed in recent past. To explain the mechanisms, I used interviews of 14 respondents to define the mechanisms and then compare some of the mechanisms with other countries where similar mechanisms worked differently or similarly and generated similar or deviating outcome.

4.1 Techno-economic Mechanisms

Global Declining Cost of Solar and Local Risk

The cost of solar decreased in last ten years predominantly due to decrease in the price of PV modules, PV panels, and PV inverters. According to the latest IRENA report *Renewable Power Generation Costs in 2020,* at a global level, cost reductions for modules and inverters accounted for 61% of the global weighted-average total installed cost decline between 2010 and 2020. This means that BoS costs are also an important contributor to declining global weighted-average total installed costs. Between 2010 and 2020, 13% of the global reduction came from lower installation costs, 7% from racking, 3% from other BoS hardware (*e.g.,* cables, junction boxes, etc.) and 16% from a range of smaller categories. The reasons for BoS cost reductions relate to competitive pressures and increased installer experience, which has led to improved installation processes and soft development costs. BoS costs that decline proportionally with the area of the plant have also declined as module efficiencies have increased.[23]

According to the latest IRENA report *Renewable Power Generation Costs in 2020, globally the* costs for electricity from utility-scale solar photovoltaics (PV) fell 85% between 2010 and 2020., this reduction has been primarily driven by declines in module prices – which have fallen by 93% since 2010, as module efficiency has improved and manufacturing has increasingly scaled-up and been optimised – and reductions in balance of system costs. In case of Bangladesh the available data shows that although the recent LOIs offered progressively lower tariffs, the price of utility scale solar PV fell by 58% in last five years. The lowest price offered is $0.0749 per unit (Taka 6.3). This is just half of $ 0.18 (Taka 15) offered in 2015. Until June, 2020, the Government of Bangladesh issued an LOI for a total of 27 large-scale solar IPP projects with total capacity of 1695.77 MW. PPA has been signed for 9 projects while 8 projects are at different stages of scrutiny by the proposal processing committee.[24]

Net Metering Pricing Policy

Recently, Bangladesh introduced a net metering guideline, according to which the rooftop solar producers can produce electricity at low cost and sell their excess

---

[23] IRENA, Renewable Power Generation Costs in 2020, Available at https://www.irena.org/-/media/Files/IRENA/Agency/Publication/2021/Jun/IRENA_Power_Generation_Costs_2020.pdf [Accessed on August 20, 2020]

[24] SREDA, Draft National Solar Energy Roadmap, Sustainable Renewable Energy Development Authority, 2020.

electricity at market price which is higher than the LCOE of rooftop solar. Despite seemingly lucrative, solar rooftop with net metering system did not receive significant response from producers in Bangladesh, whereas feed-in-tariff in Vietnam got significant response from the producers. Vietnam developed nearly 10 GW new solar rooftops in just two years since the feed in tariff was offered. In 2019 when feed in tariff was offered, the average LCOE was around 8 cent/kwh and the feed-in-tariff was 9.35 cents/kwh. Total installed rooftop solar panel capacity increased to 925.8 megawatts (MW) from 377.9 MW by the end of 2019. In 2020, when the cost decreased further and the feed in tariff was 8.38 cents, in just one year the total capacity addition was nearly 10 GW. The response in Vietnam was huge. On the other hand, Bangladesh started net metering in 2018 but the response was not significant. According to the SREDA national database, up to October 6, 2021 total 1452 net metering systems were developed with a capacity of 33.963 MW. According to the government published brochure the LCOE for the rooftop is Taka 3.10 (3.6 cents) whereas the retail tariff for commercial on-grid is Taka 10.82 (12 cents), for industrial on-grid it is Taka 8.98 (10.5 cents). When asked about the difference in response despite having higher incentive in net metering, the interviewees shared some insights.

First, the net metering policy shifts the risks to producers in case the actual LCOE realized after installation is higher than the standard level due to weather condition, higher maintenance cost, expenditure on replacing older technology for more efficient ones, and the quality of PV equipment. The interviews revealed that SREDA authority published an LCOE value of Taka 3.10 for a 60-kw rooftop project with 20-year lifetime. However, there is a debate about the way the LCOE has been calculated. The interviewees from IDCOL, BPDB, and the solar equipment suppliers, solar developers pointed out that the standard LCOE value published by SREDA is low because it has not used standard procedure of LCOE calculation and did not take into account some variable costs in electricity procurement and construction and various risk associated with it. Some of the interviewees pointed out that the cost differs depending on the LCOE calculation procedure followed, the lifetime assumed, necessity to replace inefficient technologies, and other variable costs arising from difficulties in installing solar in certain buildings, and unplanned developments in the neighborhood. If all these costs were taken into account the LCOE would have been at least Taka 6 (7 cents). So, there is a difference between the published LCOE (3.6 cents) and the actual LCOE (7 cents).

Even if the LCOE is 7 cents, it is still lower compared to the market price. First, the potential deployer often cannot visibly identify the benefits of installing solar rooftop as the producers mostly consume and pay less for lesser consumption of grid electricity, but do not receive any credit in the form of cash from the power development board. This is an ongoing process and the impact of introducing net metering has not been realized yet. Net metering system is not an economic incentive and it does not require any subsidy from the government. Besides, the cost of production fluctuates with the price of PV modules, panels, and inverters, and the associated cost of importing.

Second, a supplier pointed out that the opportunity cost of investing in solar is high because the payback period is longer (6-7 years) than other alternative investments. If the lifetime of the installed rooftop solar is 20 years, the investor starts to get the benefit after cost recovers in 6-7 years. When an investor compares the other investments on variable inputs in production with the investment on rooftop solar, the immediate benefits from investing in other inputs are more attractive to the investors. For example, a garment owner can quickly recover cost from his investment in fabric and employed labour than from his investment in solar. Although the IRR can be high in case of solar rooftop project, the benefit takes longer time to be realized. Therefore, investors are not very enthusiastic to invest in solar.

Third, a solar irrigation pump developer commented that the risk of solar deployment is higher in Bangladesh compared to other regions because of frequent disaster like cyclone in the South and seasonal floods in all over the country. This requires special features in the designs and construction. This increases the cost. Besides, there always remains possibility of damages in times of flooding, especially for some technologies like solar pump. Solar irrigation pumps are used three to four months in a year and the pump remains idle throughout the rest of the seasons making it more costly. In the absence of transmission and distribution facilities, in most of the cases the irrigation pumps are not often connected to the grid. If the developer needs to connect to the grid, the developer needs to invest on the transmission line as the government does not provide the infrastructural support. These are some of the reasons why cost increases in case of solar irrigation.

4.2 Socio-technical Mechanisms

Learning by Doing

History of solar power in Bangladesh dates back to the early 1990s with the beginning of installation of off-grid solar home systems (SHSs) mostly in rural areas.

By 2023, Bangladesh has one of the highest numbers of off-grid SHSs in the world: 6,038 million with the total capacity of 263 MW located predominantly in areas outside grid coverage. Currently the total installed capacity of solar is 966 MW, and total installed capacity including captive and renewable sources is 26,700 MW[25]. The current contribution of solar is 3.6% of total capacity. In total installed capacity, off-grid solar electricity generation capacity (365 MW) is 1.36% and on-grid capacity is 2.24% of the nationwide electricity generation capacity. [26]Although slow in development, in 32 years (1990–2022) the off-grid solar technology has been able to reach remote off-grid areas, now there is a challenge to incorporate electricity into the grid.

Figure 4.1: Share of Solar in Electricity Supply (2000-2022)
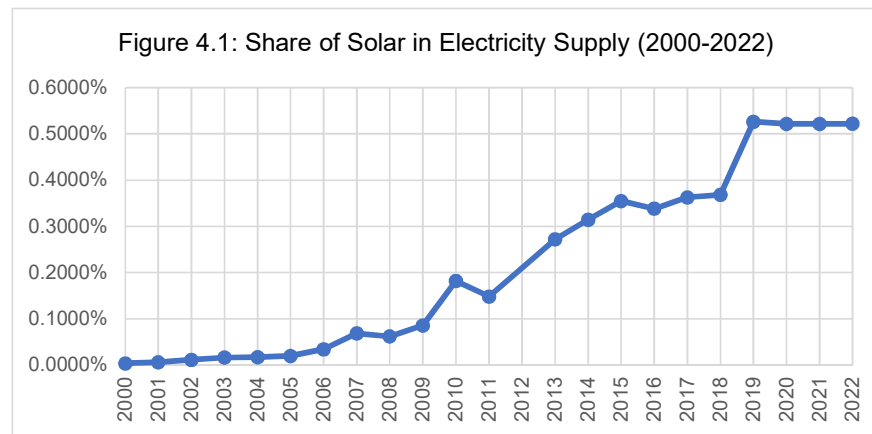
Source: EMBER Electricity Data (2023)[27]

Although Bangladesh has been developing solar home system from 1990, the contribution of SHS in first ten years was negligible. After 2000 the share of solar has started to gradually increase but the share was less than 0.10% till 2010. After 2010, there has been a rise in electricity supply from solar and it continued throughout the decade till 2020. Figure 4.1 shows the actual share of solar in total

[25]   Power Division, Power Division Website, Government of Bangladesh, 2023. Available at http://powerdivision.gov.bd [Accessed on April 10, 2023]

[26]   SREDA, National database of Renewable Energy, Sustainable Renewable Energy Development Authority, 2023. Available at https://ndre.sreda.gov.bd/ [Accessed on April 9, 2023]

[27]   EMBER, Yearly Electricity Data, 2023. Available at, https://ember-climate.org/data-catalogue/yearly-electricity-data/ [Accessed on April 9, 2023]

electricity supply. The figure shows that since the introduction of on-grid solar the solar share started to increase rapidly.

Figure 4.2: Solar Capacity Addition MWp (2011-2022)

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Large projects	40.03	107.1	85.14	1.64	18.41	19.36	18.79	39.99	49.87	64.77	170	57.52
Small projects	49	26.88	34	33.31	25.56	10.03	50	16.51	22.07	21.48	0	0.71
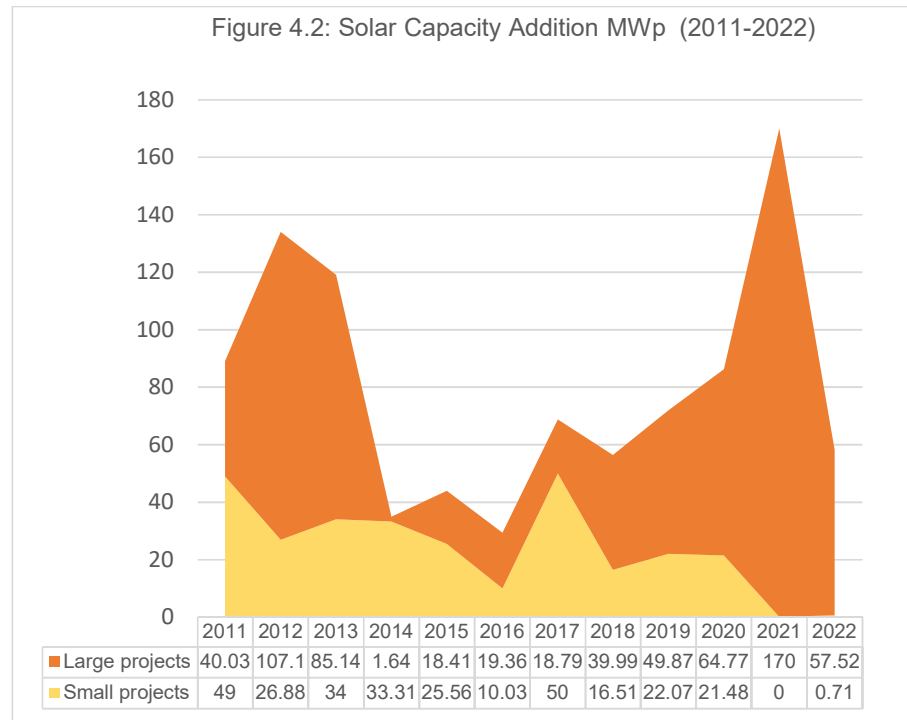
Source: SREDA, (2023)[28]

By the time solar home system reached 5.5 million, grid connected supply from conventional sources became cheaper and more accessible to the consumers than solar home system. This has made investment in solar home system less attractive. The same happened to mini-grid where large storage requirement made the mini-grid electricity more expensive than grid electricity. Recently, rooftop solar in commercial and industrial buildings and utility projects are more attractive investments than off grid mini-grid and SHS. The interviewees pointed out that rapid change in technology, falling prices, rising efficiency, and rapidly changing transmission and

---

[28]   SREDA, National database of Renewable Energy, Sustainable Renewable Energy Development Authority, 2023. Available at https://ndre.sreda.gov.bd/ [Accessed on April 10, 2023]

distribution system are makingsome technologies more profitable and attractive than the others. Therefore, learning from experience has little impact on the two decades of total growth of solar. As solar home system started to grow in 2000, solar rooftop and irrigation pump started to grow in 2012, and solar park from 2015, there is no linear learning process based on which learning and capacity building could be assessed for all types of solar technologies.

Research and Human Capacity Development

Since the first renewable energy policy was developed in 2008 there has been a number of institutional changes observed in the government and Universities to promote research, human resource development, and capacity building to facilitate development of renewable energy. In 1981, first renewable energy research center was established in University of Dhaka. However, it worked with a limited capacity till 2010. In 2011, Renewable Energy Institute was established to train human resources required for development of renewable. However, in 2013, the institute was renamed to Institute of Energy to increase its scope of work on other energy as well. This change of name indicates the lack of potential of an institute to sustain only with renewable focus. Later, other private universities including United International University, BRAC University, MIST started to offer courses specifically designed to develop human resources in renewable energy. Among these Center for Energy Research based in United International University, established in 2010, made a significant contribution to human resource development. When interviewees were asked about the percentage of graduates working with renewable focus in both University of Dhaka (public) and United International University (private), the responses revealed that when a private university has a record of 80% of their graduates working in the field of renewable energy, only 5% of the graduates from public University has a record of working in the renewable field. This shows that there is an uneven development of capacity across educational institutions and private sector has been playing greater role in the human capacity development in Bangladesh.

4.3 Political Mechanisms

Policies represent the indicators of contested political interests of various interest groups. Although the State Minister of Power and Energy expressed the government's intention to increase the share of solar to 40%, in reality the policies in places do not demonstrate either the desirability or the feasibility of achieving growth of solar in the near future. Rather, in some situations the policies appear to be

conflicting to each other and in some situations, they explain the existing dilemma between national capacity development objective and free market objective. The following policies are analyzed by identifying the actors and their contested interests and benefits from the policies in place.

4.3.1 Import Duty

All IPPs (Independent Power Producers), including solar and conventional fuel-based ones, receive import tax or duty waiver on the import of power plant equipment and the spare parts. Thus, solar IPPs enjoy the same benefits as the other IPPs. However, engineering, procurement, construction (EPC) contractors and net metering solar rooftop OPEX operators do not get the same import duty exemption. The interviewees expressed discontent about the discriminatory incentives prevailing over different technologies of solar. While the larger projects get more indirect subsidies, the smaller projects having larger potential to grow do not get similar benefits.

The policy of import duty raises question about the effectiveness of import duty waiver in promoting solar. So far, from 2015 to 2021, 130 MW capacity utility scale solar projects have been deployed in Bangladesh and more are in the pipeline. If this duty waiver were sufficient incentive, we could have observed higher growth of IPPs. The bottleneck does not exist in trade barriers, rather there are other policy choices for which solar did not grow to meet the target in the past. Investors do not clearly make choices based on the import duty waiver alone, there has to be other implementable policies that facilitate growth of solar.

Recently in July 2021, the re-imposition of higher import duty and taxes on inverters has appeared as a burden to Bangladesh's slowly expanding solar sector. Before 2021-22 a special regulatory order had applied a reduced, 11% import duty and tax cost on inverters. The 2021-22 budget which took effect in July, revoked the order and restored the combined levy on the 'important capital machinery' items to 37%. Contrary to Bangladesh's ambitious solar target declared by the State Minister of Power and Energy, the imposition of the duty will likely to increase the cost of solar. In India, on the other hand, there is reduced or no import duties on imported plant equipment, tax holidays and other similar favorable policy incentives and regulation have a positive influence on reducing the LCOE.

4.3.2 Income Tax Waiver

The IPPs (Independent Power Producers) selling electricity to the national grid gets tax waiver on their earnings from selling power for the first 15 years of the date of

commercial operation. This is an indirect form of subsidy which is equally effective for all kinds of private power generation companies, and not only the solar IPPs[29]. Therefore, this incentive cannot be seen as a preferential treatment to the solar developer. When fossil fuel-based power generation companies get other additional benefits like capacity charge, higher tariff in purchasing power agreement, energy at low price, and infrastructural support like roads, transmission, and distribution facilities, the solar based power generation does not get that benefit. Therefore, the income tax waiver is not a lucrative benefit to the solar IPP developers.

4.3.3 Infrastructural support

"In Bangladesh, the IPPs are burdened with the cost of grid impact study, line root survey, construction of transmission line and evacuation sub-station, and the cost of acquiring right of way for transmission network. These costs are eventually reflected in the higher cost of electricity production."[30]There is a very sharp difference between India and Bangladesh in the government support. While in India the government construct not only the required roads and transportation systems, but also the transmission line and substation for solar projects, in Bangladesh the developer needs to build certain infrastructure on its own expense. These are obviously significant cost components for a large-scale solar plant. In Bangladesh, when the project developers have to build such infrastructure and needs to get the necessary approval from different quarters for building such infrastructure the cost goes up. If we compare other technologies like nuclear, LNG, gas, and oil-based power plants with solar power plants, the absence of this kind of infrastructural support is a clear indicator of government support biased towards the fossil fuel-based electricity generation.

4.3.4 Introduction of net metering system

Net metering system is not an economic incentive for producers. It is rather a risk shifting process from the government to the prosumers who produce for their own consumption. If we compare the current level of officially offered net metering benefit in Bangladesh with that of the feed in tariff benefit offered in Vietnam in 2019 and 2020, the actual economic benefit is actually higher for producers in Bangladesh than for producers in Vietnam.It can be expected that Bangladesh's

---

[29] Bangladesh Bank, Investment Facilities, *Bangladesh Bank Website*, 2021, Available at https://www.bb.org.bd/investfacility/invesfac.php [Accessed on September 5, 2021]

[30] S. A. Chowdhury, Indicative Tariff for Utility-Scale Solar IPP in Bangladesh, *United Nations Development Programme (UNDP),* 2018.

response to the economic benefit of net metering could at least reach closer to Vietnam. However, so far, we have not seen any such growth that could prove that response to net metering is coming along as a positive outcome.

If we compare the feed-in-tariff policy with net-metering system the gap in outcome of these two systems in two countries can be explained by the responses of the interviewees. In techno-economic mechanisms I explained why despite having high potential benefit from net metering system, the responses of investors have not been significant. Here, another factor pointed out by an interviewee has provided another equally important explanation. In the context of rapidly changing technological globalization every year, new innovations in technologies are making older technologies less competitive either by introducing more efficient technologies, or by marketing cheaper technology, or by both. The rapid change in technology over the last one decade has created new expectations among the investors about using more efficient technologies. This has created a ground for speculation. The need for upgrading older projects to improve efficiency has in some circumstances made the older projects less competitive and costly. In this competition for using upgraded technology at lower cost, some investors delay their investment timing. In this context, feed-in-tariff offer for a limited timeframe makes the investment more lucrative as it offers immediate return in exchange of solar electricity and reduces uncertainty associated with future cost recovery as a result of declining cost and compensates against the need for replacing older technology for more efficient ones. Althoughnet metering system in Bangladesh theoretically offers higher long-term benefit, the response to time-bounded feed-in-tariff offer made the investors rush to get the advantage of higher tariff for a longer period of time. While feed-in-tariff reduces the risk of investors, net metering system shifts the burden of risk to the prosumers, making it less attractive investment for investors having multiple investment opportunities to choose from. Bangladesh's policy to introduce net metering is a market approach that does not provide any subsidy and transfers the risk to the prosumers.

4.3.5 Unsolicited proposal

According to the Quick Enhancement of Electricity and Energy Supply (Special Provisions) Act 2010[i], "The Government and all enterprises owned or controlled by the Government may undertake any plan under this Act for quick enhancement of the generation, transmission, transportation and marketing of electricity or energy, or may accept any proposal for undertaking any plan regarding import of electricity or

energy from abroad and transmission, transportation and marketing thereof and quick implementation of the same."[31]

This Act may not ensure low cost production when quick implementation of project is given the highest priority. Therefore, unlike competitive bidding this Act opens up opportunities for private actors to make their intended profit. It creates opportunities for selective bidding in which rent seeking transfers public resources to private entities. For solar projects to grow faster the higher tariff offered in purchasing power agreement (PPA) could have potential to incentivize solar industries. However, in case of Bangladesh this has not been the case. Even after getting approval there has been delay is project implementation largely due to other barriers like delay in getting land, preparing land, getting connected to transmission and distribution network etc. The provision of submitting unsolicited proposal sidelining competitive bidding process and getting approval neither speeded up electricity supply, nor did it open up sufficient scope for faster growth of solar in the absence of other necessary incentives. On the other hand, this Act has been used to justify the highly expensive fossil fuel based private generation companies, nuclear, and dependency on imported LNG. Therefore, instead of providing preferential benefit to the solar developer, this policy served the interest of the fossil fuel-based power producers. Besides, when nuclear and fossil fuel-based projects were prioritized and fast-tracked, the development of solar industry got a baffled non-market signal for its potential growth.

5. Feasibility of Solar

The historical growth of solar share in Germany is the first example of a developed country's achievement over the last two decades (2000-2020). Although developed and developing countries have many differences in techno-economic, socio-technical, and political mechanisms, in feasibility analysis the growth of Germany can be taken as an upper limit below which any target can be surely feasible and above which any target can be less feasible and ambitious under certain assumptions.

I take Vietnam's target as an example of a feasible target as this is an example of lower middle-income country in Asia achieving highest growth recently after the cost of solar has gone down. Given some similarities in techno-economic, socio-technical, and political mechanisms between Bangladesh and Vietnam, Vietnam's future target

---

[31] GoB, "Quick Enhancement of Electricity and Energy Supply (Special Provisions) Act, 2010", Ministry of Power, Energy & Mineral Resources, 2010.

has been taken as an example of a relatively less feasible target above which any target is ambitious.

Figure 5.1: Historical Solar Growth of Germany and Future Target of Bangladesh and Vietnam

Source: Ember (2023)[32], SREDA (2023)[33], GoV (2022)[34]
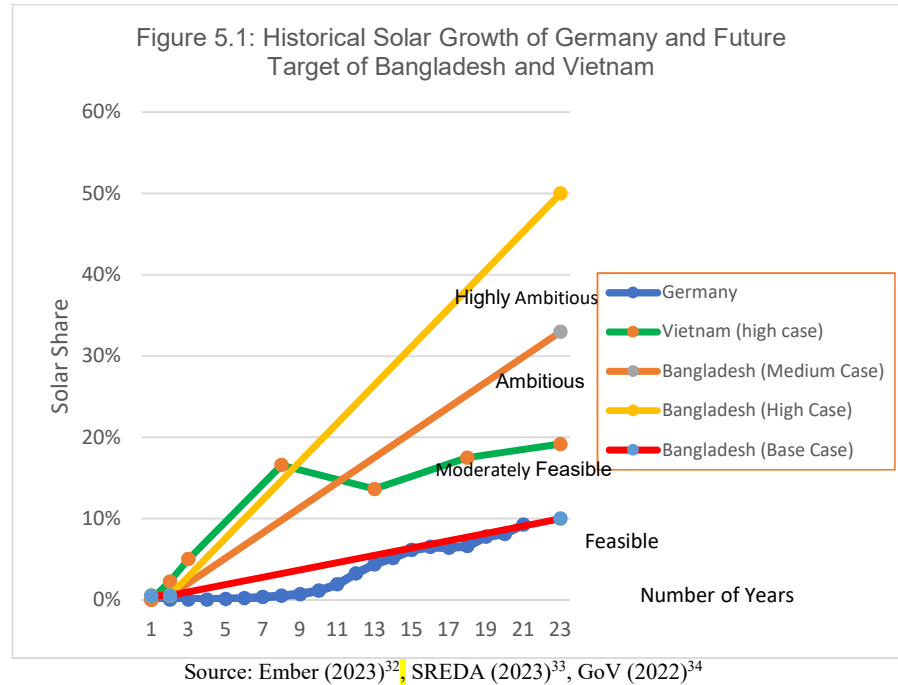
Note: The X-axis shows the number of years of solar deployment for Bangladesh and Vietnam starting from 2019 and Germany from 2001. The objective is to compare Germany's *achievement in last 20 (2001-2020) years with the intended targets of Vietnam (2040) and Bangladesh (2041) in the future.*

By plotting Germany's share of solar for 21 years (2000-2020) I show the historical growth trend of Germany for 21 years. Vietnam and Bangladesh in 2019 is comparable to Germany in 2001 when Germany was also in the formative phase like

---

[32] Ember, Global Electricity Review, 2023, *Ember Website*, Available at https://ember-climate.org/data/global-electricity/ [Accessed on April 9, 2023]

[33] SREDA, National database of Renewable Energy, Sustainable Renewable Energy Development Authority, 2023. Available at, https://ndre.sreda.gov.bd/ [Accessed on April 9, 2023]

[34] Government of Vietnam, Power Development Plan (VIII), Ministry of Industry and Trade, Government of Vietnam, 2022.

2019's Vietnam and Bangladesh. From 2019, every year how the growth can be compared to Germany has been shown for Vietnam's high case and Bangladesh's base, medium, and high case target till 2041. Figure 6.1 depicts the already achieved solar share of Germany and future target for Vietnam and Bangladesh. It shows that Bangladesh's base case target is comparable to Germany's achievement. Germany had to make technological innovations to make solar more efficient and affordable. Germany also had to highly subsidize the initial growth by using feed-in-tariff policy and manufacture its own solar equipment. Germany also had to spend on R&D to take the advantage of early comer in solar market. However, countries like Bangladesh and Vietnam did not provide such huge subsidies or spend on the research and development. As periphery countries both of these lower middle-income countries benefitted from the technology developed in the core (Germany) and semi periphery (China). Therefore, it is not sufficient to compare Bangladesh with Germany and conclude that only Bangladesh's base case target is feasible and all other targets are infeasible.

To be able to find out a feasible target the example of Vietnam can be compared with Bangladesh. The time bound feed-in-tariff in Vietnam has made the investors rush to first build utility scale solar and then emphasize on the rooftop solar. Vietnam is an example of how subsidy through feed-in-tariff has encouraged the investors to rush to take the opportunity. However, in 2021 Vietnam's experience shows that its transmission and distribution facilities are not well equipped to supply the newly connected solar rooftop and solar parks. Electricity of Vietnam (EVN) has urged to reduce production of solar electricity by 70%. Besides, Vietnam is no longer giving feed-in-tariff permission to new producers who entered the market after December 2020. Vietnam's achievement of high growth is now facing new problem of system integration. When the power development plan 8 of Vietnam was drafted and published in early 2020 Vietnam did not did not take into account its unexpected growth in just two years (2019-2020) and kept the future target low while giving more emphasis on coal and LNG. Vietnam has proved that it can reach its target 5 years earlier if right economic incentives are provided to targeted potential investors. Therefore, Vietnam's target of 19.17% can be assumed as a moderately feasible target compared to Germany's target.

Bangladesh's medium case (33%) target is ambitious and high case (50%) target is highly ambitious because the targets are above Vietnam's high case target and much higher than what Germany's solar deployment has achieved in last 20 years. Therefore, based on historical analysis this finding show that the base case target of

Bangladesh is feasible, medium case target is ambitious, high case target is highly ambitious. The 19.17% target of Vietnam can be moderately feasible target if certain conditions are met. Here, I mention some factors that caused Vietnam reach a target faster than any other countries.

1) Both direct and indirect subsidy at the initial stage to keep the price low.
2) Emphasis on rooftop solar in commercial, administrative, and industrial buildings.
3) Increasing coordination among city planning, water resource planning, land reclaiming in making non-agricultural lands available.
4) Insurance against natural disaster.
5) Capacity development of power development board.
6) Government investment in large utility scale solar power plants.
7) Developing capacity of solar manufacturing like Vietnam.
8) Providing other infrastructure support to solar deployment.

The medium target and high target require additional political support of the government. It also depends on the innovation of cheaper and more efficient technologies. Since there are uncertainties about those potential developments the feasibility of these targets can only be assessed based on certain assumptions. The draft national solar road map has already identified those conditionalities that can make those targets feasible. Along with those conditions, here I include other factors that can increase the feasibility of solar target in Bangladesh.

1) Policy to provide more resources for upgradation of grid infrastructure.
2) Using government resources to make available efficient and low-cost storage facilities in the future.
3) Making more lands available through land reform or using reclaimed land.
4) Cancelling coal-based power plant projects that may cause over capacity in the future.

6. Conclusion

The global cost of solar has decreased in last one decade, but the socio-technical and political conditions in Bangladesh were not favorable to make use of the declining cost advantage to grow solar. The expansion of grid to remote areas made the existing solar home system less attractive to consumers because of its intermittency, expense, and limited capacity. In some places the mini-grid technology is exorbitantly costly compared to the grid connected electricity and the government needed to buy the mini-grid electricity at high cost to deliver to the users at low cost. The utility scale solar projects have started to come to operation since 2015 but there are only nine projects that could start operation till 2023. Although the cost of utility

scale solar has come down recently, the cost of solar electricity from private IPPs were higher than the public power plant. One of the reasons is that the government did not have to pay for the land whereas the private producers had to pay for the land. The cost of per unit of electricity in IPPs were in the range of Taka 10.36 (12 cents) to Taka 16.11 (19 cents) in the 2020-21. Although according to the latest power purchase agreement the price was set at 10.25 cents, the cost went up because of the load factor, and capacity payment. This shows that the cost is still high for Bangladeshi utility scale solar. However, this higher cost does not reflect the global trend of cost decline, rather it explains the political and socio-technical mechanisms for which the market signal was unfavorable for solar to develop slowly.

In case of rooftop solar, the introduction of net metering system since 2018 could not also produce any significant outcome. Although the government published cost were estimated to be Taka 3.1 (3.6 cents), in reality there is a debate over the cost of rooftop solar. According to the government estimated cost, the profitability is very high if the existing tariff ranges between Taka 7.7 (9 cents) to Taka 10.3 (12 cents). However, this market-based system without any subsidy could not generate any significant outcome either. This shows that profitability does not itself signals demand for investment. It shows that socio-technical capacity of the institutions, human resource capacity, rent seeking through irregularity, and weak regulatory enforcement could not generate positive outcome.

By comparing with international cases this research found that the base case scenario of 10% solar share by 2041 is a certainly a feasible target and 19.17% is a moderately feasible target for Bangladesh. The medium case 33% target is an ambitious target and 50% is a highly ambitious target. The 10% target is feasible if the socio-technical and political conditions remains constant and the policies remain market-based and without much state patronization. The existing policies are neither favorable and nor unsupportive, rather ineffective in promoting solar. The pace of global technological advancement, cost decline, and increase in efficiency will create a market condition to drive solar to its politically and socio-technically feasible level of 10% by 2041.

Beside cost decline and technology advancement, the moderately feasible target of 19.17% will require state subsidy, phase out of existing fossil fuel-based power plants, human capacity development, institutional capacity development, certain measures to ensure land availability, and policies to remove trade barriers, and coordinated infrastructural planning to facilitate solar deployment.

To achieve the ambitious target of 33% and very ambitious target 50%, Bangladesh needs to give the highest priority to the solar development by scrapping all the coal and nuclear power plants, developing grid capacity, fast-tracking system integration, developing necessary infrastructure for storage, transmission, distribution and all other additional required initiative mentioned above for achieving moderately feasible target.

List of Interviewees:

1. Shahriar Ahmed Chowdhury, Chairman, Centre for Renewable Energy Services Ltd. (CRESL), and Director, Centre for Energy Research, United International University, Bangladesh Researcher, policy maker (Drafted National Solar PV Action Plan, 2021–2041).
2. Farzana Rahman, Executive Vice President and Unit Head (investment), Renewable Energy, Infrastructure Development Company Limited (IDCOL).
3. Tauhidul Islam, Project Director, Infraco Asia (providing leadership and capital to develop early stage infrastructure projects into viable investment opportunities).
4. Md. Nurul Aktar, CEO & Director, Energypac Electronics Ltd.
5. Taher Sherpa, Director, Sherpa Power Engineering Ltd.
6. Tanuja Bhattacharjee, Energy Specialist, World Bank.
7. Arif Mohammad Faisal, Programme Specialist, Environment and Energy, UNDP.
8. Saiful Huque, Director and Professor, Institute of Energy, University of Dhaka.
9. Ahmed Jahir Khan, Director, Renewable Energy and Environment, Bangladesh Power Development Board.
10. Mowdud Rahman, Energy Associate, UNHCR.
11. Ismail Ali, Energy Reporter, Share BIZ.
12. Niloy Das, Electric Engineer and a young entrepreneur.
13. A.K.M Kamrul Huda, Project Director, Spectra Solar Park Limited.
14. Jahangir Alam, Engineer and Project Coordinator, Kaptai Solar Power Project.

The Strategies for Overcoming Cultural Untranslatability:
The Case of Rabindranath Tagore's *Gora*

Md. Abdul Halim[*]

Abstract

The aim of this study is to show the cultural untranslatability of Rabindranath Tagore's *Gora* (1910) by analyzing the translation of the novel by W.W Pearson. Both the source and translated texts are studied using the content analysis method keeping the central motif in mind. The present research paper finds that *Gora* is so deeply rooted in Bengali cultural issues, that the translator has faced immense difficulties in making those cultural substances familiar to the target audience. The translator has used some strategies for overcoming cultural untranslatability such as borrowing and naturalization, definition, addition, substitution, transliteration, cultural equivalence, omission, etc. but in spite of the use of these strategies, the translation remains at a distance from the source text. However, the translator has mostly employed one approach, but on rare occasions he has utilized more than one, for example, transliteration with addition or definition, to give the intended audience a clear understanding of what is being said.

Key words: Cultural Untranslatability, Culture-specific items**,** Cultural Classification, Foreign Translator, Translation Strategies.

1. Introduction

Translation of literary texts is much more complicated than that of non-literary texts. Equivalence—notably cultural equivalence—is less significant in a non-literary text. But a literary text presents challenges because it simultaneously deals with language and culture when translated. Furthermore, it is assumed that language is culturally produced. Each culture has individual 'culture specific' words, and it is not easy to get the textual and literary equivalent materials of the source language in the target language. Therefore, a translator should have sound knowledge of both languages and cultures. Nonetheless, due to linguistic and cultural differences, the translator may encounter difficulties during the translation process. Finding out a proper equivalent for the source language substances in the target language becomes difficult. J.C. Catford addresses this situation as "Translation fails—or untranslatability."[1] It is often described as an attribute of a text or any substance in

---

* PhD Fellow, Institute of Bangladesh Studies, University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh.

1 J. C. Catford, *A Linguistic Theory of Translation: An Essay in Applied Linguistics*, 5th impr, Language and Language Learning 8 (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978), p. 94.

one language for which no equivalent text or substance can be identified in a target language. In this case, Catford proposes that if the target language does not have the pertinent equivalent, the linguistic and cultural components of the source language should be given priority.[2] It happens for many reasons, and a bi-lingual and bi-cultural translator can use various translation strategies to overcome this problem. However, there are two types of untranslatability: linguistic and cultural. Linguistic untranslatability happens when the linguistic aspects of the source text cannot be appropriately replaced in the target language. Cultural untranslatability appears "when a situational feature, functionally relevant for the Source language (SL) text, is completely absent from the culture of which the Target language (TL) is a part."[3] It instigates from the cultural gap between source culture and target culture. More specifically, it may appear and create a significant problem in rendering culture-specific items while translating literary text. Hence, the present study mainly focused on cultural untranslatability and the strategies taken by the translator to overcome the problem.

The present article is corpus-based qualitative research using the content analysis method to find out mainly the translation strategies employed by W.W. Pearson to overcome cultural untranslatability in Rabindranath Tagore's classic work, *Gora.* Two specific objectives have been set in order to achieve the main objective: to demonstrate how W.W. Pearson, a foreign translator, dealt with the Bengali culture-specific items and: to assess the approaches used to overcome cultural untranslatability. In this regard, both primary and secondary sources were conducted to attain the main objective. The study has used the Bengali culture-representative classic novel *Gora* (1910) by Rabindranath Tagore and its English translation, *Gora* (1924) by W.W. Pearson, as primary sources.[4] It preferred to employ books, journals, and other online and offline materials pertinent to the topic as secondary sources. Since the study compares cultural issues, both the source and target texts underwent a careful investigation utilizing the translation methods suggested by academics. First, the Bengali culture-specific items and their English substitutions were extracted from both texts. Then, the untranslatable cultural items were identified based on their classifications. Side by side, the translation strategies to overcome the cultural untranslatability in the translation process were observed. Finally, a suggestion is made regarding which translation procedures are best suited to dealing with cultural

---

2   Ibid.
3   Ibid., p. 99.
4   Rabindranath Tagore, *Gora* (Dhaka: Kakoli Prokashoni, 2016); W.W. Pearson, *Gora* (New Delhi: Rupa Publication, 2002).

untranslatability. The researcher has chosen the transliteration approach from Bengali to English expression, employing diacritical marks, which is becoming more prevalent in Bangladesh. In addition, in the analysis, the main text refers to *Gora* S (source text), while the translated text stands for *Gora* T (translated text).

1.1 Culture-specific Items and their Classifications

In literary translation, culture-bound words or notions take priority. Scholars have attempted to identify and classify cultural components from diverse angles because they differ from other lexis. For instance, Peter Newmark addresses this term as 'cultural words'.[5] In contrast, Mona Baker prefers to identify it as 'culture-specific concepts'.[6] Similarly, Nida adopts the term as 'culture-bound issue'.[7] At the same time, Aixela has popularly introduced this issue as 'culture-specific item'.[8] Despite the various names, scholars seem to agree on the same fundamental idea when it comes to cultural issues, namely that when there is a cultural focus, there is a translation problem because of the cultural distance or gap between the source language and the target language, which leads to cultural untranslatability. Regarding the classification of culture-specific items, Eugene A. Nida (1996), has categorized it into five groups; ecology, material culture, religious culture, social culture, and language (linguistic culture).[9] However, Peter Newmark (1988) has highlighted the more straightforward categorization of 'cultural words' such as ecology, which includes flora, fauna, winds, seasons, and weather; material culture, which denotes food, drinks, clothes, houses, and towns; social culture, which comprises work and leisure; organizations, customs, activities, procedures, and concepts all of these issues cover cultures related to political and administrative, religious and artistic; and gestures and habits.[10] It is notable that Eugene A. Nida and Peter Newmark have both identified cultural terminology with nearly identical concepts. Nida's categorization of culture-specific objects, excluding linguistic culture, is examined in this study.

---

5   Peter Newmark, *A Textbook of Translation* (New York: Prentice-Hall International, 1988), p. 94.

6   Mona Baker, *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*, Third edition (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), pp. 20-42.

7   Eugene A. Nida, "Linguistics and Ethnology in Translation-Problems," WORD 1, No. 2 (August 1945), p. 196, https://doi.org/10.1080/00437956.1945.11659254.

8   J. F. Aixela, Culture-Specific Items in Translation. *Translation, Power, Subversion,* Alvarez, R. and Carmen-Africa Vidal, M (eds.). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1997, pp. 52–78.

9   Eugene A. Nida, "Linguistic and Ethnology in Translation Problems," in *Language in Culture and Society,* ed. Dell Hymes (New York: Harper and Row Publisher, 1996), p. 196.

10 Newmark, *A Textbook of Translation*, p. 96.

1.2 Strategies for Overcoming Cultural Untranslatability

It is crucial to have a clear understanding of the translation methods, procedures, and strategies. According to Newmark, "translation methods relate to whole texts" while "translation procedures are used for sentences and the smaller units of language."[11] In the other sense, related to rendering culture-specific issues, translation procedures deal "with a particular element of culture."[12] On the other hand, translation strategies refer to "the choice of the procedure best suited for a particular act of communication."[13] In fact, translation strategies are typically summarized as the procedures that lead to the best resolution of a translation problem.

Some procedures provided by scholars are available for overcoming this problem, namely cultural untranslatability. Peter Newmark (1988) proposes the following translation procedures: transference, naturalization, cultural equivalent, functional equivalent, descriptive equivalent, synonymy, through-translation, shift or transposition, modulation, recognized Translation, compensation, componential analysis, reduction and expansion, paraphrase, etc.[14]Vinay and Darbelnet reformulated the procedures as mentioned earlier into 'seven basic translation procedures', i.e., adaptation, calque, equivalence, modulation, borrowing, literal translation, and transposition.[15] However, apparently, the best-known taxonomy articulated by Vladimir Ivir is the review and the summarization of the set-procedures mentioned above. They are seven in number: borrowing and naturalization, definition and paraphrase, literal translation, substitution, lexical creation, addition, and omission.[16] Translators in dealing with cultural untranslatability or 'unmatched elements' choose one strategy or more than one strategy for mitigating the translation problem. The present research was conducted mainly by Ivir's translation procedures with some adaptations tailored to render Bengali culture into English.

2. Analysis of Rabindranath Tagore's *Gora* and Its Translation
2.1 Ecological Untranslatability

The ecological features directly relate to every aspect of nature, e.g., flora, fauna, wind, plains and hills, weather, season, other geographical concepts, etc.[17] More

---

11 Ibid., p. 81.
12 Vladimir Ivir, "Procedures and Strategies for the Translation of Culture," in *Translation Across Cultures*, ed. Gideon Toury (New Dehli: Bahri Publications Ltd, 1987), p. 117.
13 Ibid.
14 Newmark, *A Textbook of Translation*, pp. 81-91.
15 J.P. Vinay and J. Darbelnet. "Translation Procedures." Readings in Translation Theory. Ed. A. Chesterman. Loimaa: Finn Lectura, 1989, pp. 61-69.
16 Ivir, "Procedures and Strategies for the Translation of Culture," p. 117.
17 Newmark, *A Textbook of Translation*, p. 96.

specifically, they are the products of nature that existed in the world without human intervention, and those ecological elements vary from place to place. However, in some cases, the equivalents of culture-specific items of the source culture are not matched in the target culture. Even the detailed descriptions of those items might be inappropriate or not provide contextual meaning. The following strategies are taken while translating the ecology-based culture-specific items.

2.1.1 Substitution Strategy

Flora, the integral part of ecology, is enormously observed and well known in the source culture. It plays a vital role representing aboriginality that cannot be transmitted properly to the target culture. Incapacitating this untranslatability, the translator has used 'substitution' strategy. For instance, *tagar phul* (*Gora* S, p. 26) is a small white flower with special significance in Hinduism and rituals. Its scientific name is *Tabernaemontana* belonging to the Apocynaceae family found in Asia, Africa, Australia, North America, South Africa America, and many oceanic islands.[18] The translator has replaced this flora with 'white flower' (p. 20) considering commonness of colour significance.

Another example of floral ecological element is '*bōrō dhān*' (*Gora* S, 120). Having no equivalent in the English language, it becomes untranslatable. *Boro* is a seasonal variant of paddy in Bangladesh known as a winter paddy. The *Boro* season begins after the *Aman* season ends. This paddy season lasts from early autumn to mid-summer.

The translator has substituted this paddy by its nature of harvesting as 'an early crop' (*Gora* T, 79). His translation is: '…the cultivators had managed to reap an early crop…'

Season having its place in the ecology varies from place to place. For example, *grīṣmakāl* (*Gora* T, p.11), equivalent to the English as Summer, comprises Baishakh and Jyaistha (mid-April to mid-June), the hottest of the four temperate seasons, occurring after spring and before autumn.[19] This season is made equivalent in *Gora* T by nature as 'in the hot weather' (p. 9) following the substitution strategy.

2.1.2 Transliteration Strategy

The ecological substance, *kēÿā phul* (*Gora* S, p. 30), the English name 'Thatch Screwpine,' is a white colour fragrant native flower found in South and Southeast Asia. It appears in the Bengali month of Ashar and Shravan. This rainy flower is

---

18 *Encyclopedia of Flora and Fauna of Bangladesh,* Vo. 6, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2008, s.v. "Apocynaceae."

19 *Banglapedia,* Vo. 12, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2012, s.v. *"Season."*

considered to be the queen of the nights. The scientific name of this flower is *Pandanus tectorius.* Here the translator has used the transliteration strategy, i.e., '*Keya* flowers' (*Gora* S, p. 23). It seems he remains faithful to the source text by urging the target reader to move towards the source culture.

2.1.3 Omission Strategy

In the translation of *Gora*, the translator has made an omission while rendering some native flowers that may not be found in the European context. For instance, *kṛṣṇacūṛā* (*Gora* S, p. 42) or Krishnacura is a large flowering plant whose scientific name is *Delonix regia* of the Caesalpiniaceae family. This red flower blooms in the spring (April to June) in Bangladesh.[20] Again, *Kunda phul* (*Gora* S, p. 215) is a native species of the Indian subcontinent. Its scientific name is *Jasminum multiflorum* in the family Oleaceae. Its English name is Star jasmine, Downy jasmine, Indian jasmine.[21] In Indian mythology, it is held to be especially sacred to Vishnu.

2.2 Untranslatability of Material Culture

Material culture-specific items e.g., food, drinks, cloth, transport, house, etc. signifying the local colour and atmosphere of any specific society different from other societies have played a significant role in the source text. The translator always has to face difficulties conveying the proper message to the target audience attributable to the distance culture and lack of proper equivalents of the source culture in the target culture (hence the cultural untranslatability). However, to overcome the problem, translator has sought different strategies.

2.2.1 Borrowing and Naturalization Strategy

The translator has borrowed some common Bengali cultural instances in English, which have been naturalized as a part of regular English vocabulary. For example, *śāṛi'* (*Gora* S, p. 15) is a traditional Bengali woman's loincloth. Similarly, *luṅgi* is also a traditional Bengali man's outfit used by both Hindus and Muslims on the lower part of the body in the Indian subcontinent. It is one of the most widely used comfortable clothing in Bangladesh and India. In the like manner, *dhuti* (*Gora*, S, p. 36) is a Bengali Hindu man's cloth also worn on the lower part of the body. It is widely used as comfortable clothing in the Indian subcontinent. However, the translator has rendered the Bengali terms, e.g., *śāṛi, luṅgi,* and '*dhuti*' from the source text and naturalized those objects next in the whole text as 'sari' (*Gora*T, p. 12), 'lungis' and 'dhuti' (*Gora* T, p. 28). The custom of wearing those Bengali garments is

---

20   *Encyclopedia of Flora and Fauna of Bangladesh,* Vol. 5, s.v. "Caesalpiniaceae."

21   Ibid., "Oleaceae."

peculiar to the Western culture but the repeated using has made those items familiar to the target audience as the cultural clothing of the Eastern part.

2.2.2 Definition Strategy

The object, *'kaṭaki jutā'* (*Gora* S, p. 36), is a cultural substance that is a locally made shoes from the Cuttack district of Orissa. The Bengali elite class wore these shoes as a matter of aristocracy. But it is unfamiliar to the English society, and this term has no translation equivalent in the target culture. The translator used the 'definition' strategy when he rendered the term 'country-made shoes' (*Gora* T, p. 28).

Similarly, *nāmābalī* (*Gora* S, p.99) is a cloth inscribed the names of Hari, Rama, and Krishna. Wearing this cloth, the Brahmins perform their sacred rituals and religious activities. The translator has represented this culture-bound object as 'a scarf inscribed with the names of the gods' (p.65), following the definition strategy to be understandable to the target audience.

2.2.3 Lexical Creation Strategy

The device *damru* (*Gora* S, p. 63), or regional name *dugdugi*, is a small two-headed musical instrument made of wood with goatskin drum heads at both ends. A string tied in the middle of the shell with two small iron balls or lead is wrapped around both yarn ends. When the instrument is moved rapidly in one hand, the small balls hit the skin, making sounds like *dug dug.* Due to this phonetic feature, its regional name is *dugdugi.* This musical device is common throughout the Indian subcontinent. It has a spiritual appeal in Hinduism since it is known as the instrument of Lord Shiva, associated with Tantric traditions.[22] The musical instrument 'drum' (*Gora* T, p. 45) has been transported to compare the aforementioned device.

2.2.4 Transliteration and Addition Strategy

Another untranslatable culture-specific item is *gaṅgā mṛttikār chap* (*Gora* S, p. 36), that literally means 'the mark of Ganges soil' that is called tilak considered to be the sacred soil marked on the forehead of the Brahmins. The Ganges is regarded as the consecrated river and has a socio-religious impression in the Hindu culture that cannot be understandable to the Western culture. The translator has used two strategies; 'transliterate' (Ganges) and 'addition' (a caste-mark) combinedly 'a caste-mark of Ganges-clay' (28).

2.2.5 Omission Strategy

The translator has consciously omitted some Bengali culture-specific term without disrupting the natural flow of reading. For instance, *pāñjābi* (*Gora* S, p. 125) is

---

22   *Banglapedia* s.v. *"Dugdug",* Vol. 5, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2012.

apparel usually used by the Bengali male in the Indian subcontinent. It has loose sleeves extending to the palms of the hands. Again, some food items unavailable in the translated texts may be unfamiliar to the European context, e.g., *kābāb* (*Gora* S, p. 38). Actually, kebab is a variety of cooked meat dishes in the Indian cuisines. For the first time, Mughals introduced this delicious food item in the Indian sub-continent. But in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and other Muslim countries, a Kebab is recognized as a wide variety of grilled meat dishes.[23] Another object related to material culture omitted in the translated text is *śatarañji* (*Gora* S, p.189). Shataranji is a traditional handicraft reflecting the Bengali cultural values found in the Rangpur region of Bangladesh. Its history is several hundred years old. Formerly, it was one of the symbols of the aristocracy and nobility of the people of this region, used for mainly floor mats and some other purposes.[24]

2.3 Untranslatability of Social Culture

Social culture comprises work, profession, customs, habit, class, caste, kinship, and many issues belonging to a specific nation. All issues are observed in both source texts and their equivalence in the translated texts. Since social customs, values and stratifications differ from place to place, it is an impediment for the translator to get a substitution of those issues. The following strategies have been taken to overcome the cultural untranslatability in the target text.

2.3.1 Borrowing and Naturalization Strategy

The lexical item *bāul* (*Gora* S, p. 7) is a group of people who practice sacred rites. They also perform devotional songs known as Baul songs found in Bangladesh and West Bengal.[25] Similarly, *yātrā* (*Gora* S. 124), is a traditional part of the famous folk drama and basic culture of Bangladesh and West Bengal "combining acting, songs, music, dance characterized by stylized delivery and exaggerated gestures and orations."[26] It has played an immense role as the medium of entertainment for mass people in the past. Both terms have been borrowed from the source culture and later gradually naturalised in the target text as 'Baul' (*Gora* T, p. 6) and 'Jatra' (*Gora* T, p. 82).

2.3.2 Definition Strategy

In Hinduism, *satīlakṣmī* (*Gora* S, p.14) is a "virtuous housewife" who brings fortune to her husband by any means and always follows her husband's words.[27] This term is

---

23   Milan Datta, *Bangalir Khadyakosh,* First Edition (Kolkata: Dey's Publishing, 2015), p. 81.
24   *Banglapedia*, "Shataranji.", Vol. 13, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2012
25   Ibid., s.v. "Baul."
26   Ibid.,s.v. "Jatra."
27   Radha Chakravarty, *Gora* (Trn.), (India: Penguin Books, 2009), p.11.

defined in the translated text as 'the pure, right-minded Lady' (p. 10), which makes the target audience understand about the family-culture of the Hindu society.

2.3.3 Substitution Strategy

Some addressing socio-lexical terms are substituted since they are absent in the English culture. For example, *mēsomaśāi* (*Gora* S, p.45) is an addressing word related to the kinship that refers to maternal uncle, i.e., husband of mother's sister. The term 'uncle' (*Gora* T, 34) has appeared in the translation to make the target reader understand the same relation. In the same manner, the term *śrī* (*Gora* S, p.10) is used in the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia in terms of polite address equivalent to the English "Mr."[28] On the other hand, 'Master' (*Gora* T, p.7) as a prefixed title regards to "a way of addressing politely a boy who was too young to be called 'Mister'."[29] The translator has replaced this culture-bound term with the aforementioned English substitution.

2.3.4 Transliteration Strategy

The untranslatable phrase, *brāhmasamāj* (*Gora* S, p.13) is an example of socio-cultural organization. The Upanishad-based monotheistic reformist movement of the Hindu religion introduced by Raja Rammohun Roy is known as Brahma *Sabha* (1829). The intelligentsias of this community were the 'forerunners of Indian modernization' who played a rebellious role "against the Hindu tradition whose community has come to be known as the Brahmo Samaj (1843)."[30] The translator has restored it as 'Brahmo Samaj' (*Gora* S, p. 10) in the translation.

2.3.5 Omission Strategy

The culture-specific item, *jāmāiṣaṣṭhī* (*Gora* S, p.34) or Jamaisasthi is a traditional Bengali cultural festival celebrated by the Hindus. Generally, it is observed on the sixth day of Shukla Paksha in the *Jyaistha* month of the traditional Bengali calendar. This festival originated ages ago as a part of a woman's socio-religious duty to make intense bondage of son-in-law with the in-laws. It is also a vow performed by the mother-in-law to please *Shasthi*, the goddess of children, who will bless her daughter to be pregnant.[31] The primary purpose of *Jamaisasthi* is motherhood procreation. The

---

28   *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 8th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), s.v. "Shri."

29   Leslie Dunkling, *Dictionary of Epithets and Terms of Address* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p.109.

30   David Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1979), xiii (preface).

31   Apala, "Jamai Sasthi Palan Karar Pradhan Uddesya Ki (What is the main purpose of celebrating Jamai Shashti)", *Anandabazar,* May 25, 2020, https://www.anandabazar.com/, accessed on 25-01-2022.

social significance of this festival in Bengali Hindu society is undeniable. This festival is celebrated with great enthusiasm, mainly in families with a newly married daughter. However, the above-mentioned instance is considered cultural untranslatability since it is deeply imbedded into Bengali Hindu culture and no translation equivalent is found in English due to the cultural gap. The translator has intentionally used omission strategy without any interruption.

2.4 Untranslatability of Religious Culture

Religious culture includes religious beliefs, activities, performances, different types of worship, names of the deities and their connotative significances, etc. Translators always worry about making the target reader understand the religious issues by rendering the equivalents of the source culture.

2.4.1 Borrowing and Naturalization Strategy

The religious term, *bēdamantrē* (*Gora* S, p. 63) is an example of cultural untranslatability. According to Hindu believe, Vedas are the sacred Hindu scriptures traditionally have come from the Supreme Lord. The Vedas are the original storehouse of knowledge of the entire human being. Before being written down, they were preserved in the memory and transmitted orally from 'guru to disciple'; hence its other name is *shruti*.[32] Besides, they are associated with various meanings; to know, judge, locate, and gain. By reading, people can know the truth, judge between truth and falsehood, become real scholars, and get real peace and happiness. For the Indian Aryans, the Vedas are the most authoritative texts, ranking above all. However, there are a total of 20434 mantras in the Vedas. The Hindus believe that all are divinely inspired and composed by the holy Rishis (sages) in divine inspiration. The combined cultural phrases are deeply rooted in the Hindu religion and do not have an English equivalent. Here, the translator has borrowed and naturalised the Indian term in the translated text as 'Vedic mantras' (*Gora* T, p. 44)

2.4.2 Definition Strategy

Then, *sandhyāhnik* (G S, p. 24) is a religious term that refers to the daily rituals of Hindus in the morning and evening. Similarly, *ṭiki* (*Gora* S, p. 24) is a tuft of hair at the back of the head, grown by Brahmins in Bengal as a mark of orthodoxy. Here, the translator has replaced the first one by 'ceremonial worship morning and evening' following a 'definition' strategy that might be understandable to the target audience. Similarly, 'tiki,' belonging to religious culture, is rendered from the Bangla text, and the translator provides a supplementary endnote. He explains- "A tuft of hair at the back of the head, grown by Brahmins in Bengali as a mark of orthodoxy.

---

32   *Banglapedia,* s.v. *"*Vedas*.",* Vol. 14, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2012.

2.4.3 Substitution Strategy

Religious practices like *śuddhācārī* (*Gora* S, p.16) or the English equivalent virtuousness generally refers to the behaviour and excellence influenced by morality and honesty. It means devotion to duty and honesty at the individual level, and the person who is practicing virtue or sanctity is called *suddhacari.* The translator has made a substitution of the mentioned religious term for the target reader as 'orthodox' (*Gora* T, p. 12) that could be understandable. Similarly, *prāẏaścitta* (*Gora*, p. 216) means atonement for one's misdeeds. In Hinduism, the term refers to voluntarily accepting one's errors and misdeeds, confession, repentance, means of 'penance' (*Gora* T, p.154), and expiation to undo or reduce the karmic consequences.[33] Here also, he has used substitution strategy. Again, *upabās* (*Gora* S, p. 224) is replaced with 'fasting' (*Gora* T, p. 159) that is a special ritual of Hindus. It means not eating for a certain period of time for social or religious purposes. Fasting is observed in marriage, worship, and various vows.[34] In the same way, *tapōban* (*Gora* S, p. 63) has taken the place of ''forest' (*Gora* T, p. 44) that is a hermitage situated in a secluded place like a forest where the sages live for austerities.

2.4.4 Transliteration Strategy

Ganges related terms like *gaṅgāsnān* (*Gora* S, p. 24), and *gaṅgājal* (*Gora* S, p. 26) are associated with untranslatability interrelated to socio-religious customs and conventions performed by the Brahmins. The first one literarily refers to bathing or ablution in the Ganges. Actually, it is a ritual or a pious deed done by the Hindus, believing that bathing in the Ganges on a specific day can save one from sins through purification.[35] The Ganges is considered one of the sacred rivers in Hinduism. She is both a goddess and a river. In Hindu mythology, the Ganges descends from heaven to liberate the dead. The second one is the continuation of the previous one considering the water as the holiest. The water of this river can remove all the impurities. The scriptures say that if Ganges water is given to the face of a dead person, then his soul gets peace. However, Western readers do not know the Hindu rituals, customs, and conventions, and it is a difficult task for the translator to convey the proper massage.

To be faithful to the source text, the translator has followed 'transliteration' strategy with literal translation to make the message meaningful to the target audience. He has rendered those religious objects from the source text as 'bathe in the Ganges' (*Gora* T, p.18), and 'Ganges water' (*Gora* T, p. 20).

---

33   James G. Lochtefeld, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, 1st ed. (New York: Rosen, 2002), p. 526.

34   *Banglapedia,* s.v. *"*Upavasa*.",* Vol. 14, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2012

35   Stephen Alter, *Sacred Waters: A Pilgrimage Up the Ganges River to the Source of Hindu Culture* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Trade & Reference Publishers, 2001), p. 129.

2.4.5 Omission Strategy

The target culture has no suitable equivalent for the following instances. The translator feels that it may not create any problem transporting the necessary message if they are omitted. The cultural phrase *kīrtankarā* (*Gora* S, p.130) or Kirtan is one of the earliest genres of Bengali music. Its emergence as a means of attaining God very easily for the ordinary person. This trend of practicing religion through songs has been going on in this country since ancient times. Kirtan is the developed form of Vaishnavism in Bengal. It usually describes God's qualities and pastimes.[36]

3. Conclusion

Untranslatability has become overwhelming in translating Bengali culture into English due to the gaps between the two languages and cultures. After analyzing the selected culture-bound Bengali novel and its English translation, it can be determined that translating culture-specific items seems indisputably a very challenging task. More remarkably, the optimal use of a particular strategy from the different translation procedures is undeniably a fact because the success of a translation mostly depends on it. However, in the translated novel *Gora*, the translator tried his best to overcome the cultural intricacy by rendering the corresponding cultural items in the target cultures using different strategies.

Substitution is the most frequently used strategy found in each cultural category. The problems related to the material, social and religious cultures have been solved by providing additional associated information. At the same time, some untranslatable culture-bound words are borrowed directly from the source text and naturalized in the target text. Similarly, in other cases, the translator has moderately defined or explained some typical culture-bound items, mainly unfamiliar to the European context. But in certain circumstances, when many of them have no equivalent in English, the Bengali name in transliteration is employed. Transliteration with addition is a new strategy used in translation. Moreover, as part of the translation strategy provoked by Gideon Toury, the translator intentionally omitted some conflicting (between languages and cultures) cultural items without impeding the natural flow of the translation process. Nevertheless, in some cases, the translator has failed to understand the particular socio-religious words or phrases based on the context resulting in the mistranslation and misinterpretation of the source culture. Finally, the study suggests that more attention is needed while handling the culture-specific items to produce a more effective translation.

---

36   *Banglapedia,* s.v. *"Kirtan .",* Vol. 8, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2012.

Dynamics of Emigration: Bangladesh Case

Sabnam Sarmin Luna[*]

Atul Sood[**]

Abstract

Overseas migration has attracted a lot of attention from policymakers and academics in Bangladesh. The writings and debates on migration in Bangladesh have centred around the economic benefits of migration as well as its social implications. This paper is a contribution to this literature. The detailed analysis of emigration patterns using the data provided by the BMET, but not aggregated and complied before, adds to the ongoing debates on overseas migration in Bangladesh. Disaggregate analysis is provided in this paper, from the 2004 till date, on the overseas migration of men and women over the years, along with their occupation, age, and skill profile. In addition, this paper brings a regional dimension into the discussion of the migration literature in Bangladesh. The sharp variation in the intensity of overseas migrations across the different districts of Bangladesh gives us new insights for policy that links overseas migration as a panacea for some of the development challenges that the country faces. The reach of overseas migration to give gains to households that are in highly underdeveloped regions remains limited and, in some ways, continues to keep them trapped in a vicious circle of underdevelopment.

Key words: Migration policy; regional variation of migration; migration trends and patterns; gender and migration; Bangladesh

Overview of labour market, poverty and migration

According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), the number of people living outside their own country has touched 281 million in 2020. In the last three decades, the number of international migrants increased by about 119 million from 1990 to 2019. Between 1990 and 2005 the number of migrants increased only 39 million whereas, between 2005 to 2019, it was 80 million. In the last decade (2010-2020), the number increased by 60 million, despite a decrease of 27% in international migrants due to COVID-19 pandemic in the year 2020. Currently, international migrants constitute about 3.6% of the world's

---

* Associate Professor, Department of Geography and Environment, Jagannath University, Bangladesh, and Research Fellow, Centre for the Study of Regional Development, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India

** Professor, Centre for the Study of Regional Development, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India

population.[1] Among the total migration stock, the number of international labour migrants was 169 million in 2019 which equates 4.9% of the labour force of host countries and this number is highest at 41.4% in the Arab States.[2] Whereas 41.5% of them were women and 58.5% of them were men migrant workers in 2019.[3] According to the ILO report, women are less likely to be employed in foreign labour market mainly due to two reasons: for working age and, their lower labour force participation than men migrants. In addition, larger economic and non-economic obstacles faced by women may also be the causes of their lower migration probability. For instance, gender discrimination in the labour market, like gender pay gap, lack of social networks and difficulties in integration of work and family life in a foreign country are probable factors reducing women's labour force participation along with expected benefits from labour migration. Labour force is an integral part of world economy. Labour migration benefits not only the migrant workers but also the communities, society and families in the origin countries they become part of.[4] In Sustainable Development (SDGs) Agenda for 2030 United Nations recognizes migration as a significant aspect of development policy.[5]

As per the Bureau of Manpower, Employer and Training (BMET) record labour migration from Bangladesh was initiated formally in 1976 beginning with a scanty number of around six thousand workers.[6] Within a very short time between 1990 and 2017, Bangladesh secured fifth place worldwide as a country of origin to export migrant workers.[7] And between 2000 and 2020 Bangladesh stood as the 6th highest origin country for international migrants.[8] The demographic dividend has given Bangladesh a favourable position to export workforce abroad and by 2019 around 12 per cent of the labour force was working in the overseas labour market.[9] Many

---

1   UNDESA, International Migration 2020 Highlights (ST/ESA/SER.A/452), (Population Division, UN New York 2020).

2   UNDESA, *International Migrant Stock 2019 Documentation*, 2019c.

3   ILO, ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers – Results and Methodology, Third edition (Geneva 2021).

4   Ibid; IOM, *Migration Crisis Operational Framework, (*IOM, Dhaka 2020).

5   IOM, Bangladesh Migration Governance Framework, (Dhaka 2019); IOM, Migration Governance Indicators (Mgi): Bangladesh, (Dhaka 2019); UN and GoB, United Nations Development Assistance Framework: UNDAF 2017–2020, (United Nations 2016).

6   M. Nurul Islam, (n.d), *Overseas employment from Bangladesh*, (BMET), p.1.

7   IOM, *Bangladesh Migration Crisis Operational Framework,* (IOM, Dhaka 2020)*, pp. 7-8.

8   UN DESA, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

9   IOM (2019), *op. cit.*

foreign countries need to import workforce from other countries and Bangladesh meets such needs. Bangladesh is an important low-priced labour exporting country in the world, and there was a huge demand for labour force from Bangladesh in the newly emerged oil-rich countries of the Middle East since 1970s.[10] That time in 1976, the goal of the formation of the BMET was to facilitate the migrant workers from Bangladesh leaving mainly to the Middle East for employment.[11]

It is also true that Bangladesh has had high rates of unemployment over the years. Therefore, migrating out of country for work is an attractive and, in some ways, inevitable option for the country's workforce. The proportion of employment as a proportion of working age population (15-65 years of age) has been low during the last three decades in Bangladesh.[12] Evaluating the labour market performance the 8th Five Year Plan (FYP) Document reports –

> … total job creation of 7.4 million during the first 4 years of the 7FYP suggests that actual job creation for the full plan would have fallen much short of the targeted 12.9 million even if there was no COVID-19.[13]

This document also spells out some important features of the labour market in the country which can help understand the dynamics of migration and development in Bangladesh. The Plan document says that during the seventh five-year plan period, the actual number of new participants to the job market was only 1.1 million annually compared to 2 million anticipated in the 7FYP. And the key reason for this is the stagnation of female labour force participation (around 36%) which is explained in the plan document. So slow job creation and specific challenges for women workers are clearly underlined in the document. Highlighting the slowdown in the share of the employed population to the total population the paper also brings attention to an increasing share of the young age population that is not in employment, education, or training (NEET). Overall, it concludes that "given substantial underemployment and the fact that 10% of employment is unpaid family labour, the domestic job creation performance of the 7FYP was below the target."[14]

---

10 IOM (2020), *op. cit.*

11 Ibid; S. A. Ali, A. A. Arif, A. K. M. Habibullah, A. R. M A. Hossain, R. Islam, W. Mahmud, S.R. Osmani, Q.R. Rahman, A.M.A.H. Siddiqui, "Labour migration from Bangladesh to the middle east," *World Bank Staff Working Paper Number 454,* Washington DC, USA, 1981.

12 UN Women, Pathways for empowering Employment: Diversity and challenges for women Migrant workers of Bangladesh (Dhaka 2018), pp. 83-184.

13 GED, *8th Five Year Plan June 2020-June 2025: Promoting Prosperity and Fostering Inclusiveness. (*Bangladesh Planning Commission 2020), p. 6.

14 Ibid, p. 7.

Looking at sectoral employment opportunities, we find that labour employment in the agricultural sector shrunk in numbers and exodus from agricultural sector continued during the seventh plan period. On the other hand, there was no expected growth of employment in the manufacturing and construction sectors. Because of mechanization, scale economics, buyer-induced regulations, RMG enterprises, the Ready-made Garments (RMG) Sector which was once a vibrant sector for young women that created some 4 million jobs between 1990 and 2012 now experiencing virtual stagnation and come down despite its rapid growth of production and exports. And by implication puts greater reliance on international migration as a way out of the domestic labour market squeeze. This appears particularly significant for women workers. Employment gains even in other industries where trade restrictions are still prominent have not been impressive. The ratio of youth unemployment also increased to 10.6% in 2017 from 8% in 2013 due to a rapid slowdown in the capacity of the manufacturing sector to generate occupations.[15] The Plan document clearly acknowledges that because of such conditions in the labour market advancement of overseas labour migration, particularly to the Middle Eastern Countries, was a crucial element of the 7FYP employment policy compared to domestic job creation. And in fact, the results of this strategy have proved to be productive. The actual annual average outflow of migrant labour (0.7 million) substantially exceeded the target (0.4 million) in the 7FYP. This extra overseas employment from the Governments point of view offered a big cushion and relaxed the drawback of a slowdown in local job creation.[16]

Despite the low job creation and stagnation in manufacturing employment, real wage growth increased in Bangladesh. The government attributes this increase in real wages to "the migration of rural labours to international workplaces, thereby shrinking of rural labour market, and aiding the growth of real wages." In the context of discussion on reduction in rural and urban poverty, overseas migration again is seen in a favourable light. The Government says that the inflow of remittances has a direct influence on reducing poverty by growing the income and consumption of the rural poor.[17]

Bangladesh was the 9th highest remittance recipient country in the world in 2017 (Bangladesh Bank, 2018), and in 2019 Bangladeshi migrant workforce contributed

---

15 Ibid, p. 10.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid, p.13.

around USD 19.8 billion to the national reserves and became the eighth-highest recipient of remittance among the 10 countries in the same year.[18] Remittance was seen as the highest source of foreign currency in terms of net earnings.[19] Overall, remittance inflows have increased over the last six years, moving from approximately US$14 billion in FY2013-2014 to US$16 in FY2018-2019.[20]

The paper is based on completely secondary data. Data was collected from Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) head office detail from the year 2004 to 2018. BMET started incorporating case by case migrants' data from 2004. The total range of data from 2004 to 2018 was 6966881 which was not collated and aggregated. Disaggregate analysis of data was provided in this paper for last 15 years. According to the concentration of migrants from 2004 to 2018, sixty-four districts of Bangladesh was divided into 4 migration intensity areas using statistical Quartile method. GIS technique was used to show the distribution of migration in four intensity areas. The sharp variation in the intensity of overseas migrations across the different districts of Bangladesh will give us new insights for policy that links overseas migration as a panacea for some of the development challenges that the country faces.

This paper is divided into four sections. Besides the introduction, migration policy and regulatory regime, trends and characteristics of migrants and regional dimension of migration in Bangladesh are discussed in this paper. The final section discusses the scope and potential of migration as an instrument for addressing the development challenges of Bangladesh.

Historical context of migration and migration policy in Bangladesh

Historically Bangladesh has been a country of emigration rather than a destination for immigrants. The government of Bangladesh has been taking various actions to facilitate the process of migration for Bangladeshi labour to guarantee the maximum profit from migration to the national economy. In the discussions on gender equality, social protection, and social inclusion in the plan documents there is hardly any mention of overseas migration. This is an interesting fact and needs further analysis:

---

18 "Rise in remittance in 2020: Bangladesh one of three large recipients", *The Daily Star,* (February 20) 2021, Retrieved on April 25, 2021.

19 Bangladesh Bank, *Quarterly Report on Remittance Inflows,* (July-September) 2018.

20 UN Migration Network, *Significance, scope and contributions of migration in the context of Eighth-Five Year Plan of Bangladesh,* Seminar on Position Paper on Migration for 8FYP, held on GED, Planning Commission, Dhaka, Bangladesh (March 12, 2020).

Why the social externalities of overseas migration do not get much significance and why it is seen more for its economic gains than its socio-cultural influence. Could overseas migration not play any role in gender empowerment? The historical context of migration in the country provides a good entry point on how patriarchy and other social-cultural presuppositions have filtered the government policy for overseas migration.

The missing migrant women: the history of migration policy

Historically migration and migration policy has been important in Bangladesh since its inception. The formal policy framework was articulated much later, mostly post 2006. However, indirectly the government did think and intervene in the processes of migration. In Bangladesh, though, international labour migration formally started in 1976, but female migration started substantially after 15 years, closer to 1991.[21] The key reason for this was the government policies of the times prevented labour migration of women from Bangladesh.[22] By excluding a large part of the population from migrating, not only gender relations were impacted but also in purely economic terms the gains from migration were limited with overall rates of migration remaining low till as late as early 2000.

After the independence of Bangladesh, there was no concrete policy to either encourage or discourage female migration. So, women could only migrate either individually or through the channel of private recruitment agencies. However, in early 1981, the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) put a ban on overseas employment on semi-skilled and un-skilled women workers.[23] It has been claimed that a memorandum was placed by the Bangladeshi association of migrant workers of Kuwait to the visiting minister of Bangladesh in Kuwait, asking to put restrictions on female migration from Bangladesh and the government of Bangladesh to oblige. The motivation to secure this decision was to protect women's safety and dignity by this policy. Later between 1988 and 1997 total ban was replaced by discretion, where the government took flexibility in its own hand to allow women workers to migrate under specific conditions. However, this did not last long. In November 1997, GoB again re-executed a complete ban on the migration of women including un-skilled,

---

21 M. Nurul Islam, (n.d), *op. cit.*

22 N. Oishi, *Women in Motion Women in Motion: Globalization, State Policies, and Labour Migration in Asia*, Stanford, (CA: Stanford University Press 2005); D. Belanger, & M. Rahman, "Migrating against all the odds: International labour migration of Bangladeshi women", *Current Sociology,* 61(3), 2013, pp. 356- 373. doi:10.1177/0011392113484453.

23 MFA, *CEDAW and the Female Labour Migrants of Bangladesh,* (CEDAW UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women 2011), p. 7.

semi-skilled domestic aides or cleaners along with nurses, typists, secretarial assistants, garments, or factory workers in the name of protecting women. The exception to the international mobility of women workers was limited to only very few 'highly qualified professional women' like doctors, engineers, and teachers. This unconstitutional and discriminatory decision was contested by numerous civil society organizations and recruiting agents because it could even contribute to the illegal trafficking of women. Thus, in December 1997 the ban was lifted for all above-mentioned categories of women except un-skilled, semi-skilled domestic workers with some exceptions.[24] In 2003, the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment (MoEWOE) revised the migration policy and permitted unskilled or semi-skilled women to migrate who were above 35 years of age and in 2006, the government again relaxed the age limit of female migrants and reduced it from 35 to 25 years except for the cleaners.[25]

The impact of this regulatory change and the opening of the migration market for women was dramatic. Within few years of this regulatory change female migrants amongst total migrants in Bangladesh increased from 1% in 2004 to 5% in 2009. The women migrant workers who were invisible from 1991 to 2002 were now beginning to become visible. This visibility had nothing to do with the choice of women to work or not rather the control of the State, through its regulatory control, over women's labour to work. This change happened in stages. In 2003 when the government amended its policy to allow migration of women workers from professionals to skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled workers up to the age of 35 years women showed up in the migrant numbers. After that, in 2006, the removal of the restriction of age from 35 to 25 gave a huge impetus to women workers to join the global supply chains in the overseas garment sector.[26] This historical background of women's overseas migration in Bangladesh has to be kept in mind when this paper discusses the trends in migration, across gender using the BMET data.

Governance framework: Policy framework post-2006, legislative framework, government departments/ authorities and programs and policy

The prominent laws and policies initiatives that are associated with overseas migration in Bangladesh includes the Overseas Employment Policy of 2006, the Overseas Employment and Migrants' Act of 2013. The purpose of these initiatives

---

24 Ibid, pp. 7-8.

25 Ibid, pp. 8-9; H. Sultana, A. Fatima, "Factors influencing migration of female workers: a case of Bangladesh." *IZA Journal of Develop Migration* 7(1), 2017. doi.org/10.1186/s40176-017-0090-6.

26 Ibid, p. 6.

comprises: to reduce the cost of migration, provide better information to the potential migrant, provide security against exploitation, reduce cheating by middlemen.[27] Formally, Bangladesh adopted Overseas Employment Policy in 2006 which was revised in 2016 to encourage overseas employment. Likewise, in other few countries, Bangladesh has incorporated migration into its national planning process since the Sixth Five Years Plan (FY2010-FY2015) onwards.[28] Whereas, 6th FYP focused on increasing the number of skilled labour force and the 7th FYP recognized "migration as an integral part of development process of the country by creating employment for a large number of workers."[29] The 2030 Agenda which sets various development priorities outlined through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be achieved by 2030 comprises many targets devoted to migration (IOM, 2019). In the vision 2021 document, (the Perspective Plan 2010-2021) among its 12 specific development goals, four of them were directly related to migration.[30]

In addition, Bangladesh as a member state of IOM welcomed Migration Government Framework (MiGOF), the internationally agreed document to administer migration coherently and comprehensively. The government of Bangladesh has laid out its Governance Framework in a document entitled 'Bangladesh Migration Governance Framework, 2019'. The key objectives, especially concerning overseas migration that the document identifies are to promote the socio-economic welfare of migrants; to facilitate the movement of people; to ensure migration in a safe, arranged and decent way.[31] The government has been encouraging citizens to sell their labour overseas, it is therefore expected that the government will provide full support to the migrants. This support entails both the creation of institutional framework as well as policy programs. The institutional framework involved creating the legislative framework as well as government departments and authorities. Not only this, the Government is also dovetailing the labour market in the country to meet the skill labour requirements abroad. In addition, to provide quality training government has integrated all technical and vocational education and training institutions under BTEB (Bangladesh Technical Education Board). The GoB has also developed a BMET Action Plan on Skills Development and Migration Management approved in

---

27 S.A. Ali *et al., op. cit.* p. 9.

28 IOM (2019), *op. cit.*, p.12.

29 GED, 7th Five Year Plan FY2016-FY2020: Accelerating Growth, Empowering Citizens. (Bangladesh Planning Commission 2015), p. 48.

30 UN Migration Network, *op. cit.*

31 IOM (2019), *op. cit.*, p. 45.

November 2017. Moreover, formal partnerships between financial and non-financial institutions are being built to draw out the best advantages of remittances and to create more balanced and geographically dispersed foreign exchange centres in the country of destination. Bilateral labour agreements are also part of these efforts, taking initiatives in establishing such agreements with more governments. The government's view was that labour agreements are the primary driving force providing legal frameworks for labour migration.—Bangladesh has signed some bilateral labour agreements (BLAs) which are formal treaties, and less formal memorandum of understandings (MOUs). Such initiatives government believes are significant for not only creating potential markets for different types of skills, but also for creating opportunities for better negotiations on worker's rights in the host countries.[32]

Migration trends and characteristics of migrants

Using the published but not collated and aggregated data provided by BMET this section captures the trend of migration in Bangladesh from 1976, and in much greater detail from the year 2004. Between the years 2004 to 2018 Bangladesh sent 6966881 migrants. The overall stock of overseas migrants from Bangladesh from 1976 is provided in Table 1 below. One can see that on a decadal basis, the total stock of migrants has grown at the rate of 10, 7, and 4 per cent per annum in the last three decades. (Table 1). If we look at the year-wise data, not decadal change, the positively sloping trend line in the graph suggests (Figure 1) that the total number of migrants has steadily increased from 1976 onwards.

Table 1: Total migrants and rate of migration in Bangladesh between 1976 and 2020

Year	Total Number	Compound growth rate (%)
1976-1990	827700	
1991-2000	2154983	10
2001-2010	4149326	7
2011-2020	5984943	4

Source: Compiled data from BMET website, 2021

32 UN Migration Network, *op. cit.*

Figure 1: Total number of migrants from Bangladesh from 1976-2020

Source: Compiled data from BMET, 2021
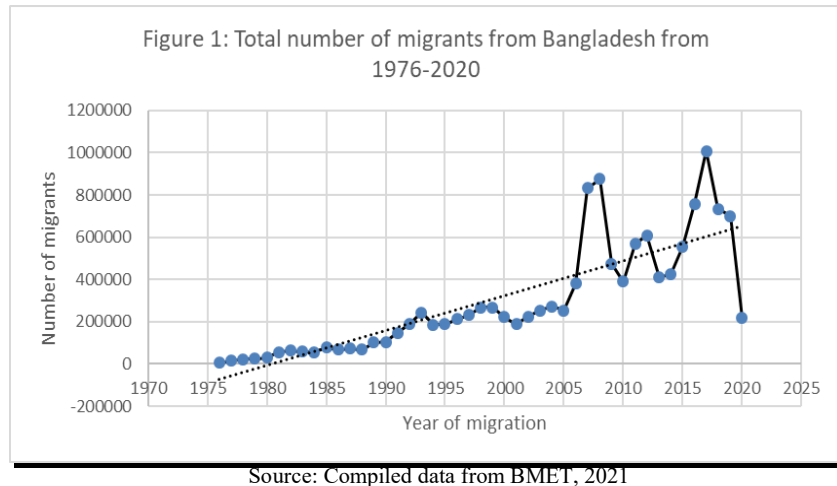
Figure 2 reveals the year-to-year changes where the migration has been different from the trend rates of migration. From a total of 125825 migrants in 2004 the numbers increased to a total of 619353 migrants in 2008. After a brief blip, the upwards flow of migrants again resumed from 2010 onwards crossing the 2008 levels in 2016. It is a bit premature here to go into the major reasons behind these changes in numbers but suffice it to say here that there were restrictions in labour migration to several top destination countries in Bangladesh that made this difference. For example, labour mobility restrictions were prominent for Malaysia between 2007-2012, for Saudi Arabia between 2010-2016, for UAE from 2012 onwards, and for Kuwait from 2016 onwards. By 2017 total migrants in Bangladesh almost reached the government target of one million labour migration per year. These restrictions to mobility may explain some year-to-year variations but finally, it is the demand of labour in the destination countries that is the key factor that can explain the aggregate numbers and changes therein. By 2018, the flow of migrants had again declined to 700481. If we look at the aggregate stock of migrants, we find that 8.4% of Bangladesh's overseas workers migrated between 2004 and 2006 and 21% of them migrated between 2006 and 2009. Some of the factors that are discussed in this paper to explain the aggregate numbers, year to year variation in these numbers and distribution across age, gender, skill, origin area and destination are the restrictions to mobility of labour in destination countries, the impact of demand factors, in particular the global economic and financial crisis, that would inevitably impact the

outflow of migrant workforce[33] and the role of regulatory policy and labour market conditions in Bangladesh. We will discuss the role of these factors in different sections of this paper.

Figure 2: Trend of migration from Bangladesh from 2004 to 2018
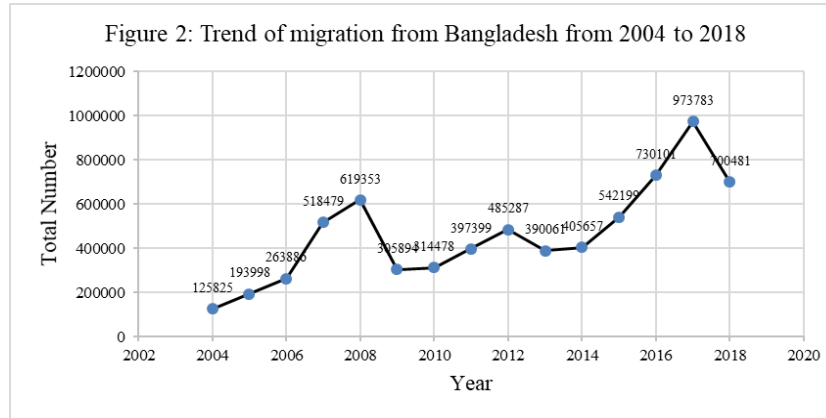
Source: Compiled data from BMET, 2019

To get real insights about labour mobility and assessing its impact, this paper will look at migration at three levels of disaggregation – gender, origin region and destination.

Gender disaggregation

Disaggregation of migrants across gender adds much richer dimension to understanding migration in Bangladesh. It is interesting to notice that how in recent years it is the increase in female migrants that is substantially impacting the migration trends and numbers from Bangladesh. This is a very significant shift because, as mentioned earlier, the government has only very recently allowed women from the country to migrate, and their mobility was curtailed earlier. It is a fact in Bangladesh that men started migration in 1976, which is officially 15 years earlier than females, and women's international mobility officially started from 1991 but continued to suffer numerous restrictions till 2006 (as we mentioned earlier in this paper). When we look at the distribution of male and female migrants amongst total migrants from 2004 onwards, we find that from 2013 women migrants cross the 10% mark (Figure 3).

---

33 BBS, "International Migration from Bangladesh: Socio-economic and Regional characteristics", *Population Monograph of Bangladesh*, vol. 3, 2015.
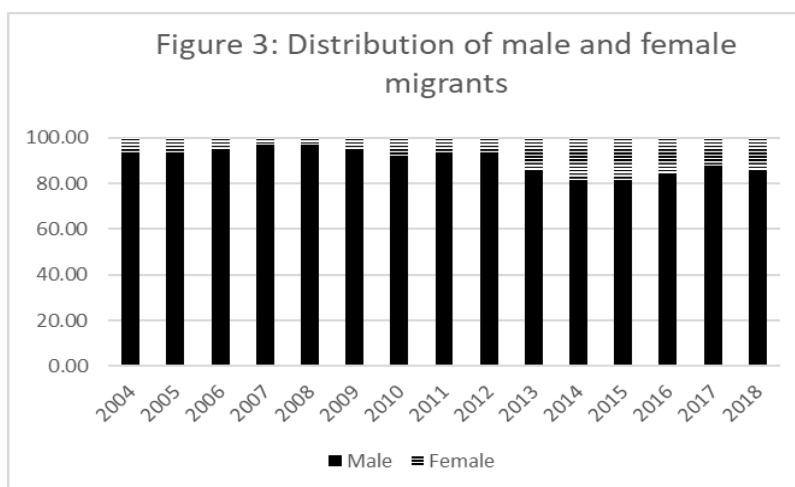
Source: Compiled data from BMET, 2019
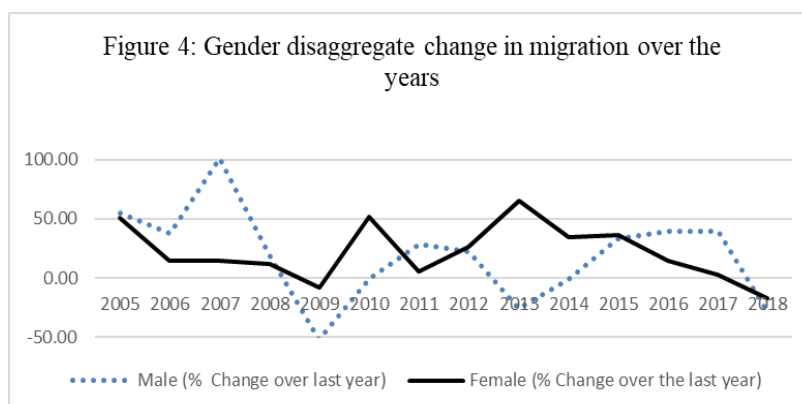
Source: Compiled data from BMET 2019

From Figure 4, it is also quite clear that the increase in female migration was higher than rates of male migration between 2008 to 2010 and between 2012 to 2015. This higher growth of women migrants was on a very small base, as the previous graph shows. Women migrants were only a small percentage of total migrants, reaching their peak in 2015, close to 19% (Figure 3). It was the outcome of bilateral agreement with Saudi Arabia in February 2015. The government of Saudi Arabia agreed to take women migrants without any cost since Bangladesh government was dedicated to 200,000 female labour over two consecutive years in 2015 and 2016. This sinking

migration cost also affects the labour market in the Middle East and encourages women to take advantage of migration more positively than men.[34]

The fall in migration in 2018 to the growing trend of later years could perhaps be an outcome of the fact that a significant number of women migrants had to return from Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia sent back 1500 women workers in 2018 and above 1000 in 2019.[35]

The age structure of migrants further reveals the gender-disaggregated characteristics of migration from Bangladesh. The majority of male migrants (more than 80%) who went overseas were from the age group of 18 to 40 years. On the other hand, sixty per cent of the total women migrants were between the age of 31 and 40 years (See Table 2). This suggests that the demography that got a significant representation in overseas migration was predominantly in the age group between 30 and 40 for women and for men even the younger cohorts of less than 30 gained mobility along with those in the age group of 30 to 40 years.

Table 2: Age distribution of migrants

Age range	Male	Female	Total
18- 30	44.09	30.85	42.68
31-40	42.70	60.25	44.56
41-50	11.60	8.43	11.27
50+	1.61	0.46	1.49

Source: Compiled data from BMET 2019

Table 3: Age distribution of migrants in three years interval from 2004 to 2018

Age range	2004-2006		2007-2009		2010-2012		2013-2015		2016-2018	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
18-30	61.66	70.47	32.68	41.15	44.91	30.84	34.77	16.91	51.64	34.77
31-40	29.93	23.96	47.26	44.49	42.59	60.05	51.23	72.51	38.53	58.04
41-50	7.40	5.14	17.58	13.46	10.70	8.58	12.25	9.90	8.83	6.96
50+	1.01	0.44	2.48	0.90	1.80	0.53	1.75	0.68	1.00	0.23

Source: Compiled data from BMET, 2019

---

34 ILO, Migration and gender in Bangladesh: An irregular landscape, (Geneva 2021).

35 A. Ara, "Migration of skilled workforce Bangladesh's future choice", *the Financial Express,* (December19), 2019. Retrieved on August 23, 2021.

A closer look at the data, at the three-year interval, starting in 2004, shows that from 2007 onwards among the women migrants, the share of women in the age group between 30 and 40 has consistently increased, while for men the pattern is more varied (Table 3).

Regional variations of migration
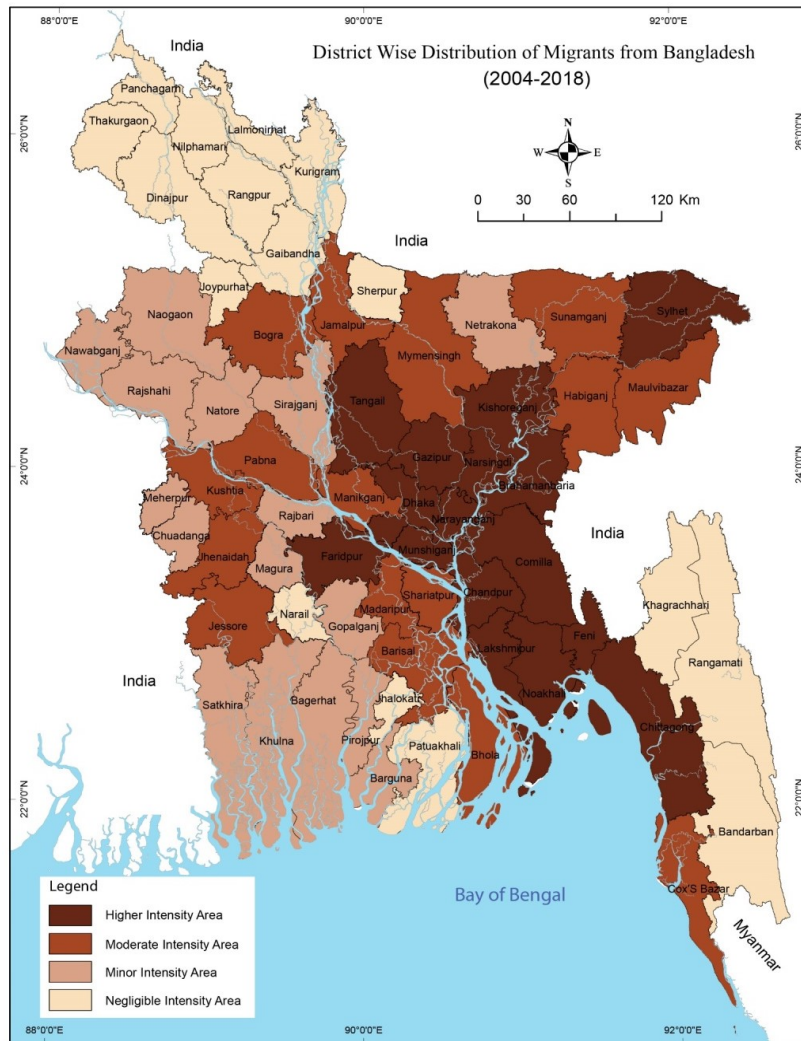
Map 1: Geographical spread of migration in Bangladesh

Using Quartile method, the sixty-four districts of Bangladesh has been divided into 4 areas according to the intensity of migrants, namely, Higher intensity areas; Moderate intensity areas; Minor intensity area and areas with Negligible migration (See Map 1).

According to BMET data, out of the total stock of migrants who have migrated overseas for work between 2004 to 2018, 63% are from higher intensity area and 23% are from moderate-intensity area, the remaining 10% are from Minor intensity area, and 4% are from Negligible intensity area (See Figure 5).
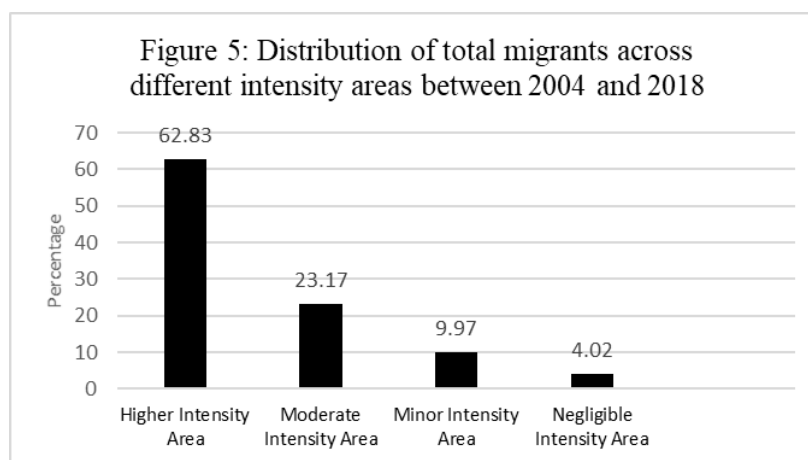
Source: Compiled data from BMET, 2019

The higher and moderate migration intensity areas cover most of the districts from Dhaka, Cottogram and Sylhet divisions. On the other hand, minor and negligible intensity areas comprise mainly the North-West part of Bangladesh. Compiled data from BBS and BMET indicates that the lower the poverty rate, the higher the migration rate across different intensity areas (Table 4).

In addition, mapping of the migration intensity areas with development levels and nature of development reveals some interesting insights. Geographical location, climatic situation, socio-economic condition, and historical background of different regions together can perhaps explain the migration variance in different regions.

Dhaka the capital city and the major port city Chottogram have appeared as the two growth centres in Bangladesh, directing both economic growth and urbanization process. On the other hand, historically, the North-West part of the country is characterized by higher incidence of poverty. Because of the natural border by two major rivers, the Ganges and the Brahmaputra, the poor connectivity between the North-West part of the country and these two metropolises Dhaka and Chottogram (explicitly known as the home to domestic and international trading hubs) was not smooth.[36]

Table 4: Average poverty rate (HCR) and migration rate across different migration intensity areas

Migration Intensity Area	Poverty Rate	Migration rate
Higher Intensity Area	16.06	62.83
Moderate Intensity Area	22.85	23.17
Minor Intensity Area	31.38	9.97
Negligible Intensity Area	39.58	4.02

Source: Compiled data from Poverty Maps of Bangladesh 2016, key findings, BBS, page 19.
        And compiled data for migration rate from BMET.

If we have a look at the socio-economic conditions in areas that provide minimal overseas labour, one can notice that they are mainly agricultural and that too of the kind that is highly dependent on seasonal factors. These regions are more often impacted by floods, drought and other natural calamities. The low economic opportunity in these regions compels labour from these regions to migrate mostly to large cities like Dhaka and other urban centres. Much of this internal migration is seasonal. These are also the regions that have low household incomes, high rates of unemployment, inadequate infrastructure in terms of transport, communication, banking and microcredit facilities, low wages, and low levels of public expenditure, etc.[37] The unpredictability of nature combined with low development provisioning limits the possibilities for the households in these regions to build the necessary financial stability that is needed to explore overseas migration and sustain them through the period of negotiating and exploring the distant job market. This is quite

---

36 The World Bank, *Migration, Sorting and Regional Inequality: Evidence from Bangladesh*. Policy Research Working Paper 4616, (Washington D.C. 2008).

37 N. Islam and A.N.K. Noman, "Estimated Regional Disparity for Northern Bangladesh." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)* Vol. 20 (11), 2015, pp. 59-63. DOI: 10.9790/0837-201115963.

consistent with the understanding coming from the migration literature. Thomas Faist in his study, argues that social and economic inequality limits cross-border migration and at the same time if migration begins from these regions, then the impact of migration on society is also tremendous.[38] The implication of this insight for policy is significant. If the policy regime sees migration as an effective way to decrease the unemployment rates and boost the economic growth rate in Bangladesh, what the above evidence suggests is that additional initiatives are needed in these backward regions for them to gain from overseas migration. Without specific initiatives only households in better-off geographies can afford the migration cost that is required to enter the overseas labour market.[39] This phenomenon of households in remote, less developed areas losing out in the race of overseas migration is historically true for Bangladesh. Similar finding is reinforced by another study[40] "A profile of the Bangladeshi community in East London*.*" It is found that the Sylhet region was the pioneer region of migration from Bangladesh. The *Sylhetis* (people of Sylhet) who went to Britain were not from the poorest sections rather most of them came from middle-income groups who could at least afford the cost of the sea passage. Now, the migrant families enjoying their status and living standards in their neighbourhood in Bangladesh as landlords. So clearly gains have been made by migration but the gains have percolated and contributed to improving the lot that was not the most disadvantaged to begin with.

Not only the socio-economic development of the regions but the social capital of a region is also an important determinant of migration of people. A region that sends migrants abroad creates a source of information for aspiring migrants. This information can be on important aspects like working conditions, accommodation, salary, skills, etc. that can substantially make a difference in competing for jobs overseas. It is well known from the experience and literature both that migrants help their friends, relatives and acquaintances in searching and getting job and settling down once they reach their destination. Mostly, the network is not same everywhere as it depends on the total number of migrants from any particular region in a given period. Thus, the lack of a threshold number of migrants from the less developed

---

38 T. Faist, "Cross-Border Migration and Social Inequalities", Annual *Review of Sociology*, vol. 42(1), 2016, pp. 323–346. doi:10.1146/annurev-soc-081715-074302.

39 Ibid.

40 S. Carey and A. Shukur, "A profile of the Bangladeshi community in East London", *New Community,* 12(3), 1985, pp. 405–417. doi:10.1080/1369183x.1985.9975918.

regions, in absence of social networking, supportive persuasion and exchange of information for migration, further reinforces, the regional gap of migration.[41]

Along with connectivity, development levels, and threshold numbers of migrants another important factor reinforcing the disadvantage of far-flung North-West regions for migration is the dynamics of migration and the very nature of international labour market. The remoteness of these regions gives them minuscule opportunities to deliver on time the short notice that recruitment delegates give to individuals and agents to arrange for the human resources. The short turnaround demanded by those seeking workers is more easily met by the labour market in Chottogram, Sylhet, Noakhali, Cumilla and Dhaka. Sometimes the foreign agents arrive without adequate prior announcement and the complete recruitment process is so fast that prospective candidates from the distant region cannot even compete. The significance of these factors can also be judged from the fact that the high-intensity regions categorized using the contemporary data are also the ones that have been historically labour exporting regions from Bangladesh, much before the official recording of migrant information from 1976 onwards. Study shows how Noakhali districts along with Sylhet were the first to avail the prospect of overseas employment as crews of the steamship companies operating in the Far East. After the independence of Bangladesh, Cumilla and Noakhali districts of Chottogram division had a significantly established rural formal sector and a large supply of skilled tradesmen. So, the skills required by foreign employers were easily available in these districts, which contributed to the increasing size of manpower export from these districts. World Bank staff working paper on "Labour migration from Bangladesh to Middle East" suggests that even before the oil resource boom, more than thirty years ago, people from Bangladesh, especially from the district of Chottogram, started to migrate in large numbers to the Middle East countries in search of work. Even before that people from Chottogram had trade relations and communications with Arabian traders. Most of these Bangladeshis have been staying in the UAE countries, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Qatar.[42]

What is being suggested here is that migration remains concentrated in few districts and this concentration remains unchanged. Various historical and contemporary factors that have contributed to these dynamics have been discussed here. From a policy perspective, the lack of spread of government's migration agency offices away

---

41 BBS, *op. cit.*
42 S.A. Ali *et al., op. cit.*

from the key urban centres to the distant less developed regions adds to the limited reach of overseas migration as an option in the most underdeveloped regions in the country. Although, BMET, the central migration agency in Bangladesh has taken various steps to enhance the roles of DEMOs (District Employment and Manpower Offices) still, migration services at citizen's doorsteps in remote and distant areas are still a dream. It needs to be mentioned here that amongst the women migrants, the spread across regions is a bit more dispersed compared to men, particularly after 2012 (Table 5).

Table 5: Share of male-female migrants across migration intensity areas.

Year	Sex	Higher Intensity Area	Moderate Intensity Area	Minor Intensity Area	Negligible Intensity Area
2004-2006	Male	69.54	19.92	7.73	2.81
	Female	62.83	25.35	8.12	3.7
2007-2009	Male	60.47	23.81	11.32	4.4
	Female	58.66	27.21	10	4.12
2010-2012	Male	67.72	21.18	7.74	3.36
	Female	56.7	27.61	10.29	5.4
2012-2015	Male	64.02	21.91	10.2	3.87
	Female	50.36	30.41	12.46	6.77
2016-2018	Male	63.29	22.91	10.08	3.72
	Female	49.52	31.27	12.47	6.74

Source: Compiled data from BMET, 2019

Figure 6 below gives the share within each continent across various regions in Bangladesh. More than two-third of workers went overseas from higher and moderate migration concentration regions and the distribution among the four intensity areas is more dispersed in case of Asia and Africa compared to other continents.

Figure 6: Continent-wise share of migrants across the migration intensity areas of Bangladesh from 2004 to 2018

	Africa	Asia	Europe	North America	Oceania	South America
Negligible Intensity Area	6.81	3.98	1.49	2.21	2.36	1.95
Minor Intensity Area	15.81	9.87	5.42	6.31	7.43	3.25
Moderate Intensity Area	27.05	23.04	27.36	19.98	16.91	9.74
High Intensity Area	50.33	63.11	65.74	71.50	73.30	85.06
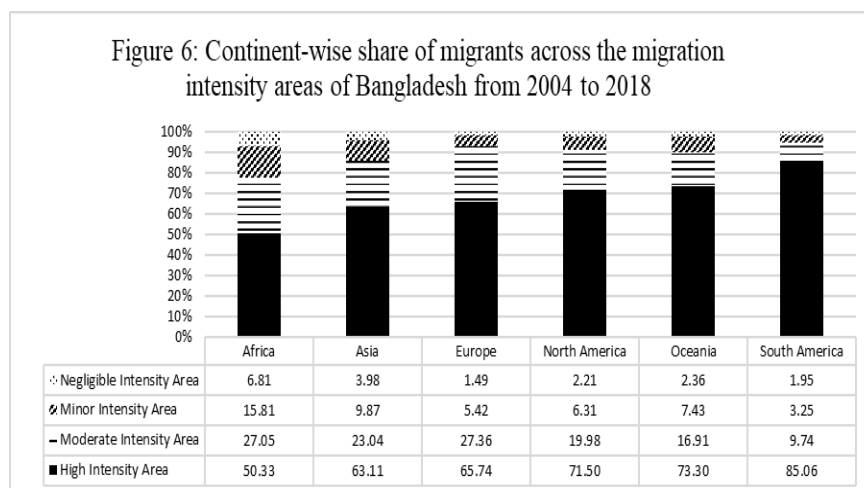
Source: Compiled data from BMET, 2019

The dynamics of labour market between source and host countries: Destination and skills

Asia hosts 96.44% of men and women migrants from Bangladesh. Other continents attract just a minuscule number of migrants; Africa (2.46%), Europe (0.98%), North America (0.01%) and Oceania (0.10%) (Figure 7). This percentage varies between men and women across the continents. Out of the total migrants going to Asia and Africa, approximately 90% were men and 10% were women. For North America, the share of male and female were 93% and 7% respectively. However, for other continents, the female share was very less (only around 1%) compared to the male share (around 99%) overall during this period (Figure 8). The pattern of male and female was not very different if we look at the migration numbers in three-year intervals in these fifteen years. In the last fifteen years, it can be observed from Table 6 below that males were always more than women across continents but in different time intervals, the proportion varied.

Table 6: Year-wise distribution of migrants across continents

Year	Gender	Africa	Asia	Europe	North America	Oceania
2004-06	Male	85.88	94.06	98.45	94.92	99.04
	Female	14.12	5.94	1.55	5.08	0.96
2007-09	Male	91.96	96.56	98.46	91.27	97.77
	Female	8.04	3.44	1.54	8.73	2.23

2010-12	Male	89.1	92.9	99.08	92.11	99.1
	Female	10.9	7.1	0.92	7.89	0.9
2013-15	Male	86.46	82.47	98.72	92.28	98.97
	Female	13.54	17.53	1.28	7.72	1.03
2016-18	Male	93.75	85.94	97.26	93.8	99.44
	Female	6.25	14.06	2.74	6.2	0.56
2004-18	Male	89.88	89.28	98.64	92.85	99.19
	Female	10.12	10.72	1.36	7.15	0.81

Source: Compiled data from BMET, 2019

Figure 7: Share of total migrants from Bangladesh across the continents, 2004-2018
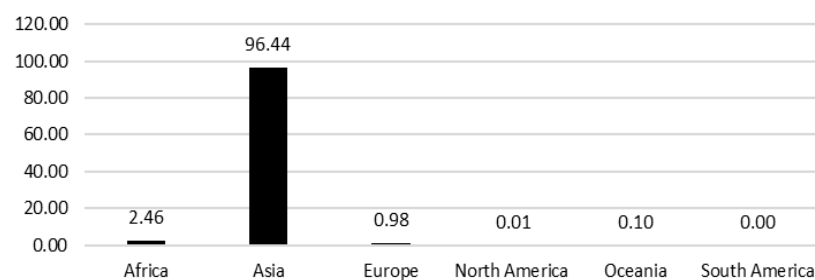
Source: Compiled data from BMET, 2019

Figure 8: Ratio of male-female migrants from Bangladesh to different continents, 2004-2018

	Africa	Asia	Europe	North America	Oceania	South America
Male	89.88	89.28	98.64	92.85	99.19	99.35
Female	10.12	10.72	1.36	7.15	0.81	0.65
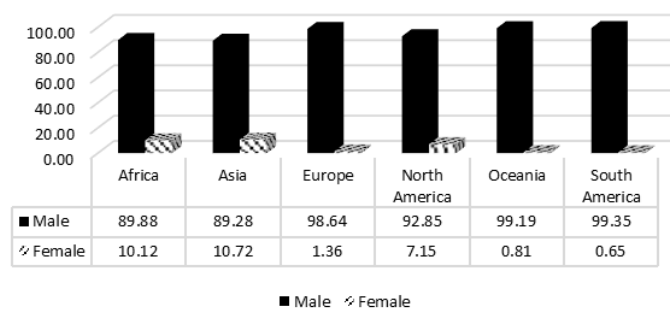
Source: Compiled data from BMET, 2019

Unlike other Asian countries, the key common destinations (for both men and women) of Bangladeshi migrants are GCC countries because of low cost of migration and political candor.[43] and a lesser proportion go to South-East and South Asian countries. In particular, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Oman, where, Malaysia and Qatar were additional important destinations for men and Jordan and Lebanon for women migrants. (Figure 9 and 10 and Table 7). Men are migrating to Middle East and East Asian countries, while women are attracted mostly to Middle East. Unlike the men, women migrants are concentrated in one destination country. Saudi Arabia is the top-rank host country for 35% female migrants and Jordan is in the second position with an 18% share of female migrants. This seems to be a direct outcome of the bilateral agreements with Saudi Arabia and Jordan which focus on women domestic workers. Apart from these two destinations, UAE (16%), Lebanon (12%), Oman (10%), and other countries (9%) are the other destinations for women migrants from Bangladesh.
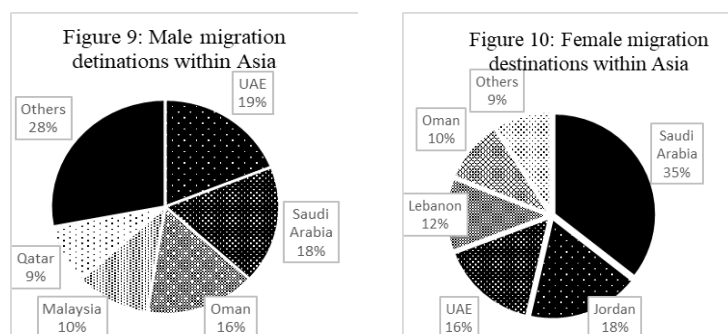
Source: Compiled data from BMET, 2019

Table 7: Top five destinations, 2004-2018

Male		Female	
Destination Countries	Total	Destination Countries	Total
UAE	1181071	Saudi Arabia	262795
Saudi Arabia	1111027	Jordan	133060
Oman	978994	UAE	115782
Malaysia	661019	Lebanon	86444
Qatar	552462	Oman	73910
Others	1743859	Others	66458
Total Male	6228432	Total female	738449

Source: Compiled data from BMET, 2019

---

43 Rahman, *op. cit.,* pp. 209-210.

If we look at numbers for male and female migrants across the top 5 destinations, it varies from year to year (Table 8 and 9). The destination for migrants is dependent on domestic and destination factors. Some of the factors that are outside the ambit of Bangladesh's own policies but yet they have influenced the number of overseas workers from Bangladesh is discussed below. For men, Saudi Arabia is a major country of destination. However, labour market of Saudi Arabia was open for Bangladeshi labour, except those willing to work as domestic help, from 2010 to 2016. That is why Saudi Arabia was not present among the top five destinations between 2009 to 2014 for both men and women. However, in 2009 few women (373) were employed in Saudi Arabia. The drop of migrants to Saudi Arabia can also be related to the ongoing "Saudization" policy, which was first introduced in 2011 and its key aim was to reduce countries' dependence on overseas workers.[44] The United Arab Emirates was the top destination for Bangladeshi male migrants for consecutive 5 years (2008- 2012) and before in 2006 also. The labour market of the United Arab Emirates banned Bangladeshi male workers since 2012.[45] As a result, from the following year, the share of male workers declined fast, while the share of female labour migrants to the UAE increased. Kuwait was also a dominant destination for migrants and was among the top four from 2004 to 2006. However, Kuwait stopped employing Bangladeshi labour in 2007, after they claimed they had found anomalies in the recruitment processes and participation of some workers from Bangladesh in unlawful activities. In 2014, Kuwait decided to remove the ban and permit Bangladeshis to work, but in May 2016, following security reports of irregularities Kuwait again declared a prohibition on male household workers.[46] Therefore, after 2006 Bangladesh lost the Kuwaiti labour market. However, in recent years labour migration to Oman and Qatar increased rapidly both for males and females. Qatar attracted Bangladeshi migrants and placed it gained prominence in 2011 for males and from 2013 for female migrants (Table 8 and 9). South-East Asian countries are popular as a destination for male migrants of Bangladesh. In particular, it is seen as a vital destination for temporary migrant workers of Bangladesh in most years, except 2017. Perception is that the Malaysian labour market is unstable for Bangladeshi

---

44 ADBI, OECD and ILO, Labor Migration in Asia: Increasing the Development Impact of Migration through Finance and Technology, (Manila 2018).

45 "UAE labour market still closed to workers from Bangladesh" *The New Age,* (February 13), 2020. Retrieved on April 24, 2021.

46 T. Habib, "Kuwait re-instates ban on Bangladeshi workers Residency permit irregularities cited as major reason for ban", *World Gulf,* (March 5), 2018. Retrieved from https://gulfnews.com/world/gulf/kuwait/kuwait-re-instates-ban-on-bangladeshi-workers-1.2182735.

migrants. It was in the top rank in 2007 and 2008 and again in 2017 and 2018. In between the flow of migration declined significantly and Malaysia was not the top destination for Bangladeshi labour. This is often attributed to Malaysia's banned hiring of labour from Bangladesh on numerous occasions. First, the ban was placed in 1999 and lifted in 2007. The Malaysian government stopped importing labour from Bangladesh between 2009 and 2012 and resumed it again in 2014. In 2018, government of Malaysia again restricted labour recruitment from Bangladesh. There was a bilateral agreement between Bangladesh and Libya regarding labour migration in 2008. As a result, a vast number of Bangladeshi migrant workers started going to Libya in 2009 and 2010 (Table 8 and 9). However, the flow has declined significantly since the war in Libya in 2011. In its place, Lebanon and Jordan have become gradually significant destinations, especially for female domestic workers or cleaners (Table 9). Apart from Saudi Arabia and UAE, these are the other two countries that have facilitated the significance of female labour migration in Bangladesh.[47]

What the above discussion suggests is that the destination, as well as the quantum of labour going out of Bangladesh for overseas employment, is very significantly influenced by the labour market policies in the destination countries. The United Arab Emirates has been out of bounds for Bangladeshi workers since 2012.[48] Saudi Arabia banned the employment of Bangladeshi labour for 6 years from 2010 to 2016, except for those working as domestic help.

Table 8: Top five destinations for male migrants year to year (parenthesis shows the percentage)

Destination rank						
Year	1	2	3	4	5	others
2004	KSA (46)	UAE (20)	Kuwait (18)	Singapore (4)	Bahrain (4)	Others (8)
2005	KSA (32)	UAE (26)	Kuwait (20)	Bahrain (5)	Singapore (5)	Others (12)
2006	UAE (32)	KSA (27)	Kuwait (10)	Singapore (7)	Malaysia (6)	Others (18)
2007	Malaysia (38)	UAE (24)	KSA (22)	Singapore (5)	Oman (2)	Others (9)
2008	UAE (45)	Malaysia (19)	KSA (13)	Singapore (7)	Oman (7)	Others (9)

47 B. Etzold, *op. cit.*

48 UAE labour market, *op. cit.*

2009	UAE (49)	Oman (10)	Singapore (9)	Libya (7)	Bahrain (6)	Others (18)
2010	UAE (52)	Oman (13)	Singapore (11)	Bahrain (6)	Libya (4)	Others (14)
2011	UAE (50)	Oman (24)	Singapore (10)	Qatar (3)	Bahrain (3)	Others (10)
2012	UAE (36)	Oman (29)	Singapore (10)	Qatar (6)	Bahrain (4)	Others (15)
2013	Oman (37)	Singapore (17)	Qatar (16)	Bahrain (7)	Maldives (6)	Others (17)
2014	Oman (28)	Qatar (24)	Singapore (16)	Maldives (7)	Bahrain (7)	Others (18)
2015	Qatar (26)	Oman (25)	Singapore (12)	KSA (8)	Malaysia (7)	Others (22)
2016	Oman (28)	Qatar (18)	KSA (12)	Bahrain (11)	Singapore (9)	Others (22)
2017	KSA (53)	Malaysia (11)	Oman (9)	Qatar (9)	Kuwait (6)	Others (11)
2018	KSA (29)	Malaysia (28)	Qatar (12)	Oman (10)	Singapore (7)	Others (14)

Source: Compiled data from BMET, 2019

Table 9: Top five destinations for female migrants year to year (parenthesis shows the percentage)

	Destination rank					
Year	1	2	3	4	5	Others
2004	UAE (35)	KSA (25)	Kuwait (16)	Jordan (12)	Bahrain (10)	Others (2)
2005	KSA (42)	UAE (27)	Jordan (11)	Kuwait (7)	Mauritius (6)	Others (6)
2006	UAE (41)	KSA (37)	Lebanon (5)	Oman (4)	Kuwait (4)	Others (9)
2007	KSA (39)	UAE (25)	Lebanon (16)	Oman (7)	Mauritius (5)	Others (8)
2008	Lebanon (37)	UAE (30)	KSA (18)	Malaysia (6)	Mauritius (4)	Others (5)
2009	Lebanon (53)	UAE (30)	Mauritius (10)	Jordan (3)	KSA (2)	Others (2)
2010	Lebanon (53)	UAE (26)	Mauritius (10)	Jordan (8)	Libya (1)	Others (2)
2011	Lebanon (48)	UAE (25)	Jordan (16)	Mauritius (6)	Oman (4)	Others (2)
2012	Jordan (32)	Lebanon (32)	UAE (17)	Oman (12)	Mauritius (5)	Others (3)
2013	Jordan (38)	UAE (24)	Lebanon ()19	Oman (11)	Qatar (4)	Others (5)
2014	UAE (30)	Jordan (26)	Lebanon (16)	Oman (15)	Qatar (9)	Others (4)
2015	UAE (23)	Jordan (21)	KSA (20)	Oman (16)	Lebanon (8)	Others (11)
2016	KSA (58)	Jordan (19)	Oman (11)	Qatar (5)	UAE (4)	Others (3)
2017	KSA (68)	Jordan (16)	Oman (8)	UAE (3)	Qatar (3)	Others (3)
2018	KSA (72)	Oman (11)	Jordan (9)	Qatar (3)	UAE (2)	Others (2)

Source: Compiled data from BMET, 2019

Malaysia too banned hiring of labour from Bangladesh on numerous occasions, from 1999 to 2007; 2009 to 2012 and again in 2018. Kuwait stopped employing Bangladeshi labours from 2007 to 2014 and again imposed restrictions in May 2016. In addition to the policies of the host countries, the demand in the host countries is

also influenced by the global economic conditions and competition from other countries. Recently, Nepal, Cambodia, and Vietnam have witnessed competitive migrant labour sending countries in Asia. The decline in oil prices and its consequences on the economic situation in the Middle East has also significantly influenced the demand for workers in the main destination regions for Asian workers.[49]

Needless to add that not only the demand side but the supply side (i.e., the conditions of labour market in the host country) also needs to be taken into account to fully comprehend the patterns of overseas migration. Skills have been used as an entry point to understanding this dimension here. Keeping in mind the skill composition of Bangladeshi labour migrants given by BMET, ten major- group categories have been aggregated into 4 categories in this paper. Namely, these are Professional, Skilled, Semi-skilled and Less-skilled migrants. In this paper, the three-digit code International Standard Classification of Occupation (ISCO-08) has been converted into a single-digit ISCO 10 major group to categorize the occupations of migrants from Bangladesh and these ten major- group categories have been again aggregated into 4 categories.

During the period 2004 to 2018, among male migrants, the number of skilled labour was highest, 48.11%, followed by semi-skilled (38.75%) and Less-skilled migrants (7.04%). And the female migrants most of the migrants were semi-skilled (57.36%) and skilled was 39.36% of the total women migrants (See Figure 11 and 12). Professionals constituted 6.11% of the total migrant pool among men and just 1.37% among women. The mobility of labour across skills varied over the years.

Figure 11: Skill-composition of male migrants of Bangladesh from 2004 to 2018

---
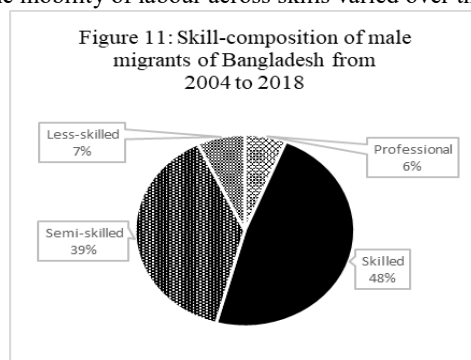
49 ADBI, OECD and ILO, *op. cit.*
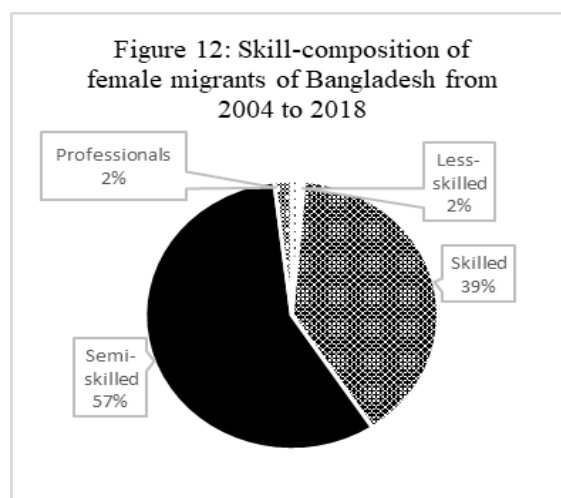
Source: Compiled data from BMET, 2019

Over time it is noticeable that men professionals from Bangladesh have increased, particularly after 2013 (Table 10). Skilled workers going overseas have by large gone down over time amongst men and semi-skilled have gone up. Amongst women workers move to overseas market by professionals have come down, skilled women workers finding job abroad have remained nearly the same over the years, except showing sharp fall between 2010-12. Semi-skilled women workers are finding more overseas work and less skilled are losing out. Notwithstanding the differences between men and women, overall, one can see that semi-skilled workers are finding jobs overseas from Bangladesh over time.

The growing demand for some professional categories in few high-demand destinations countries like Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman has triggered the increase in the share of professional male migrants. Interestingly, the detailed data collected from BMET reveals that among the professional category, more than 90% of them are specialist doctors, engineers, translators, and IT consultants. Amongst the women migrants, professional category consists HSE manager, industrial engineer, public relations officer, etc. Overall, women migrants are mostly those who are semi-skilled. Labour market within the country is deeply linked with what happens in the overseas labour market for Bangladesh workers. In the opening section of this paper, it is noted how there is an exodus of labour from the agricultural sector not finding enough avenues domestically in manufacturing and services. This pool of perhaps

less skilled workforce is finding some outlets in the overseas market. If this is true, it could perhaps be one reason for the seventh Plan to suggest that overseas migration provides 'a big cushion and softens the adverse effects of a slowdown in domestic job creation.

Table 10: Distribution of migrants by skill from Bangladesh between 2004 and 2018

Categories	SEX	2004-2006	2007-2009	2010-2012	2013-2015	2016-2018	Total
Professional	Male	3.95	2.44	2.15	8.56	9.97	6.11
Skilled		57.82	60.21	47.46	36.41	43.99	48.11
Semi-Skilled		24.72	28.01	46.6	50.58	39.14	38.75
Less- Skilled		13.5	9.34	3.78	4.45	6.9	7.04
Professional	Female	5.32	3.71	1.17	1.69	0.43	1.37
Skilled		45.73	52.41	19.94	31.64	47	39.36
Semi-Skilled		43.92	35.52	74.59	65.94	51.77	57.36
Less skilled		5.03	8.36	4.3	0.73	0.8	1.91
Professionals	All Migrants	4.03	2.48	2.08	7.37	8.64	5.61
Skilled		57.1	59.93	45.49	35.58	44.41	47.18
Semi-skilled		25.87	28.28	48.6	53.24	40.9	40.72
Less skilled		12.99	9.31	3.82	3.81	6.05	6.49

Source: Compiled data from BMET, 2019

The gains in poverty reduction could also be understood via this connection of overseas markets complimenting the domestic labour market. The loss of semi-skilled jobs in urban areas in sectors like garments, especially for women around 2012, could be another source of this pool of semi-skilled now seeking jobs abroad. The proportion of semi-skilled women workers going overseas does show a big jump in Table 10 from 2010 onwards. The seventh Plan also talks about specific challenges of youth employment. From amongst the women migrants, we know from the above discussion that overall sixty per cent of the total women migrants were in the age group of 31 to 40 years but specifically during the period between 2010 and 2012, women up to the age of 30 were more significantly seeking overseas employment. The limited gain to women as professionals in the international labour market is a reflection of low levels of professional education in the country. The restrictions on women to migrate and the control over age group that can migrate from Bangladesh is clearly the most significant reason explaining the limited presence of women from Bangladesh in the overseas labour market.

Conclusion

Studies on overseas migration from Bangladesh have looked at the overall patterns of international migration and examined the gender, age, occupation, and skill specificities of the migrants. This paper begins by suggesting that to understand the trends and characteristics of migration, we need to also examine the history of migration policy in Bangladesh. This history has immense significance for the women of the country. The paper establishes how the option for women from Bangladesh to use overseas migration as an instrument to find job and address poverty has been policy circumscribed, especially after the major policy shifts of 2003 and 2006. Besides the specific policy context of overseas migration, this paper explains migration patterns in terms of the restrictions to mobility of labour in destination countries and the impact of demand factors. The paper brings out another interesting fact. At the sub-national level, the BMET data reveals that the lower the relative poverty rate in a geographical area in Bangladesh the higher is the migration rate from these areas. Inter-temporally migration remains concentrated in a few districts and this concentration remains unchanged. Various historical and contemporary factors that have contributed to these dynamics are discussed in this paper. The lack of spread of government's migration agency offices away from the key urban centres to the distant less developed regions is identified as a policy lucane to explain the limited reach of overseas migration for the underdeveloped regions of the country. The paper also suggests that the unpredictability of nature combined with low development provisioning limits the possibilities for the households in these regions to build the necessary financial stability that is needed to explore overseas migration and sustain them through the period of negotiating and exploring the distant job market. On the supply side, the pool of less-skilled workforce pushed out from the agricultural sector and not finding avenues domestically in manufacturing and services, is finding an outlet in the overseas market. The gains in poverty reduction could therefore also be understood via this connection of overseas market complimenting the domestic labour market. The limited gain to women as professionals in the international labour market reflects low levels of professional education in the country. The restrictions on women to migrate and the control over age group that can migrate from Bangladesh is clearly the most significant reason explaining the limited presence of women from Bangladesh in the overseas labour market.

Blame Shifting: A Unique Phase in Bengali Children's Meaning Acquisition Process

Jennifar Jahan[*]

Abstract

'Blame shifting' or 'deflection' is generally a psychological process where something is passed over to someone else in an attempt to draw attention away. It is a type of defense regarded as emotionally unmannerly. But in this paper, blame shifting has been presented as a positive aspect, representing a general phase that children go through during their first language acquisition period. When children acquire meaning, they shift blame, that starts as a psychological process but linguistically represents the creative use of language in different ways. In this paper, I tried to present the phase of blame shifting of ten participant children as a medium of meaning construction in their first language acquisition process. In an attempt to break the stereotypical assumption of the term 'blame', this paper would try to reflect how children shift blame on others as a part of their language development by manipulating language use and cognitive intelligence.

Key words: Blame shifting, Defense mechanism, Meaning acquisition, Child language
development, Cognition, Poverty of Stimulus, Innateness

1. Introduction

"Men are only clever at shifting blame from their own shoulders to those of others."

- Titus Livius (59 BC–17 AD)

Titus Livius, a Roman historian, discussed blame shifting in the distant past, suggesting that even though people disapprove of it, this method of avoiding others' censure is nothing new.[1]

Shifting blame is to hold someone else liable for anything, particularly something negative that has occurred. It can be presented as assigning someone or something responsible for any undesirable incident or phenomenon. When children blame other or external situations for their behaviour, blame shifting happens. It might arise when children do something wrong, fail to do something right, or feel a specific way, they become reluctant to admit their own part of responsibility. They shift their burden of blame or action on others.[2]

---

[*] Associate Professor, Department of Linguistics, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

[1] Lozano Elizabeth and Laurent Roger, 'The effect of admitting fault versus shifting blame on expectations for others to do the same', Vol. 14(3), (PloS one 2019), pp. 1-19, (10.1371/journal.pone.0213276)

[2] Hakan Cetinkaya and Ervin Ercin, 'The Psychological Problems Seen in the Children of Divorced Parents and the Nursing Approach Concerning These Problems', Pediatric Nursing (ed.), *Psychiatric and Surgical Issues,* 2015, https://doi.org/10.5772/59166

The present research tested how exposure to a blame-shifting or responsibility-taking agent leads the participant children to another unrelated target as semantic mapping or meaning making, particularly leaving the perceivers surprised by their reaction to the failure. Age group of the participant children was 3 to 5 years (+/- couple of months). The discussion focuses on how children manage to shift blame for their misdeeds with different sentences that explore their meaning-making ability along with developed cognition that leads to this level of language practices.

2. Cognitive Development

According to the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, "Growth and development in all four areas of childhood are particularly rapid in the first five years of life".[3]

Some of these are the development of one's physical abilities, their capacity for language and communication, their intellect, and their capacity for positive social and emotional interaction.

What we mean when we talk about a child's cognitive development is their capacity for abstract thought, curiosity, and problem solving. The brain is the most important part of this process. Cognitive psychologist Jean Piaget proposed that children go through a sequence of stages as their brains and environments interact. A child's cognitive development, he added, is reasoning, demonstrate that cognitive development and language acquisition are intrinsically linked not so much about acquiring knowledge as it is about developing or constructing a mental model of the world, and that this model is fluid as the child ages.[4]

Language comprehension becomes more mature and complex as children grow older. Their brains develop along with their ability to communicate, comprehend, and produce spoken language. When children learn a first language, they build on what they already know by using conceptual information to differentiate and categorize the objects, relationships, and events they encounter.[5] All of these require properly formed brain development.

It is common to see children shift the blame to others and make accusations of wrongdoing when they are made to take responsibility for their actions. They always

---

[3]   Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, *Brain Architecture,* 2019, Retrieved from
      https://developingchild. harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/brain-architecture/
[4]   Sarah McLeod, 'Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development', 2009
[5]   Eve Vivian Clark, 'How language acquisition builds on cognitive development', *Trends in
      Cognitive Sciences,* Vol. 8(10), 2004, pp. 472-478.

see themselves as the victim in these kinds of situations. As a result, they prepare themselves mentally to avoid blame and shift their perspectives.[6]

When blame intensifies to hazardous shame, it is completely obvious that it needs to be monitored. However, since the participants in this study were all under the age of five, I found nothing concerning in their methods of accusing others or shifting blame. Rather, the language used to escape the rather unpleasant situation was very creative and demonstrated an advanced level of semantic development in majority of the participants.

3. Why Do Children Shift Blame?

Children engage in blame shifting when they attribute their negative actions to someone else or something other than themselves. Whether they broke a rule, or, did not follow them, or just felt a certain way, they are hesitant to take ownership of their actions and be held accountable for them. They blame others rather than themselves for failures in accountability and/or action.[7]

Blame-shifting or blame attribution is an irrational and context-switching behaviour. When someone confronts them about something they did or attempts to set limits, the primary focus shifts back, putting that person on the defensive.[8]

Children and sometimes the adults are also reluctant in part to admit their fiasco or shame because of the general desire to avoid negative social evaluation and disapproval from others.[7]Thus, blame shifting is taken as a way of saving face when things go wrong.

Usually grown-ups sometimes shift blame away from themselves by bringing attention to external causes,[9] attempting to obscure their role in causing misfortune or to hide failures that could likely be noticed by others and can cause repercussions.[10]

However, this study investigated the idea that children of this age shift blame to avoid being reprimanded or verbally abused by their caregivers. It exemplifies their pure

---

[6] OferZur, 'Rethinking 'Don't Blame the Victim: Psychology of Victimhood', *Journal of Couple Therapy*, Vol. 4(3/4), 1994, pp. 15-36.

[7] Lozano Elizabeth. and Laurent Roger, 'The effect of admitting fault versus shifting blame on expectations for others to do the same', Vol. 14(3), (PloS one 2019), pp.1-19, (10.1371/journal.pone.0213276)

[8] Mark Leary, 'Motivational and emotional aspects of the self', *Annual Review of Psychology,* Vol. 58(1), 2007, pp. 317-344.

[9] Jordan Peterson. and Justin Barrett, 'Explanatory style and academic performance among university freshmen', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 1987, Vol. 53, pp. 603-607.

[10] Kent Weaver, 'The politics of blame avoidance', *Journal of public policy*, Vol. 6(4), 1986*,* pp. 371-398.

motives of avoiding any upcoming hassles. I have also noticed that they have gotten better about taking responsibility for their actions after receiving advice from their elders. Children's tendency to blame others is absolutely natural as long as it does not become a habit or a pessimistic outlook. Through the lens of blame shifting, this study investigates the various semantic representations that young children exhibit as they learn to speak for the first time.

Data Exploration

This is an empirical research in which ten respondents were observed in their natural surroundings, as their age group was below five years. Data has been collected only on the basis of the participant children's language use. Although blame shifting has been studied psychologically in numerous studies, it has not been studied linguistically in relation to children learning their first language, particularly Bengali-speaking children.

From my observations, I learned that even toddlers occasionally employ idiomatic language to convey complex ideas about their wants, needs, and expectations. Because of this, they develop their own, novel ways of using language, such as those used for emotional manipulation or semantic negotiation, shifting blame, and coining new words.

The next few sections will describe data that explores children's language innovation, which can be presented as blame shifting, and will be accompanied by detailed analysis.

Data

I have assigned each participant a number rather than a name for reasons of confidentiality. The following are examples of the propensity of children to shift blame:

Child-1

Since this child was able to string together sentences, this toddler has begun placing blame on those around her. When child-1 makes a mistake, such as dropping a glass or wiping her wet hands on the curtain, she immediately points the finger at someone else.

One day I saw a torn doll in her living room and a skedher-
ei   putu.lta   ke   chireche
this   doll. DEF   who   tear.PERF.PRES.3P
Who tore this doll?

She simply said, 'No' - by moving her head side to side without any second thought and blamed the household staff. Although her mother reports that Child-1 did it.

When she sleeps at night, saliva drops on her pillow. One morning, her mother said to her-
beibi   dekho   ki   korecho   eta
baby.3rd.sg look.IMP.   what   do.PERF.PRES.2P   this
Baby look at what you have done?

The child replied-
egula   ki   ami   kori nai
this.PL.   what   I .1SG.   do.PROG.PRES.1P   NEG.
What are these! I did not do it!

dekhe   mone   hocche   keu   pani
look.PERF.PRES.1P   seem   be.PERF.PRES.1P. somebody   water
dheleche
pour.PERF.PRES.3P
It seems like somebody poured water on it.

Child-1 mostly blames on her elder sister and the household staff (who stay the whole day with her).
Like-
ami   kokhon TV   charlam
I.1SG.   when   TV   on.PERF.PRES.1P
When did I turn on the TV!

oi   eshe   charlo
she.3P.SG.   come.PERF.PRES.   on.PRES.PERF.3P
She came and turned it on.

Few more examples are like,

ami   jacchilam   glas.ta   nore   pani pore gelo
I.1SG. go.PAST.PROG.1P   glass.DEF.   move   water drip go.PERF.PRES.
I was going but(somehow) the glass moved and the water dripped.

neil polish ki   ami   felechi
nail polish what   I.1SG   drop.PERF.PRES.1P
Did I drop the nailpolish?

ami   ki   dei
I .1SG.   what give.PRES.1P
Do I use nailpolish!

chotdir   hate   dekhechilam
younger-sister   hand.LOC.   see.PERF.PAST.1P
I saw it in younger sister's hand.

pepi tip   dilo   dim.ta   bhenge   gelo
pepi press give.Past. 3P   egg.DEF.   break.PERF.PRES.   go.PAST.3P
Pepi pressed and the egg broke

almarir   dorja   choklet   nije pore   geche
cupboard door   chocolate self drop   go.PERF.PRES.
The chocolate fell from the cupboard door by itself

ami   nite   chai   nai
I.1SG   take.PRES.1P want.PRES.1P   NEG
I did not want to take.

Child-2:

When I went to visit child-2, another participant boy at his house for the first time, I saw some pencil marks on the wall. I asked him-
egulo   ke   dag   dilo
this.PL.   who   mark.PL.   give.PAST.3P
Who put these marks?

ami   ki   jani
I.1SG. what know.1SG
Do I know?

He pointed at his elder sister sitting in the other room with uncertainty.
o   koreche   mone hocche
she.3SG.   do.PERF.PRES.3SG   seem   be.PRES.PROG.
She did I think.

But his mother said he did that. Sometimes when he watches TV for a long time and mother scolds him, he says-
amar   ki   dosh!
my.POSS.1P. what   fault
What is my fault!

baba   bollo   ekhane   boshe   dekho
father say.PERF.PRES.3P   here   sit.PERF.PRES.   watch.IMP.
Father said to sit here and watch.

At that time his father was not even at home. When the new house helper came, child-2 started blaming her for everything.

Child-3:

She was standing on a stool and playing with her brother. Suddenly she fell off the stool-

bhaiya	tomar	jonno	pore	gelam
brother	your.POSS.3P	for	fall.PERF.PRES.	go.PERF.PAST.1P

Brother, I fell down for you.

ami	ki	korlam
I.1SG.	what	do.PERF.PAST.1P

What did I do?

fele	dile
drop	give.PAST.2P

You dropped me.

Mother asked her one day-

amar	iPad ta	ke	dhoreche
my.POSS.1P	Ipad.DEF	who	touch.PERF.PRES..3P

Who touched my Ipad?

bhaiya	dhoreche
brother	touch.PERF.PRES.3P

Brother touched it.
(Her brother was not at home at that time).

dogi	koreche	tahole
dog	do.PERF.PRES.3P	may

The dog might have done!

Again, once mother saw some dried rice on the iPad screen, she asked the child-

iPad e	egula	ki
iPad.LOC.	this.PL.	what

What are these on the Ipad?

bhat	ke	lagiyeche
rice	who.3.SG	put.PERF.PRES.3P

Who put rice here?

mone	hoy	iPad er	purano	dag
seem	like	Ipad.POSS.	old	mark

Seems like iPad's old mark.

Child-3's mother asked her how is her father, she said, 'bhalona' (bad). Her father heard it from the other room and said-

ki   bolecho   ami   pocha
what. say.PERF.PRES.3P I.1SG. bad
What did you say, I am bad?

ami   boli   nai
I.1SG   say.PRES.1P   NEG.
I did not say.

ke   boleche   tahole
who.3SG   say.PERF.PRES.3P then
Who said it then?

musik   boleche
music   say.PRES.PERF.3P
The music said (A song was running in the TV at that moment).

Child-3's mother found one of her earrings left open in the jewel box, she said-
kaner   dulta   ke   khullo
ear.POSS.   ring.DEF   who.3SG   open.PERF.PRES.3P
Who opened the earring?

lait   jalate   giye   khule   geche
light   on.PERF.PRES.3P   go.PRES.   open.PERF.PRES.   go.PERF.PRES
It opened while I was turning on the light.

dogi niye   geche
dog take.PERF.PRES.   go.PERF.PRES.3P
The dog took it, etc.

Child-4:

Among all the participating children, child-4 shifts blame more and frequently. According to his mother, he is very naughty and keeps doing something wrong every day; and then puts the blame on others without any hesitation.

ami   ki   porday   hat muchte   giyechilam
I.1SG what   curtain.LOC.   handwipe.PRES.PERF.   go.PERF.PAST.1P
Did I go to wipe my hand on the curtain?

batashe   porda   ure   hate   laglo
wind.LOC..   curtain   fly   hand.POSS.   touch.PERF.PRES.1P
The wind blew the curtain and it touched my hand.

Child-4 also shifts blame on his cousin brother or on the house helpers. One day he tried to open a muffin pack; he pulled it so hard that the muffin jumped out of the packet and dropped on the floor. His father said-

tomar   shobshomoy erokommone-hoy
your.POSS. always   like
You always think like this.

ami   kichu   kori   nai   papa
I.1SG. anything do.PERF.PRES.1P. NEG. dad
I did not do anything dad.

paket ta   bhalo   chilo   na
packet.DEF. good.   stay.Past.3P   NEG.
The packet was not good.

The most fascinating aspect of children's blame shifting is that they blame inanimate objects, circumstances, and even animals as well as humans.

Child-5:

Child-5 tends to forget answers during exams. Once, he forgot how to solve a problem during his KG-1 maths exam. Though he practiced the problem at home, he could not answer it at the exam.

ei   shohoj onko.ta   paro   nai   keno
this.SG easy   math.DEF can.PERF.PRES NEG   why?
Why could you not do this easy math?

The child replied-
oi   shomoy pencil   bhen.ge   gelo   tai.
that time   pencil.SG. break.PERF.PRES.   go.PAST.3P   so.
The pencil broke right at that time!

One morning when he was going downstairs, he fell. Then he started crying. His father who was with him, said that child-5 was rushing and skipping stairs, so he fell. It was his mistake. But the child told his mother-

nicher   dadu   ki   bhanga   shiri   baniye.chen
ground floor   grandpa   what break.PAST. stair.PL.   make.PERF.PAST
Grandfather from the ground floor made such broken stairs!

As he is a crybaby, he also cries while playing with other children.

oder   jonno ami out hoye   gelam.
them.PL. for   I[1st] out get.PAST go.PERF.PAST.
I got out of the game for them!

Few more examples-

ami	ki	gate	er	baire	jete	cheyechi
I.1.SG	what	gate	DET.	outside	go.PERF.PRES	want.PERF.PAST.1P

Did I want to go outside the gate?

kalo	kukur.ta	takiye.chilo	tai	gelam
black	dog.DEF.	look.PERF.PAST	so	go.PERF.PAST.1P

The black dog was staring at me so I went.

glass theke	pani	emni	shirt e	pore	gelo
glass from	water	like that	shirt.SG.	drop.	go.PAST.3P

Water spilled on my shirt just like that!

baba	mone	hoy	choshmar	upor	boshechilo	tai	bhenge.che
father.3P	seems	like	eyeglasses.SG	on	sit.PAST	so	break.PAST.3P

Seems like father sat on his eyeglasses so it broke.

ajke	shokal	howa	dekhbo	tai	raat	jege	tv	dekhchi
today	dawn	break	watch.FUT.3P	so	night	wake	tv	watch.PERF.PAST.1P

Today I will watch the dawn breaking so I am watching tv late at night.

Child-6:

This child has a weird habit of licking walls. When his father asked him why he keeps on doing that, he said –

shada	wall.e	ekta	dag	chilo	porishkar	korlam
white	wall.DEF	one	mark	is.PAST	clean	do.PERF.PAST.1P

I was cleaning a mark from the white wall.

The following day, when he was licking the wall once more, his mother scolded him, and he remained silent without making any further comment.

This child does not like to eat vegetables. When his mother forced him to eat, he said -

dekho	ekta	poka	ache	torkarir	bhitor
look.IMP.3SG	one	insect.SG.	is	curry.POSS	inside

Look there is an insect inside the curry.

He keeps making new excuses every time to avoid eating vegetables, like- they are not cooked properly or the only vegetable he detests is carrot etc.

When Child-6 loses any game against his sister (9 years old), he puts blame on his sister or on the game, like –

apu   amake   hariyeche   iccha   kore
sister.3SG.   me.1SG   lost.PERF.PAST.3P   purpose   do.PAST.
Sister made me lose on purpose.

<center>OR</center>

ami   birokto   hocchilam   tai   jiti   nai
I.1SG   bore   to be.PERF.PAST.1P   so   win   NEG
I was bored so I did not win.

Child-6 mostly blames his sister and inanimate objects or factors. Some of his common excuses are –

dudh.to   apur   dhakkay   pore   gelo
milk.DEF   sister.POSS.   push   spill.PAST   go.PAST.3P
Milk spilt because sister pushed me.

ami   shudhu khelchilam   eta   kibhabe   porlo
I.1SG   only   play.PAST.1P   this how   fall.PAST.3P
I was only playing; how did it fall?

ami   kori   nai   o   koreche
I.1SG   do.PAST   NEG.   she   do.PAST.3P
I did not do it, she did.

Blaming others is a common behaviour among young children. So, it is important to help them learn to take responsibility for their own actions and choices.

Child-7:

This girl is really energetic, conversational, and fun-loving. In the housing society where they stay, she interacts with a lot of kids, she plays with them, speaks to their parents, grandparents; she even likes to talk to the gate guards, and vendors. Child-7 can therefore carry on a conversation for longer and is adept at using complex or compound sentences.

As she is very active and naughty- she keeps breaking things, making sounds and other mistakes like not touching the objects or electronic gadgets she is not allowed to touch. One day she was talking to the laundry man, which her mother forbids her to do.

tomake   bole.chi   oporichito karo   shathe kotha boltena
you.DEF.2SG tell.PAST.PERF.1P unknown anybody with   talk tell.FUT.3P NEG.
I told you not to talk with strangers!

Ami   bolte   chai nai   ankle   amake   dekeche
I.1SG talk.FUT. want NEG   uncle   me   call.PRES.PERF.3P

I did not want to talk, uncle called me. (Actually she ran to him to talk.)

lipstick.ta   ke   bhenge.che
lipstick.DEF who.3P   break.PAST.PERF.3P
Who broke the lipstick?

ami   dekhlam   o   dhorlo
I.1SG   see.PAST.1P she   touch.PAST.3P
I saw she touched it (pointing at her elder sister).

Some more examples are like-
ma   tumi   dako   nai   tai school er   deri hoyeche
mother you.3SG wake.3P NEG so school.POSS late   happen.PAST.PERF
Mother you did not wake me up, so I am late for school.

tv remote ta   shob shomoy ke   mati te   fele
tv remote.DEF. always   who.3P floor.DEF drop.3P
Who always drops the tv remote on the floor?

ami   homework likhechilam   kintu ure giyeche   batashe
I.1SG homework write.PAST.PERF.1P but   fly go.PAST.PERF wind
I didthe homework but the wind blew the paper away!

mojar dudh khacchilam   glass.ta   kibhabe pore gelo
tasty   milk drink.PAST.PERF glass.DEF. how   drop go.PAST.PERF.3P
I was drinking the tasty milk but how did the glass fall!
[By adding words like tasty, pretty, etc., she tries to defend her innocence]

amake   boko keno egula ami   kori na
me.1SG   scold why these me.1SG do.1P NEG
Why do you scold me, I did not do these.

And Child-7 tends to blame her sibling or the housekeeper the most.

Child-8:

Child – 8 is the middle child of three siblings. She has two brothers. The
younger child is only few months old. But still Child - 8 sometimes blames on the
infant like –

beibi   kadche   shune   jetegiye pani ta   pore gelo
baby.1SG cry.PAST.PERF. hear.1P   go.CONT. water.DEF drop go.PAST.PERF.3P
I heard the baby crying and tried to go there so, the water fell (baby was with the
mother).

She might even blame the table for not being even, like –

tabil ta   baka tai dudher   glas ta   daray nai
table.DEF. curve so   milk.POSS glass.DEF stand NEG
The table was uneven so the milk glass could not stand straight and fell.

Like other kids, she also blames her elder brother mostly.

bhaiya   dhakka diye amake   feleche
brother push.PAST me.1SG   fall.PAST.PERF.3P
Brother pushed me so I fell down.

One day she left her jacket at school and when her mother asked where it was, she said that the teacher did not remind her, so she forgot to bring it.

More of this child's blame shifts are like -
tumi   age   bolo nai eta kora   thik na
you.3SG before say NEG this do.PRES.CONT right NEG
You did not tell me before that this is not right.

putul ta   bhalo chilo na   tai hat   khule geche
doll.DEF   good   was NEG so hand open go.PAST.3P
The doll was not good so the hand came off.

porte boshe khuda peyechilo   tai ar   pori nai
study sit   hungry get.PAST.PERF so more read NEG
I felt hungry when I sat to study so, I did not continue.

Moreover, the housemaid or the driver are also blamed sometimes.

The amazing feature of Child blame shifting varies from child to child; even children of the same age can differ in their blame shifting practice. So, it is very interesting to observe the young kids blame shifting.

Child-9 and Child-10:

Even though these two children were observed individually, their language use was similar enough that their data could be looked at as a whole. One child is 3 years and 4 months old, and the other is 3 years and 7 months. They live with their parents and grandparents, so they are always watched by an adult. Because of this, they couldn't just put blames at anyone. According to the observed data children's shifting of accountability at this age is remarkably harmless. They do not exhibit many variations

in sentence structure or in the selection of the party or parties that can be held accountable. Their blame shifting is really basic. Like-

kibhabe phuldani.ta   pore   gelo
how   vase.DEF.   fall   go.PAST.3P
How did the vase fall!

hothath   dekhi   pore.ache   ekhane
suddenly   see. PERF.PRES.1P fall.PERF.PAST   here
The vase fell here all of a sudden.

bhat.gula pore   geche   plait.ta   choto
rice.PL   fall.PAST   go.PERF.PAST   plate.DEF   small
The rice fell because the plate is small.

ami jani   na   ke   tomar   phone dhorlo
I.1SG know NEG. who.3P   your.2P   phone touch.PERF.PAST.3P
1 don't know who touched your phone.
[But actually Child-10 touched the phone]

Most of the time, this child blames people, particularly the people who live with him.Apart from directly blaming others, children of this age commonly engage in the following basic routine behaviours:

a) silently stand with their head down,
b) do not look at the adult directly,
c) start to cry,
d) run from the place and/or
e) apologize and admit their mistakes.

As was already noted, at this age, blaming seems more like an explanation than an

irresponsible behaviour. Nonetheless, it is also undeniable that a child may change the subject of an argument or shift blames even at the age of 3.

4. Data Analysis

Based on the data presented above, it can be assumed that children differ in their ability to shift blame to their age level. Two of the participants were three years old, and they had little or no understanding of blame shifting. They had not reached the age where their family members would allow them to do anything without supervision. As a result, they had little experience making mistakes and shifting blame. There was no pressure or fear applied to them, so the few instances of their blame shifting sentences

can be interpreted as 'excuses'. According to the observed data, children at the age of four (or 3.9 months and above) begin to shift blame in a meaningful way. As they age, they become more and more inclined to place blame on others for their own shortcomings.

Data also show that kids who have a brother or sister are more likely to blame them for something. This is because, in their minds, they have to blame someone for everything. The single child places the blame on their parents, their household staffs, or the world at large. As was mentioned before, blaming is a negative issue in child psychology if it persists over time or is indicative of a larger behavioural problem.[11] However, the aforementioned information allows us to settle that blaming is a natural part of a child's language development, up until the point where it becomes habitual.

5.1. Blame shifting and Child Meaning Acquisition

How children shifts blame can give insights into the intricate processes involved in meaning acquisition and social development. It can tell us a lot about how children learn what things mean and how they grow as people. Playing a blame game can be related to learning about responsibilities, understanding how causes and effects work, and getting more empathetic. Through blame shifting, children usually attempt to avoid negative consequences or punishments, so it can be a part of a child's semantic and pragmatic development, where they learn how to use language to get what they want while connecting with other persons.

At first, children might not fully understand how their acts affect other people and how those actions impact them. But, they are learning about personal accountability and repercussions, as evidenced by their attempts to avoid taking on their own actions by blaming others. As they grow up and learn more, they will realise that self-responsibility is an integral part of being mature and considerate.

Furthermore, shifting responsibility can be seen as a reflection of children's developing moral reasoning as they start to understand the concepts of right and wrong.

The examples of infants and young children blaming inanimate objects or animals in this text are meant to be humorous rather than to point out severe developmental concerns. Some parents though come to their children's defense when they point the

---

[11] James Liu, 'Childhood externalizing behavior: theory and implications', (official publication of the Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nurses, Inc*)*, Vol. 17(3), *Journal of child and adolescent psychiatric nursing,* Vol. 14(3), 2004, pp. 93-103.

finger at others in an effort to protect them or prove that they are in the right; doing so only serves to reinforce the

undesirable behaviour of the child. When a situation is effectively handled and the child is taught what is and is not acceptable behaviour, the tendency to place blame on third parties typically disappears.

The children in the study were all too young to significantly blame others, and their parents, notably their mothers, strived to manage the situation carefully, so the researchers considered it unnecessary to be alarmed about the children's predisposition to blame others. Parents and other caregivers can assist children develop the skills necessary to take responsibility for what they do and become accountable for their actions.

5.2. Blame Shifting as a Part of Cognitive Development

Cognitive factors and social aspects are closely related. Researchers supported that, cognitive pre-requisites for language development is very important. In the 1980s, cognitive linguists contributed to the expansion of research linking language and cognition.[12] The representation of conceptual structures in language is the primary focus of cognitive linguistics. Emphasis is placed acquisition processes such as imitation, perceptual organisation, generating new sentences and on issues such as how aspects of general cognition (such as how the meaning of grammatical constructions is created) are important in describing linguistic structures. It all began with Jean Piaget, who attempted to emphasize the similarities between language and cognition.[13] Meaning acquisition processes such as imitation, perceptual organization, generating new sentences and reasoning, demonstrate that cognitive development and language acquisition are intrinsically linked.

Developmental aspects related to cognition are also important to child's physiological growth and it goes parallel to language acquisition, depending more on the environment in which the linguistic operations take place. That is why starting from the very first cognitive theory by Piaget to the recent developmental stances on language acquisition (including the usage based approach), the role of cognition in language development has always been discussed with priority. Issues like language constructions or schematizations are results of cognitive maturation influencing

---

[12]   R.N. Campbell, 'Cognitive Development and Child Language', eds. R. Fletcher and M. Garman, (Language Acquisition), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1979).
[13]   Jean Piaget, 'The Construction of Reality in the Child', (New York: Basic Books, 1954).

language acquisition. The presence of it crosses our perception more through the expressive and receptive language use of the children during the whole period of first language acquisition.

Courses of semantic acquisition are more or less identical to all languages and to every child; for example- early utterances, pretend play, imitation, perceptual organization, form-meaning mapping, asking questions, development of conversational skills etc. Aside from these, there are a few unusual and child-specific features in the development process of meaning acquisition that necessarily involve more intense observations than the others. Children's tendency to shift blame is one of a kind and stands out as a distinct trait. According to Freud this is a normal phase of language development found in children in all languages as 'ego defense mechanism'.[14]

The renowned scientist Albert Einstein once put it like, "a person who never made a mistake never tried anything new", shifting blame can be seen as one of the stages of development where

mistakes are made. And making mistakes and learning from them is an essential part of child development.

5.3. Blame Shifting: An Innovative Phase in Child Language Development

Ground-breaking child language development includes blame shifting, which is an example of the child's creative effort in language use. As a result, the topic of how children learn to blame others or manipulate language in such an inventive way may arise. The findings suggest that one component in children's creative use of language is their ability to draw on their memory and reason to convey meaning through the use of words and contexts they have heard or seen before. According to the data, contextual meaning is not learned in a linear fashion, nor do children need direct one-on-one data input from adults; rather, they pick up on these elements as quickly as possible from their language surroundings mostly.

However, this unique perspective on the continuing debate over cognitive and linguistic problems investigates the 'Poverty of Stimulus' (PoS) argument in language learning. Chomsky appears to be the first to use the phrase "the poverty of the stimulus".[15] It contends that the linguistic input received by children is insufficient to account for the rich and rapid development of their knowledge of their first language(s)

---

[14]   Sigmund Freud, '*The ego and the mechanisms of defense',* (United Kingdom: Taylor and Francis, 2018).

[15]   Noam Chomsky, 'The debate between Jean Piaget and Noam Chomsky', ed. Patelli-Palmarini, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1980).

via general learning mechanisms.[16] However, if the child's social interaction information is restricted, the capacity to utilize such minimal data to build such a sophisticated variety of verbal skills is certainly surprising! It posits that, beyond the peripheral processing mechanisms, there are forms of knowledge and principles of various kinds that influence the nature of acquired information, but in a very limited and highly organized manner.

Chomsky responded to the concern by formulating the concept of "innate knowledge".[17] According to him, what the stimulus lacks, the organism makes up for with its own (genetically given) resources; Citing Socrates and Descartes, Chomsky asserts that people

possess innate knowledge, or information that cannot be obtained from the environment since the stimulus does not reflect what the mind creates in response to stimulation.[18] Which indicates that the basic rules of language are already in the mind before a person is born.

After closely analyzing the collected data, I asserted that child language innovation is dependent on both environmental input and innate ability. Both factors contribute to the child's exploration of meanings. Thus, neither strict innateness nor total reliance on environmental input can be solely credited for a child's successful language development. Children without a health condition rely more on their cognitive ability to use a language fluently and creatively; additionally, this ability enables them to progress and utilize previously stored information for more proficient language use.

6. Conclusion

The acknowledgement of the impossibility of representing children from different cultures as a common background to reflect the meaning acquisition process is at the heart of this study.

These meanings emerged from the interactive, participatory nature of data collection and intensive data analysis.

Blame-shifting, also known as "blaming the victim," is a form of shifting responsibility and making up stories. As limit is set or confronted to them about their behaviour, they shift the conversation back to the person, putting him/her on the defensive.

---

[16] Alexander Clark and Shalom Lappin, 'Linguistic Nativism and the Poverty of the Stimulus', (John Willey & Son, 2011).

[17] Noam Chomsky, 'Aspects of the Theory of Syntax', (Cambridge: MIT Press 1965).

[18] Noam Chomsky, 'The debate between Jean Piaget and Noam Chomsky', ed. Patelli-Palmarini, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1980).

Children's shifting of blame is a special kind of moral judgment that emerges during verbal development and related to cognitive development and maturation too. It has both social and intellectual components, regulates conduct on the part of others, depended on social cognition, and demands justification as a social act. These distinguishing characteristics set blame shifting apart from other phenomena, such as anger, event evaluation, and wrongness judgments.

A person's cognitive development, or how they learn to think, reason, and comprehend their surroundings, is a lifelong process. It can be classified into various stages, each of which is marked by specific changes in cognitive capacities, and is closely tied to age and maturity. Although there are certain broad patterns in cognitive development that can be seen, each child may have a different understanding and application of blame shifting. Because of this, it cannot be assumed that all children will begin blaming others at the same time or in the same manner.

Moreover, in terms of meaning acquisition, blame shifting can be related to the way individuals learn to assign meaning to events and situations. For instance, if a child grows up in an environment where blame is frequently placed on others, he or she may learn that this is an acceptable way to handle challenging situations. In contrast, if a child is taught to accept responsibility for their actions and to work towards solutions, they may be less likely to engage in blame-shifting behaviour.

Children shifting blames can be upsetting for parents or caregivers. However, it is essential to approach the situation in a manner that teaches the child to accept responsibility for his or her actions. Parents and other adults who are responsible for children can help them take responsibility for their actions by taking a number of actions when they engage in blame shifting. First and foremost, it's crucial to acknowledge the child's emotions and provide a secure environment in which they can express themselves. Second, help the child understand that accepting responsibility is an important part of growing up in order to promote responsibility-taking. Third, set an example of accountability by owning up to your mistakes and finding solutions. Fourth, refrain from punishing the child for assigning blame because doing so might encourage the behaviour. Fifth, give more attention to finding solutions than placing blame, and work with the child to figure out what they can do differently in the future. In order to promote the behaviour going forward, reward the child when they accept responsibility for their actions. By following these steps, parents and caregivers can try to help children learn to take responsibility and avoid blame shifting behaviors turn to a crucial developmental issue.

The age range of the participants in this study was generally limited to 3 to 5 years, which opens the door for future studies on this topic to include children older than 5 years and examine their phase of blame-shifting. Although I have only casually observed a few children between the ages of 9 and 11, I have found that they shift blame more frequently than the younger children do, and their language use in relation to this is more sophisticated and logical. This might serve as a hint or a place to start for any future research on this subject.

This work has always sought to stand on the articulations of language acquisition participants as they made sense of their existence and life experience. Moreover, the participants' language constructions were analyzed to examine the relationship between these children and their family members. Through a detailed observation of their language use and co-constructive nature of meaning making endeavor, I tried to present an account of the meaning acquisition process of the Bengali children I chose as my research participants.

Socio-Legal Aspects of Old Homes in Bangladesh: An Analysis

Nahid Ferdousi[*]

Abstract

The older people need inclusive attention and care equally like any other segment of the population. Like different regions of the world, many Asian countries have already started to pay attention in developing elderly support programs and legal framework. Bangladesh is far behind from many Asian countries in ensuring proper protection and minimum social security services for the senior citizens. At present, the traditional joint family structures have broken down and familial support to the older people have been reduced drastically. Due to absence of proper protective mechanism, millions of older people is living a miserable life within and outside the family. Moreover, community home-based care and residential care facilities has not developed yet in the country. Rather, the concept of old homes, caregivers and rehabilitation centers are getting popular as well. Accordingly, there is no regulatory framework or monitoring authority specifically for old homes and centers. Traditionally it is not much appreciated by the society because of the prevailing social, cultural, and religious norms of the country. Hence, it is the need of time to address the issue of the elderly shelter homes and provide them care in a better way. This study focuses on socio-legal aspects of old homes in Bangladesh and possible recommendations for the betterments of the elderly care delivery.

Key words: Old people, Familial support, Social aspects, Old homes, Legal framework

Introduction

Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries of South Asian Region. As per the population census of 2022, people aged 60 years and above are considered as senior citizens and their number is 9.28% of the total population (more than 2.5 crore) of the country.[1] Likewise, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) has predicted that the older people will cover 10.09% in 2025, while the number is expected to increase enormously around 17% in 2050.[2] In spite of rapidly increasing numbers of the older population, development protection of their rights and wellbeing is less visible in Bangladesh.

---

[*] Professor of Law, Bangladesh Open University, Gazipur.

[1] Population and Housing Census Report-2022, Preliminary Report, Ministry of Planning, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

[2] Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), Report on Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2020, Statistics and Informatics Division (SID), Ministry of Planning, June 2021, Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has a long history of maintaining cultural heritage and family traditions. Majority of the people lives in rural areas engaging themselves in agricultural activities, continuing their family heritage. In last one and half decade people of Bangladesh has shifted their focus from agriculture to industrialization. Such mind shift is the result of globalization, influence of western culture, modification in socio economic condition, change in life style and living pattern.[3] Due to shifting focus towards industrialization from agriculture, people's lifestyle, culture, family ties and social structure have also changed. With growing literacy rate people are now relocating at urban areas and cities to support their livelihood. Such demographic shift of family members is influencing family structure in a great deal. As a result, joint family system has already lost its importance as well as social fabric has also changed. Indeed, different types of changes took place in the society that has made the issue of older care and rights more complicated.[4] Therefore, many elderly members are seen to reside alone with no one to look after them.

Senior citizens as an integral part of the society are now slowly losing their values both in families and in societies.[5] According to Bangladesh Association for the Aged and Institute of Geriatric Medicine (BAIGM), 8% of country's total population are senior citizens which is increasing in a tremendous manner.[6] These statistics clearly shows the future demand of old homes, caregiver center and rehabilitation centers across the country. Hence, the rising elderly population is intensifying this need but the country is not prepared to offer any types of alternative options on how to deal with their needs. Moreover, there is no implementation of the laws and policies to address the issues of housing, health care, financial and social protection of senior citizens.[7] As a result, the dependency ratio of the age group starting from 0 to 14 years and above 65 years will reach 52.4% from 46.9 % by 2051. It is an alarming sign for Bangladesh as percentage of active labor force of age group starting from 15 to 59 years will decrease to 60.4% from 65.1%.[8]

---

[3]   M. Nazrul Islam and Dilip C. Nath, 'A Future Journey to the Elderly Support in Bangladesh', *Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 2012, p. 2.

[4]   Ibid.

[5]   M. A. Kabir, 'Elderly Care in Bangladesh, Challenges Ahead', *The Daily Star,* Dhaka, 2015.

[6]   Sheikh Iraj, 'Old age homes: Remove the stigma', 9 November, 2019, *The Independent,* Dhaka, *web:* https://www.theindependentbd.com/post/223035

[7]   Saifuddin Saif, 'Older population rising in Bangladesh', *The Business Standard,* 9 April, 2023. https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/bangladesh-must-prioritise-policies-support-growing-older-population-analysts-613918.

[8]   BBS population projection 2011-2061 and BBS elderly population in Bangladesh, Vol. 4.

Bangladesh is heading towards intermediate stage of ageing challenging economic and social aspects of the country. Increasing number of elderly populations, breaking down of joint families and diminishing trend of cultural heritage might result in high demand of accommodation, medical care, and rehabilitation facilities.[9] Experts predicted that demand for old homes and care givers will increase tremendously. Therefore, government must act fast to meet the predicted demand of old homes and rehabilitation centers to safeguard the dignity and security of every senior citizen. [10] However, the idea of establishing old homes for the older people has got popularity in Bangladesh like the rest of the world. It is true that the concept of old homes is not still taken positively by many people, but it has become a harsh reality at present. Developed health care facilities, improved life longevity rate, and growing fertility rate may contribute to doubling the number within next two decades. Increasing demand of old home facilities have forced government and authorization bodies to think about this alarming issue repeatedly.[11]

At present, there six old homes run by the Department of Social Services maintaining the rules of the Voluntary Social Welfare Agencies (registration and control) Ordinance, 1961 and about 45 private registered old homes are working to ensure shelter support for the older people of Bangladesh.[12] According to the section 3 of the Voluntary Social Welfare Agencies (registration and Control) Ordinance, 1961, no agency shall be established or continued without following the provisions of this Ordinance. It is mandatory that all old homes across Bangladesh be registered and maintains guidance provided by Ministry of Social Welfare. However, if steps are not taken for the growing elderly population aging sixty years, a crisis may arise.[13] There are several challenges of senior citizens in near future regarding infrastructures and service constraints of the old home and rehabilitation centers in the country. This study focuses on socio-legal aspects of old homes in Bangladesh and possible recommendations for the betterments of the elderly care delivery.

Literature Review

Scholars studied the older care facilities including old home service from multiple perspectives. Md. Zillur Rahman (2012)[14] in his book titled *'The Life of Older*

---

[9]   Sazzadul Alam, *'Elderly people in Bangladesh: Vulnerabilities, Laws and Policies'*, Report of BRAC, 30 November, 2015, p.12.

[10] M. Makbul Hossain, 'Better retirement homes a must for industrialised Bangladesh', *The Daily Star,* Dhaka, 15 July 2022. Web: www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/better-retirement-homes-must-industrialised-bangladesh-3070981

[11] Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 'Elderly Population in Bangladesh: Current Features and Future Perspectives', *Population monograph of Bangladesh,* Vol. 4, Ministry of Planning, 2015, p. 1.

[12] Field survey report, 2022.

[13] Md. Zillur Rahman, *'The Life of Older People'*, Arafat's Publication, Dhaka, 2012, p. 124.

[14] Ibid.

People', explored the whole situation of older people in the context of the changing social structure of Bangladesh. He has projected a vivid picture of the life of older people through case studies in the family and old homes as well. Md. Raziur Rahman (2018)[15] carried out research titled, 'An Empirical Study on Elderly Population's Care in Bangladesh: Legal and Ethical Issues', described the services for the elderly and their limitations in Bangladesh. Author stated that older people are neglected due to lack of supportive family members of nuclear family. As a result, they are become dependent on institutional support and become mentally depressed. The author also emphasized the improved services of old home for ensuring elderly care.

Another study by Md. Zahid Hossain , S. M. Akram Ullah and A. K. M. Mahmudul Haque (2020),[16] on 'Human Rights of the senior citizens in Bangladesh: Political, Administrative and Economic Challenges', highlighted the present situation of old homes in Bangladesh. The authors assessed the number and functions of old homes in Bangladesh. They argued, the children are busy with their career and they cannot give enough time to their parents. At an old age, parents suffer from loneliness and they desire a company. In this situation, authors viewed the old home as a place where the parents get many people to share their feelings and sufferings, views, opinions, beliefs, emotions, etc. As per authors findings old homes are not available everywhere in the country. They argued that there is no registered government or registered private old home in Rajshahi district. However, the researchers have found a private old home at Bagha, Rajshahi which was not registered by the government. Their findings also show about several types of problems to register an old home.

Similarly, Sharmin Islam *et al* (2019),[17] examined the parents care scenario in Western World and Asian societies. Their observations revealed that old people from both West and Asia are interested to stay in their home with their children and grandchildren. They stated that this is a way to transmit their real life experience to their third generation which is very essential for the emotional, humane and psychological development. They argued it is obviously helpful and required that preferably the old people and senior citizens should stay in their extended families where they found the peace and tranquil to live in touch with their next generations.

---

[15]   Md. Raziur Rahman, *An Empirical Study on Elderly Population's Care in Bangladesh: Legal and Ethical Issues*, Journal of Humanities and Social Science, Vol. 23, Issue 1, Ver. 9 (January. 2018), pp. 1-8.

[16]   Md. Zahid Hossain *et al.,* 'Human Rights of the Senior Citizens in Bangladesh: Political, Administrative and Economic Challenges', *Advances in Research,* Vol. 21, No. 12, 2020, pp. 31-40,

[17]   Sharmin Islam et al., 'Old Home and Caring Elderly Population: Need or Dilemma', *Bangladesh Journal of Medical Science,* Vol. 18, No. 3, July 2019.

They strongly support that family will also help to enrich the future generation to get lively exchange of experiences in a passive and friendly way.

However, authors could not ignore the need of 'old home' rather preferred old homes with limited situations. They explained that some families are unable to look after their parents and sometimes all the offspring of an old couple may live abroad, in such situations these types of old people need to be cared in professional 'old home' in professional manners. But the authors supported government old homes not private old homes. They suggested that these old homes must be preferably established and maintained by the government because the administrative rules of private sectors are set for commercial purpose.

A research report on "Expectations, Realities, and coping strategies of Elderly women in a village of Bangladesh" by Tamima Sultana (2011)[18] explored the dignity and honor of the elders in modern society. She also demonstrated that the situation of care for the elderly in Bangladesh is complex. The author argued that families are considered to be the primary place of care for the elderly and they will live with her/his children. She also stated that in reality care for the elderly within family or household may not take place as smoothly as it is perceived to do, particularly in the case of the elderly poor.

Md. Ripul Kabir, Shammy Islam, Dipika Chandra (2020),[19] a study titled on 'Socioeconomic Status of Elderly People at Household Level: A Sociological Study on Rangpur City Corporation', highlighted the socio-demographic and economic profile of the elderly people and analyzed elderly care responsibilities of family members. The authors presented that elderly people in modern societies are mainly alone at home or they are cared in elderly home. They showed the relationship between other family member and the elderly in terms of taking care of the end life of older person.

Likewise, in the report titled 'Elderly people in Bangladesh: Vulnerabilities, Laws and Policies' conducted by Sazzadul Alam (2015)[20] described the factors of isolation of older people from their kindred and, as a result, they live alone and face the

---

[18]   Tamima Sultana, *Expectations, Realities and Coping Strategies of Elderly Women in a Village of Bangladesh* (December 1, 2011). Available at: https://ssrn.com/ abstract= 1967283 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1967283

[19]   Md. Ripul Kabir et al., 'Socioeconomic Status of Elderly People at Household Level: A Sociological Study on Rangpur City Corporation', *Khulna University Studies,* Vol. 17 (1&2): 2020, pp. 67-76.

[20]   Sazzadul Alam, *'Elderly people in Bangladesh: Vulnerabilities, Laws and Policies'*, Report of BRAC, 30 November, 2015, p.12.

problems on their own. The author assessed the absence of elderly protection law and the reasons of breakdown of family structure which are the great challenges for senior citizens.

In the article titled "Protection of Elderly Parents in Bangladesh: An Evaluation of Relevant Guidelines', Mst. Rezwana Karim (2021),[21] has analysed the provisions concerning the protection of elderly parents in the international and national legal framework and also examined the factors that contributed to stay old homes. Fawzia Farzana, (2019)[22] in the research on 'Aging in Place' in Bangladesh: Challenges and Possibilities, conducted to recognize problems faced by the growing number of older adults aging in place as well as the causes force them to choose an institutional housing and determine the possibility of 'aging in place'.

However, the present study aims to focus on socio-legal aspects of old homes and offers recommendation for the improvement of elderly care service.

Methods

This is a qualitative study and content analysis of elder care facilities in old homes. For this study, firstly, relevant sources are located by conducting library-based research to examine primary and secondary sources. Secondly, content analysis is undertaken when analyzing the primary and secondary resources to explore the importance of old homes service in Bangladesh. Secondary data are collected from existing sources such as textbooks, journals, research articles, internet, international conventions, government statistics and newspapers and so on.

Socio-Legal Rights and Dignity of Older People

Historically, in Bangladesh, younger generations always maintain traditions and a religious belief that encourage them to look after their aged family members with proper care and respect. It is a matter of great concern that this age-old tradition is being changed. Inclusion of so called modern social and religious values, adaptation of western culture and socio-economic, demographic transformations are influencing people's perception and life style. As a result, younger generation of today prefer to enjoy nuclear family. In different parts of Bangladesh, it is being seen that younger people tend to have nuclear family structure in towns and cities leaving their parents in rural areas. This new trend of living alone and adopting nuclear family structure is

---

[21]   Mst. Rezwana Karim, *Protection of Elderly Parents in Bangladesh: An Evaluation of Relevant Guidelines*, 29 (S2) 2021 IIUMLJ, 221-248.
[22]   Fawzia Farzana, 'Aging in Place' in Bangladesh: Challenges and Possibilities', *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research,* Vol. 4, No. 2, 2019.

responsible for collapse of traditional extended family structures of Bangladesh. Rapid changes in family concepts have become a threat to physically and financially challenged older people. Older people who are suffering greatly due to rapid transformation of living pattern of Bangladeshi younger generation mostly lives in villages and consequently in many cases it becomes impossible to reach that group with proper government support and aid facilities. [23]

It is seen that senior citizens are often neglected in their families, society and there is no legal framework regarding their wellbeing in Bangladesh. Negligence from family and relatives, encountering various forms of diseases and financial crisis are main challenges met by elderly people. In Bangladesh most of the older people live in rural areas and they are often ignored by their near and dear ones beyond the notice of public eyes. Accordingly, vulnerability of the older people in terms of food consumption, shelter, community and social attitude is increasing in present social context. As a result, actual demand for old homes, caregivers and rehabilitation centers are much higher than the documented demand. Indeed, to ensure minimum dignity, care, respect, and treatment for the older people, the concept of setting up adequate number of old homes and rehabilitation center has become a burning issue. Despite steps being taken by the government, radical steps are necessary. [24]

Thus, the issues of old homes remain insignificant in national plans and policies which deteriorate their situation. Though the National Policy on Older Persons was framed in 2013 but it has not been implemented due to the lack of sincere efforts by the authorities concerned. Likewise, the Parents' Maintenance Act, 2013 is not getting implemented for the absence of its rules and awareness among people. Unfortunately, there is no law to safeguard the senior citizens. Further, hospitals, community clinics and old homes often ignore geriatric problem as there are no specific elderly health policy and monitoring system.[25] In near future, the issue of senior citizens will be a vital challenge for the government as the numbers of older people are increasing without appropriate steps to ensure their rights, dignity and services in the country.[26] However, for ensuring their rights and welfare in all aspects

---

[23]   Md. Sazedur Rahman, 'Aging and Negligence in Bangladesh', *Journal of Gerontology and Geriatric Research,* Vol. 6, No. 3. 2017

[24]   Mohammad Abdul Hannan Pradhan *et al.,* 'Demographic Transition and Home Care for the Elderly in Bangladesh: An Urban Rural Comparison', *Advances in Economics and Business,* Vol. 5(6), 2017, pp. 334-345.

[25]   Atiqur Rahman, 'Human rights situation of older persons in Bangladesh', *Bangladesh Journal of Geriatrics,* Vol. 47, 2012, p. 91.

[26]   Sheikh Iraj, *'The saga of old age homes'*, The Business Post, 25 September 2021.

of their life, there is no particular department in the country which can investigate the violation of human rights of older people.

Hence, elderly individual suffers extremely in their age and in this situation, they have to bear later life is necessary expenses. There are pension policies to ensure social security on old age for retired government employees only. According to Public Service Retirement Act, 1974 after attaining the age of 59 years, they can retire from service and get a pension as retirement benefits.[27] Though about 36 million labors are working in agriculture sector in the country, they are not covered by the law. Similarly, private sector workers and migrant older workers do not receive any pension. In the Act 1974, there is no specific guideline to increase retirement age as the life expectancy is gradually increasing in the country. Thus, most of the older people face various challenges in financial issues under the exiting social security programs. Moreover, many senior citizens are homeless but there are no old homes with free of cost accommodation facility for them. [28]

Bangladesh is neighboring country India is far more synchronized in terms of data, policy and elder support facilities.[29] Another neighboring country Pakistan also enacted Maintenance and Welfare of Old Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2019 to safeguard its senior citizens. Historically, in Nepal immediate family members used to be the primary caregivers for their senior citizens. With influence of globalization and mass movement of younger generation of Nepali to foreign locations for better living standard and career opportunities slowly older care center are moving towards older care homes. Apart from that many older citizens of Nepal suffers greatly due to superstition. Many older people who suffer from many diseases like dementia are often left behind or have no other option to live of their own as it is considered as bad spirits or punishments of the gods as part of religious belief. As a result, a significant number of senior citizens is moving towards old home in search of a shelter over their head.

According to Help Age Global Network, till 2019, 9% of entire Nepal population consists of senior citizen, it means around two million people living in Nepal were sixty years and above. This amount is expected to become double in 2050 and reach thirty-six million. Therefore, as per prediction of ageing Asia, by 2050, around 18.6% of entire population of Nepal will consists of elderly population aging over

---

[27] Sazzadul Alam, *'Elderly people in Bangladesh: Vulnerabilities, laws and policies'*, 2015, p.43.

[28] Md. Humayun Kabir, *'Local Level Policy Development to Deal with the Consequences of Population Aging in Bangladesh',* United Nations, New York, 1994, pp.33-74.

[29] *'Schemes for The Welfare of Senior Citizens'*, PIB Delhi, 16 March 2022. Web: https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1806506

sixty.[30] Considering this upcoming situation government of Nepal has taken many initiatives. Traditionally old homes in Nepal are designed only to support specific group of elderly people who do not have anyone as a family member for care giving. So, government of Nepal, as first initiatives sets up old age home in religious places targeting those elderly who do not have any family. Thus, nation across world has been putting emphasize on ensuring proper care and assistance to their senior citizen for a long period of time.

Comparing to that Bangladesh is standing at the beginning stage in terms of ensuring proper care and assistance to it senior citizens. Due to improve quality of life and advancement of medical science older population is increasing in a tremendous manner. Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) says the average life expectancy in Bangladesh stood at 72.8 years in 2020 with an increase of 3.8 years from 69 in 2011.[31] Due to increasing number of older citizen, government of Bangladesh has taken many initiatives to ensure proper care and assistance for them alongside with many private enterprises. Setting up of old homes, rehabilitation centers, old age allowance and parents act are some of the noticeable attempts of Bangladesh governments. All such efforts from both private and public initiatives are not adequate to ensure proper care and assistance availability for majority of senior citizens residing across country.[32]

As a result, pressure on existing old homes, caregivers and rehabilitation center is increasing in a rapid manner which is putting an adverse impact on the facilities and monitoring systems of such old homes and centers. Some of the major challenges of old age homes and centers have inadequate number of accommodation facilities, limited number of healthcare facilities, absence of proper recreation and motivational events, unskilled elderly assistance, absence of proper policy, improper monitoring, absence of regulatory bodies and limited financial assistance. Thus, socio-legal aspects of old homes and centers of senior citizens remain insignificant in national strategy.

Legal Framework of Old Homes

Governmental old homes of Bangladesh are established under the supervision of social welfare ministry of Bangladesh, whereas the private initiatives for older

---

[30] *'Ageing population in Nepal'*, HelpAge. Web: https://ageingasia.org/ageing-population-nepal/
[31] Statistical Yearbook Bangladesh-2021, 41st edition, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) Statistics and Informatics Division (SID), Ministry of Planning.
[32] Md. Anisar Uddin, 'Social Safety Nets in Bangladesh: An Analysis of Impact of Old Age Allowance Program', Unpublished Dissertation, Institute of Governance Studies (IGS), BRAC University, Bangladesh, 2013, pp. 18-19.

persons are registered and monitored by the Voluntary Social Welfare Agencies (Registration and Control) Ordinance, 1961[33] (amended in 2007) and the section 19 of the ordinance the Voluntary Social Welfare Agencies (registration and control) Rules, 1962 has been passed. The Voluntary Social Welfare Agencies (registration and control) Ordinance, 1961 is expedient to provide for the registration and control of voluntary social welfare agencies operating across country. This ordinance covers the whole Bangladesh. As per such ordinance a person or organization wishes to establish a company should be registered and should submit all necessary documents. Registration authority shall process such registration in prescribed format. None of the agency shall be established or continued their service without maintenance in accordance with the provisions of this ordinance.[34]

As per section 3 of the Voluntary Social Welfare Agencies (registration and control) Ordinance, 1961, all old homes operating across Bangladesh needs to be registered under Ministry of Social Welfare of Bangladesh. Under section 14 of the Voluntary Social Welfare Agencies (registration and control) Ordinance, 1961, there is provision of punishment. Any person or company violating rules of such ordinance shall be punishable with imprisonment or fine. But it is unfortunate that till date there is no specific authorized body that is responsible for monitoring old homes. Neither any specific mechanism is developed to evaluate the service standard of old homes. Good nutrition and sound health of older people largely depends on food with proper nutritious, availability of safe drinking water, proper sanitation facilities, minimum medical care, and maintenance of proper hygienic system.

As per reference of the World Social Protection Report 2021-22 published by International Labor Organization (ILO), Bangladesh has secured second position in South Asia for bringing 28.4% of country's population under social protection programs including older people.[35] Article 15(d) related to social security in the Bangladesh constitution with the aim of ensuring social security for the older people. All the policies guiding practices and regulating old homes are highlighted below for better understanding of elderly situation of Bangladesh.

---

[33] The Voluntary Social Welfare Agencies (Registration and Control) Ordinance, 1961 (no.46). Bangladesh government adapted this ordinance by the Bangladesh Laws (Revision and Declaration) Act, 1973 (Act No. VIII of 1973)

[34] The Voluntary Social Welfare Agencies (Registration and Control) Ordinance, 1961. Web: minlaw.gov.bd

[35] *'President Hamid, PM Hasina issue messages on eve of Int'l Day of Older Persons',* Dhaka Tribune, 30 September 2022. Web: www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2022/09/30/president-hamid-pm-hasina-issue-messages-on-eve-of-intl-day-of-older-persons

Bangladesh National Social Welfare Policy was announced in 2005 aiming towards addressing challenges of older people residing across country. Later on, to address all possible challenges of older population National Committee on Ageing was constituted for the first time soon after the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing in 1982. It is considered as the first move that Bangladesh government has initiated to address the ageing issues formally.[36] National Health Policy 2008 was introduced to ensure senior citizen receive medical assistance from national and local healthcare centers and hospitals.

On November 17, 2013, the cabinet approved the National Policy on Older Persons and recognized them as the senior citizens of the country. The National Policy for Older Persons 2013,[37] aims to strengthen elderly health care facilities including primary health care support and establishment of age-friendly health center. National Elderly Policy 2013 also includes referral services along with short term mobile camps for those older persons who live in remote areas. Aiming towards ensuring a dignified, povertyless, functional, healthy, and secure society for the older people government has enacted such policy.

The Maintenance of Parents Act, 2013 of Bangladesh is enacted to ensure social security of the parents and senior citizens. This law also compels the children to take good care of their parents especially at their old age. As per the Maintenance of Parents Act, 2013 the children are entitled to ensure proper maintenance of their and parents and provide them with food and shelter facilities. Furthermore, this law also put a restriction of children sending their parents to old homes without their consent. Under section 3 it is clearly stated that under no circumstances children are allowed to force their parents to live in old homes beyond their wishes.[38]

This law is milestone in ensuring rights of older people living in Bangladesh. Under section 2 and 4 of the Act 2013, this law clearly stated that food, cloth, shelter, and medical care facilities for parents and grandparents must be ensured by the children and grandchildren. In section 7 of the law, it also emphasizes that in case of separate living from parents, children are responsible for giving a reasonable amount of money from their daily, monthly, or yearly income. This Act clearly stated that any

[36]   Social Welfare Policy, 2005- Chancery Law Chronicles (clcbd.org) Web: http://www.clcbd.org/document/45.html

[37]   National Policy for Older Persons (PIB.GOV.IN), Web: https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=108092

[38]   Bangladesh Parents Care Act, 2013. (ILO.Org).
     Web: http:// www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=en&p_isn=95797

kinds of offences are cognizable, bailable, and compoundable. As per section 6 of such Act, it is stated that in case of any non-cooperation from any family members including children or son's wife or daughter's husband or any other relatives, such person shall be liable as abettor to the same crime and punishment. [39]

Soon after designating people aging sixty and above as the country's senior citizens, Bangladesh government aims to extend social dignity, security, and essential facilities to of older people targeting 1.50 crore older citizens in the country. As per a press release by the social welfare ministry of Bangladesh, government has drafted a new law which will ensure facilities such as food, clothing, communication and treatment for the older population.[40]

Bangladesh government enacted old age allowance program in the fiscal year 1997-98 to support poor older population of the country. Till now almost all older people living across 262 upazilas of the country has bring inside of this allowance program. On current fiscal year 2022-23, Almost six million (5.7 million) older persons had received old age allowance.

In the year 2015 Bangladesh government formulated a comprehensive National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) which aims to rationalize and reinforce the existing safety programs with a view point to achieve a better output from the capital invested on 2021 and ahead. It aims to broaden the scope of social protection programs across the country. It also identified several strategies to safeguard employment policies and social insurance to address the emerging needs of the middle-class families.[41]

Challenges of Old Homes

Bangladesh government has taken many initiatives to ensure proper care and assistance for older people, such as, old age allowance, maintenance of parents act, national policy of older person are some of the noticeable attempts. All such efforts are not adequate to ensure care and assistance for the senior citizens. The number of old homes comparing to required number is significantly low in Bangladesh. The main challenge is the shortage of old homes for the senior citizens.

---

[39]   Nahid Ferdousi, *Rights and Challenges of Older People in Bangladesh,* 27 Oct 2020. Web: https://www.thedailystar.net/law-our-rights/news/rights-and-challenges-older-people-bangladesh-1984633

[40]   Deepak Acharjee, *'Govt dragging feet on 1.50cr senior citizens' benefits'*, 30 September 2017, Web: https://www.theindependentbd.com/home/printnews/116533

[41]   National Social Security, Strategy (NSSS) of Bangladesh, Web: https://socialprotection.gov.bd/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/National-Social-Security-Strategy-English.pdf

In many cases it is being observed that both private and public old homes operating across Bangladesh is not following proper rules and guidelines to ensure proper service and health care facilities to the senior citizen who are availing their services. In reality, rich, upper-class older people want better old homes with modern facilities. Apart from government old homes, many private old homes have been established to provide elderly care services. There are no old homes for mid and low-income families and they struggle to bear the high expenses of private old homes. Moreover, the number of private old homes is not recorded and they are not monitored by the government agencies. The present challenge is to ensure old homes not only for those who are financially sound because every older person has right to get the facilities of old homes. [42]

Bangladesh government has initiated policies regarding old homes but still several significant issues are not addressed properly by existing policies like the monitoring tools, evaluation mechanism, regulation body and role of law enforcement agencies in case of any violation. Due to absence of adequate monitoring system service features and quality of old homes are greatly affected. In many cases old age homes are only limiting their services only to food and sheltering. Care giving which is very much essential for senior citizens is somewhat missing in many old homes due to absence of proper monitoring system.[43]

Thus, the major challenges of old homes are limited number of healthcare facilities, absence of proper recreation and motivational events for the residents. In most of the old homes, there is no improved diet facilities, skilled caregivers, physical exercise opportunity, counseling system, recreation facilities and awareness rising program. It is mandatory for the older person to intake proper nutrition for supporting their health condition. Absence of registered nutritionist in many old homes is creating great challenge for the vulnerable older. Moreover, absence of skilled therapist and ineffective therapy session is creating blockage in mental condition.[44] Often, older person who resides at old homes are mentally challenged. In this situation, regular physical and counseling service can reduce such mental blockage and demotivation from their mind.

---

[42]   *The state must take better care of elderly citizens*, The Daily Star, August 20, 2022.
[43]   Zubair Khaled Huq , *Provisions and rights of senior citizens*, The New Age, 28 February, 2022. https://www.newagebd.net/article/163902/provisions-and-rights-of-senior-citizens
[44]   Ekram Kabir, *This is why we need more homes for the elderly*, The Business Standard, 7 February, 2022. https://www.tbsnews.net/thoughts/why-we-need-more-homes-elderly-367474

Often, absence of proper medication or irregular visit of doctor in old homes is creating a great challenge for the vulnerable older people to conduct regular activities. Absence of routine check-up may give rise to deeper physical problems in the long run. To support emerging number of old homes comparing to availability there is no other alternatives than proper service management. Thus, there are not enough facilities for older people to get proper treatment.

The National Policy on Older Persons was formulated in 2013. Although the policy is a positive initiative, due to lack of specific legal framework and sincere efforts from the concerned ministries, it yet to be properly implemented. Most of the older people and service providers authorities are unaware of the policy.

Some Possible Measures for Improvement

The discussion above suggests that government should come forward with more meaningful assistance for the senior citizens. In these regards, the government should improve its social safety schemes and expand its pension coverage to include a larger proportion of older people. Equally it must prioritize elderly supporting facilities at the local level and major cities.[45] To support vulnerable senior citizens, government should establish sufficient old homes and rehabilitation centers in the country.

For maintaining old homes, rules should be formulated for proper monitoring and ensuring quality services to elderly people. The government needs to implement the National Older Persons Policy 2013 policies that support introduction of an appropriate pension system, privilege card, assisted-living facilities, day care support and health insurance scheme of older people. In addition, the allocation of senior citizens in yearly budget should prioritize.

Government needs to develop mechanism that can ensure a supporting livelihood system for the senior citizen who are physically capable enough to earn their living. It will not only improve their self-respect but only inspire them to live a healthy life. Adequate elderly health care facilities are also needed. Old age is a period of physical declining. It is undeniable fact that in course of time, physical condition slowly turns to diminishing. Thus, appointing adequate number of caregivers, physiotherapist, nutritionist and doctors in the old homes are necessary.

---

[45] The state must take better care of elderly citizens, The Daily Star, 20 August, 2022. https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/editorial/news/the-state-must-take-better-care-elderly-citizens-3099226

Number of older generations is increasing in a rapid manner. Therefore, alongside with public initiatives, private initiatives also play a vital role in ensuring proper assistance and support for the older people. Affiliation of both public and private initiatives can result in significant change in service quality and awareness quantity. In this regard, a separate cell on 'Ageing Affairs' under the concerned Ministry should be established for delivering essentials services and ensuring fundamental rights.

Considering all aspects of older persons need, it is reality that they want to stay with their family. The last episode of older age should live with their extended families where they contributed. This is prime concern of the children to serve their responsibilities reciprocally. So, it is needed to think how can be ensured their rights and care in-house and outside in consistent with the social values and culture of Bangladesh.[46]

Living at an old home in such a critical moment of life is stated to be the most difficult part of one's life. With the increasing number of older populations across country it is becoming extremely important for the government of Bangladesh to ensure proper care and assistance for the senior citizens. For betterment of the specialized health care, separate sections in National Health Policy should be enacted which prescribes the guidelines of the hospitals, clinics, old homes and shelter homes how they will provide service to older people without suffering the financial hardship. The government should develop and implement a work plan on the basis of the National Policy on Older Persons, 2013 to provide facilities.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is clear that senior citizens deserve more attention and care from family, society as well as the country. Usually, the elderly needs are ignored as there is no comprehensive legal framework with relation to respecting, promoting and protecting the rights of older people. The government should establish a significant number of old homes both in rural and urban to meet the basic needs of older people. With the present demands of elderly, the law should be enacted for the execution of the national policy and for providing social service facilities to ease the

---

[46]   Habiba Sultana. "*Rights of Senior Citizens in Bangladesh: An Overview*", Journal of Humanities and Social Science, Vol. 25, No. 10, 2020, pp. 1-4.

plight of the older people. It is required to uphold the aged-friendly society for the proper execution of the laws and policies. Additionally, the government should adopt the Madrid Plan of Action towards achieving the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development of all citizens including the elderly so that they can pass their later life with respect, dignity and peace.

Spectrum of views of the late Professor Amales Tripathi in history, literature, and philosophy[1]

Ananda Bhattacharyya[*]

Abstract

Amales Tripathi was a brilliant teacher at Presidency College and the University of Calcutta. He was academically associated with the Asiatic Society, Calcutta. Tripathi's study deals with Bengal during a period in which the great Presidency served as the political, financial, and commercial base of the East India Company. Tripathi touches on many aspects of the trade, shipping, and finances of the Company in Bengal. His initial research work was in economic history, and the doctoral thesis was published as *Trade and Finance in Bengal Presidency, 1793-1833*. The work remains the standard work on agency houses and private trade under Company rule in Bengal. Professor Tripathi was highly influenced by F. P. Braudel's monumental work *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (translated from French into English in 1972-73). Even he was also influenced by Holden Furber's *John Company at Work,* the first in-depth analysis of the English East India Company's Asian activities between 1783 and 1793 and by C. H. Philips's *The English East India Company 1789-1834*(1940) which was based on Namerian philosophy. Professor Tripathi discarded the over simplifying approach and denunciatory tone.

Key words: Braudel, Namier, Ranke, Thucydides, Herodotus

Amales Tripathi was a brilliant teacher at the Presidency College and the University of Calcutta. He was academically associated with the Asiatic Society, Calcutta. Professor Tripathi is a British and American as well as Indian – trained scholar, who is a sectional President of Indian History Congress and Head of the Department of the Presidency College in Calcutta and last but not least the Ashutosh Professor of the University of Calcutta. Tripathi's study deals with Bengal during a period in which that great Presidency served as the political, financial, and commercial base of the East India Company. During these same years the Company's monopolies of the Indian trade and, later, the China trade were terminated by Parliament in London. His initial research work was in economic history, and the doctoral thesis was published

---

[1]   I am highly indebted to my teacher Professor Deba Prosad Choudhury of Jadavpur University Calcutta, for providing my new insights in the understanding the philosophy of history. I am also indebted to Shri Shyamal Das for providing me some important materials in this connection.

[*]   Retired Assistant Director, West Bengal State Archives, Government of West Bengal, India.

as *Trade and Finance in BengalPresidency, 1793-1833*. The work remains the standard work on agency houses and private trade under Company rule in Bengal. Utilizing a large body of original source materials in manuscript as well as print, Tripathi touches on many aspects of the trade, shipping, and finances of the Company in Bengal. He takes note of Britain's exports to Bengal; Bengal's shipments to England of cotton goods, raw cotton, silk, indigo, sugar, and newly built ships; Bengal's "country trade" with Singapore, Batavia, and Canton; Calcutta's coastal trade with Madras and Bombay; and the Company's ever-changing pronouncements on the rates, number, and size of non- Company ships permitted to engage in trade with Britain. On the financial side, Tripathi refers to the Company's balance sheets; shipments of bullion to Bengal; terms of loans, interest rates, funding of debts; problems of money supply; and sources of credit. Since Tripathi's monograph may be said to have a central thesis, it is that the campaign to end the Company's monopoly was rooted in political and economic exigencies rather than in any doctrinaire philosophy of free trade. Chief among these exigencies, he argues, was the demand on the part of private individuals (i.e., servants and ex-servants of the Company) and private trading houses for facilities to remit to England their respective savings and profits. So long as the Company dominated the India-Britain trade, it was difficult for these parties to make their remittances in the form of goods. Tripathi's argument is an interesting one, but it cannot be said that he presents it clearly or convincingly. He assumes that his readers will have at their finger- tips a detailed knowledge of the trade and politics of the East India Company both at home in England and in Bengal. Although the volume includes many pages of trade figures, these are presented as raw data, neither converted into quantity measures nor corrected for price changes. Tripathi has attempted no systematic analysis of money supply and money flows. Nor has he placed the Bengal trade in the larger setting of British overseas trade and payments. This thesis aims at analyzing the inter-connection between trade and finance in the Bengal Presidency between 1793-1833, a period of transition from monopoly to free trade and of growth of the British Empire in India. Romesh Dutt's *Economic History of India under Early British Rule* is the only major historical work in this field which covers the same period moved by the Indian middle class ethos at the end of the nineteenth century, breathing deeply of the Gladstonian liberalism in the air, Romesh Dutt looked at Indian history with a utilitarian's and a free trader's bias. He followed the old tradition of Mill and Wilson. Daniel Thorner has rightly reviewed by saying that 'Tripathi's argument is an

interesting one, but it cannot be said that he presents it clearly or convincingly. He assumes that his readers will have at their finger- tips a detailed knowledge of the trade and politics of the East India Company both at home in England and in Bengal. Although the volume includes many pages of trade figures, these are presented as raw data, neither converted into quantity measures nor corrected for price changes. Tripathi has attempted no systematic analysis of money supply and money flows. Nor has he placed the Bengal trade in the larger setting of British overseas trade and payment.[2]

Professor Tripathi has argued the fact that Romesh Chandra Dutt's *Economic History of India* was still regarded as an authoritative exposition of the impact of the Company's trade and governance on Indian Economy in the academic circles of India. According to Professor Tripathi, 'Dutt derived its institutional treatment from the prevailing Whig view of history, its moral tone from the self-righteousness of Gladstonian liberalism and its utilitarian bias from the Indian middle class ethos at the end of the nineteenth century.[3]

Asian trade since the age of reconnaissance has become the busiest research enterprise for some time. Professor Tripathi studied the complex interaction of trade and empire and public and private trade in a sophisticated way when the works of Sukumar Bhattacharya[4] and K. N. Chaudhury[5] 5provided a more modern approach. The works of S. Arsaratnam, Om Prakash, Sushil Chaudhury and Indrani Roy may also be mentioned in this context. All these works including Professor Tripathi were highly influenced by F. P. Braudel's monumental work *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (translated from French into English in 1972-73). Even he was also influenced by Holden Furber's *John Company at Work, the Work*, the first in-depth analysis of the English East India Company's Asian activities between 1783 and 1793, and by C. H. Philips's *The English East India Company 1789-1834* (1940) which was modelled on Namerian concept. Professor Tripathi discarded the oversimplified approach and denunciatory tone. He has concluded his thesis by saying that 'one of trickiest problems that have plagued

---

[2]   Amales Tripathi, *Trade and Finance in the Bengal Presidency, 1793-1833,* (Orient Longman, 1956), Reviewed by Daniel Thorner, The *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 3. May (1958), pp. 502-503.

[3]   AmalesTripathi, *Trade and Finance in the Bengal Presidency, 1793-1833*, (Oxford University Press, 1979), p. iv

[4.]   *The English East India Company: The Study of an Early Joint Stock Company 1600-1640,* (Taylor & Francis, 1999)

[5]   Ibid.

Indian Historians is the problem of the 'drain'.[6] In order to situate the concept of *Drain of Wealth* which according to Namerian thesis may be called the 'plassey plunder', Professor Tripathi has explained in detail in his *Evolution of American Historiography, 1870-1910* in the backdrop of Brooks Adams' attacks on the British Empire. Professor Tripathi also even did not spare the Marxist authors including E. G. Habsbawm who holds the view over the generation.

While writing The *Extremist Challenge: India Between 1890 and 1910*,[7] he has traced the transition from religion to political including the ideological issues. Tripathi in a sophisticated way and excellent prosaic styles had shown the understanding of the reform and radical movements in and out of the Indian National Congress during its first generation. Tripathi's three idols were Bankim Chandra, Vivekananda, and Dayananda, whose effects were thrown upon the extremists. While reviewing the book Robert L. Bock has opined the view that Tripathi's' excellent work for a study of Tilak, Pal, Lajpat Rai, Aurobindo Ghosh, Bankim Chandra, Vivekananda, Dayananda and others in a Hindu nationalist movement of 1890-1910' deserves mention[8]. Professor Tripathi in this book foresees the potent of future crisis endangering Raj and Indian unity in the moderate disillusionment with reforms as well as in Muslim separatism. Private correspondence is analyzed in terms of the partition of Bengal as a traumatic event of the book. Both moderate and extremists participation in boycotts and in swadeshi is traced, as well as the fringe element in terrorism. Economic forces, which are also shown in tables, are involved in the discussion as well as cultural and political history. The various congress party struggles are probed during this formative early period up to the Gandhianera, and Tripathi's narratives ultimately focuses on Aurobindo after the political split of 1907

---

6   Dadabhai Naroji, *Poverty and Un- British Rule in India* , (Publications Division, 1962); R. C. Dutt, *The Economic History of India in the Victorian Age*, (K. Paul, Trench & Co.), [1916], 1906, p. XIV; C. J. Hamilton, *The Trade Relations Between England and India, 1660-1896,* (Thacker , Spink and Co*.,* 1919), pp. 135-148; Holden Furber, *John Company at Work*, (Harvard University Press,1951), pp. 305-312; N. K. Sinha, ' Drain of Wealth From Bengal Second Half of the Eighteenth Century', *The Economic History of Bengal*, *From Plassey to the permanent Settlement,* Vol. 1, (Firma KLM, 1970), pp. 210-222: K. N. Chowdhury, "India's International Economy in the Nineteenth Century: A Historical Study ", *Modern Asian Studies* 2, (Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 31-50; P. J. Marshall, *East Indian Fortunes :The British in Bengal in the Eighteenth Century,*(Clarendon Press, 1976) p. 262fn.

7   *The Extremist Challenge: India between 1890 AND 1910*, (Orient Longmans, 1967).

8   *The Extremist Challenge: India Between 1890 AND 1910*, reviewed by Robert L. Bock, *The American Historical Review,* Vol. 74, No. 4, April, 1969, pp. 1340-1341

and the accompanying terror with the Muslim League, Morley- Minto reforms and other British responses to the extremist challenge have been traced in detail.

Tripathis' erudite scholarship is reflected in another work *Vidyasagar: The Traditional Modernizer*.[9] The discussion on Vidyasagar is interlinked with the cultural efflorescence that sparked out in 19th century. In 1830 Rammohun Roy allegedly told a missionary, 'I began to think that something similar to the European Renaissance might have taken place here in India'. Since then, the idea of Bengal Renaissance thrilled the emotion and imagination of the Bengalees that the periodic attempts to re-interpret the concept have become something like a secular ritual since then Renaissance has been defined as linguistic modernization, literary efflorescence, Hindu revival-nationalism, social reform, westernization, historic consciousness, Secular Humanism, Brahma Protestant Reformation, Hindu- Brahma synthesis. Though Professor Tripathi says that he rejects the 'so-called Renaissance model[10] the organization of his material, his times, the very questions he asks- all is rooted in the historiography of the Bengal Renaissance. Vidyasagar (1820-1891) is viewed by Tripathi as 'Child Prodigy', 'Teacher and Administrator' champion of 'popular Education and Female Education', Social Reformer, Moderniser of Bengal Literature and 'The Lonely Prometheus'. Tripathi made an important contribution on the very concept of 'Modernity of Tradition' and in the introductory portions of subsequent chapter of Vidyasagar. Most writers have concluded that Renaissance was co-relative to the genesis of modernism in Bengal whereas David Kopf argued in his work[11]that the modernity of tradition or indigenous was more characteristic of the Bengal Renaissance than the alternative process of Westernization. It was Professor Tripathi, the first Bengali historian who explored the conceptual possibilities of this thesis in a fresh evaluation of nineteenth century history. Tripathi says 'modernity and tradition have usually been placed in a dichotomous relationship …Actually, these two concepts are not totally divorced, and traditional features persist in a modern society as modern potentialities exist in a traditional one…The co-relation between a social process (modernization)' was an Historical accident. Vidyasagar perceived creative possibilities within the Indian context, only if some corrections were applied from the western experience'.[12] David Kopf while reviewing the book aptly remarked that

---

[9]   *The Extremist Challenge: India Between 1890 AND 1910*, reviewed by Robert L. Bock, *The American Historical Review,* Vol. 74, No. 4, April, (1969), pp. 1340-1341.

[10] Ibid, p. x.

[11] David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773-1835,* (University of California Press, 1969).

[12] Tripathi, *Vidyasagar*, p.12.

'Vidyasagar was a product of Sanskrit College; knew Sanskrit, Bengali, English, and spent a lifetime updating Hindu traditions to conform to modern values. In fact, as Tripathi ably demonstrates, this Pundit-who spent years searching out obscure Sanskrit texts to justify the emancipation of Hindu women- was a far more effective modernizer than most Anglicized intelligentsia'.[13]

His ideas about the philosophy of history are found in his Presidential Address delivered in the session of Indian History Congress. According to him 'Clio, like Cleopatra, has a trick or two of her own to preserve her eternal youth. "Age cannot wither her or custom stale." An unwoven web she may wear, but what prevents her from changing her fashions and colours with the times?' He intelligently mixed up Marx, Croce and Vico's designs. He also thought Braudel followed as well as deviated from Marx, Bloch and Lucien Febvre. His 'dialectic of time span', especially 'la longue duree', his novel view of a three-tier capitalism, replacement of 'class by the concept of 'hierarchy', emphasis on the influence of superstructure on –infra-economy made him more attractive for a moment while. Ladurie's stress *mentalite*, as well as population and climate, added variety to our jaded taste. For real structuralism, however, we go shopping at Foucault, Derrida and Company. 'Discourse' and 'deconstruction' seem to be the 'in-thing this winter. He was a firm believer of Ranke's Positivism for which he remarked in his presidential address 'Ranke's positivism and political history. The watchword was - 'The past as it actually was.' Go to the archives, ferret out facts, choose the right ones, add them together and the facts would tell what was good for you to know about the past. Professor Tripathi also thought that 'The modern age in Indian historiography began in such an atmosphere. My teacher, Hemchandra Raichaudhuri, the greatest authority on ancient Indian history, and my mentor, Jadunath Sarkar, the greatest in medieval, swore by Ranke's positivism'. Ranke's positivism was, first, a romantic reaction to eighteenth century universalism and secondly, an emerging Teutonic nation-state's protest to Latin domination, embodied in the Napoleonic empire. He used history to discredit the French revolutionary ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity i.e. the new political, social and economic system being built by the French bourgeoisie. German liberalism failed at Frankfurt, but even if it had succeeded, Ranke would have hailed the Prussian monarchy, which, by the way, gave him lavish patronage throughout life. Living in the ambience of Hegel, Ranke unhesitatingly saw his Idea to be

---

[13] Amales Tripathi, *Vidyasagar, The Traditional Modernizer*, reviewed by David Kopf, *The Journal of Asian Studies,* May, Vol. 36, No. 3, 1977, p. 577.

manifest in the Wilhelmina state. He would support both Austro-Prussian and Franco-Prussian wars, for war, to him, was the mother of peace. Similarly, authoritarianism was the key to socio-economic development and German hegemony, the model of higher culture. He would refrain from giving any moral judgement, for "every epoch is immediate to God". Every event moved according to God's plan and the great persons of history (Carlyle's Heroes) carried it out. About Ranke, Acton commented, "talks of transactions and occurrences where he should have talked of turpitudes and crime". Professor Tripathi made a comparative study in Ranke's 'Prussia loom ' in H. C. Rai Chaudhuri's concept of building up of a state, particularly, in the case of Magadha. Hemchandra's Magadha, Kautilya and Chandragupta have been compared with the Hegelian concept.

Professor Tripathi's masterpiece like *Swadhinata Sangrame Bharater Jatiya Congress* (1885-1947)[14] though written in Bengali, has been translated   by his son Amitava Tripathi in English.[15]

The translator, Amitava Tripathi, however, calls it a 'modified version of the Bengali original'[16]for the English edition does not contain the extensive allusions to Bangla literary texts. The book is a rich historical study of the Congress Party in colossal erudition; Tripathi covers nearly every detail of the Party from its formative year's right up to Indian independence, and does so judiciously and quite analytically.

The book comprises four sections neatly arranged in chronological order: 'The First Phase (1885–1907): From the Founding of the Congress to the Extremist-Moderate Split'; 'The Second Phase (1907–1930): From the Morley-Minto Reforms to the Salt March'; 'The Third Phase (1930–1943): From the Round Table Conferences to the Quit India Movement'; and 'The Fourth Phase (1943–1947): From Wavell to Mountbatten – The Road to Independence and Partition'. Tightly written, highly accessible and admirably clear, this book is an important contribution to the existing discourse on Indian nationalism and should be of interest to students and researchers of History and South Asian Studies alike.

Tripathi provides a refreshing challenge to the three conventional historiographical approaches in the field: that of the Cambridge School, the Subaltern School and the

---

[14] *Swadhinata Sangrame Bharater Jatiya Congress, 1885-1947*, (Ananda Publishers Private Limited, 2012).

[15] Amales Tripathi and Amitava Tripathi, *Indian National Congress and the Struggle for Freedom 1885–1947*, (Oxford University Press, 2014), p. xxv.

[16] Ibid. p. xxv.

Leftists. The subtlety of his argumentation is premised on detailed empirical evidence, and oftentimes economic statistics, without ever falling prey to economic determinism. That said, it is perhaps a little surprising to find that a book which had set out to provide an 'analytical and not a descriptive history'[17] only comprises, as Rudrangshu Mukherjee succinctly insists in the Foreword, Tripathi's positive assessment of the Congress and the Indian national movement. In view of Gandhi's leadership of the Congress from 1920 to 1947, Tripathi asserts,[18] 'Gandhi is the nucleus of this study'.[19] However, his claim was that 'Gandhi was free from the restrictive and often inhuman strictures of orthodoxy'[20] might not necessarily be agreeable. This immediately reminds of the Ambedkarite critique of Gandhi, which does not attract much of Tripathi's attention. The omission of any detailed analysis of Ambedkar's masterpiece, What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the untouchable (1945), in this context, is glaring. Finally, a book of this volume and richness should have come with a subject index and not only a name index as at present.

His analytical history of the Congress with a focus on Mahatma Gandhi has much to teach students of contemporary Indian politics. He was himself always prepared to learn from the younger generation of scholars whose works are cited throughout his book. An astute interpreter of trade and finance, he was keenly attentive to the economic context of political movements. He showed how "pertinent" the Great Depression was "in explaining the circumstances leading to the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930-1931".

Yet Amales Tripathi was at his best in unravelling for his readers the ideology of Indian nationalism, which he believed was "completely misread" by the so-called Cambridge school because of "its lack of understanding of Indian culture" and by the subaltern collective with its tendency to "trivialize" elite culture. His was a compelling critique of the trends in South Asian historiography that seemed dominant in the 1980s. He would have been happy to note that in the second decade of the twenty-first century the history of economic and political ideas is back in vogue. Historians of anti-colonial nationalism today have a much more nuanced approach that Amales Tripathi would have found congenial.

---

[17] Ibid, p. xiii.
[18] Ibid, p. xiii.
[19] Amales Tripathi, *Indian National Congress and the Struggle for Freedom 1885–1947*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), reviewed by Avishek Ray, *Political Studies Review,* 14 (2), pp. 309-310.
[20] Ibid

Professor Tripathi's analytical narrative unfolds in four phases. The first phase lasted from the foundation of the Congress to the extremist challenge of 1907. Following Herbert Butterfield rather than Lewis Namier, Tripathi shows how the early Indian nationalists were more "carriers of ideas" than "repositories of vested interests". He firmly rejects the contention that nationalist thought was articulated through "an inauthentic mode of orientalist discourse". He deftly brings to light the many contending strands of *swadeshi* philosophy, including the ways in which Prafulla Chandra Ray and Nil Ratan Sircar embraced the prospect of large-scale industrialization. Even though the Congress appeared to be in complete disarray after the Surat split, Morley did not rule out the possibility that it might, like the phoenix, rise from the ashes.

And rise it did under the magnetic and charismatic leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Tripathi's second phase extends from the Morley-Minto reforms to the salt march of 1930. We find in this book a finely etched portrait of Gandhi's personality with its many contradictory traits. The author does not hide his admiration for the Mahatma. Yet he is invariably balanced and fair in evaluating Gandhi's rivals and critics. This chapter contains a detailed description of the Berlin-based conspiracies during World War I. It also offers deep insights into the political thought and actions of Gandhi's Muslim compatriots, such as Muhammad Ali, Shaukat Ali, Abul Kalam Azad, M.A. Ansari and Abdul Ghaffar Khan. Tripathi correctly notes that the deployment of Muslim symbolism in the *Khilafat* and non-cooperation movement recalled the Swadeshi resort to Hindu symbolism.

Tripathi sees economic reasons as the main impetus behind the civil disobedience movement. His third phase stretches from 1930 to the Quit India movement of 1942 and the Bengal famine of 1943. He contests the charge that the unholy nexus between Congress and big business can be traced back to Gandhi. "Gandhi allowed Birla and Sarabhai to dictate to him," Tripathi argues, "no more than Subhas Bose was to later allow Japan and Germany to control his policies." This chapter supplies a brilliant analysis of the Gandhi-Nehru-Bose relationship. Tripathi finds Bose's Haripura address of 1938 to be more left-leaning than Nehru's Lucknow address of 1936. He shows how Gandhi and Bose came close in their ideology from 1942 onwards and highlights the radical nature of Gandhi's draft resolution on Quit India. Gandhi was prepared to negotiate with Japan and take the risk of violence to end India's colonial serfdom. The communist betrayal of the nationalist cause comes in for a devastating critique. Literary sources embellish the book throughout, but nowhere in more poignant a manner than in the discussion of the Bengal famine.

Amales Tripathi's personal relation and interaction with his colleague is reflected in the Foreword of Rudrangshu Mukherjee, 'I cherish the affection he showered upon me even though he was fully aware that on many issues to do with the writing and interpretation of history my views differed sharply from those he held'.[21]

Amales Tripathi was a legendary student in his time and a legendary teacher he was also phenomenally erudite. Tapan Raychaudhury says, 'he has never known a Pandit like Amales Babu'. Generation of students who attended his lectures were captivated by the learning that he brought to his teaching, especially his use of literature. When teaching Indian Nationalism ,Bankim Chandra and Rabindranath would come effortlessly into his 'analysis and when teaching industrial revolution his exposition would be lit up by references to Blake and Dickens', as Rudrangshu said in his introductory note.[22]There is no doubt that he was a sensitive reader of literature was his passion of love which are found in his another work *Swadhinatar Mukh*, written in Bengali. Besides Dickens, he has also referred to Elliot in the context Indian independence. His immersion in historical writing was evident in a collection of Essays titled *Ithas O Oitihasik.*[23] Here he explicated and discussed the ideas and their implications of Historians dating back to Herodotus and Thucydedis and he then moved to the historical ideas of Fernand Braudel.

The book *Indian National Congress and the Struggle for Freedom 1885–1947*does not purport to project a comprehensive picture of a hundred years Indian history. If historians like Lefebvre or Soboul have been unable to present a comprehensive history of a mere decade of a French Revolution, surely be hubris to do full justice to all the other players while essentially writing a history of the congress party- as Rudrangshu has concluded in his introductory note. Whereas, Sumit Sarkar has paid his centenary tribute in this way 'Distinguished teacher and one of the best-known historians of modern India.[24]

Professor Amalesh Tripathi was not only confined to economic history , Indian and American Historiography but was very much busy in writing the nationalist movement of Bengal (which may be called the Age of Extremism) that remains the corpus of the national movement and Bengal's intellectual and cultural history .His

---

[21] Ibid. p, 14.
[22] Ibid. p, 14.
[23] Paschimbanga Rajya Pustak Parshad, 1960.
[24] 'Professor Amales Tripathi (1921-1997)', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, (Indian History Congress) Vol. 58, 1997, p. 986.

work *Freedom Struggle*[25] (written in collaboration with Bipan Chandra and Barun De.) can have a taste of his treatment of the national movement and a valuable survey in Bengali nationalist politics. His essay on Vidyasagar rejects the existing historiography on Bengal renaissance. But Professor Tripathi before entering into the domain of historical research he went to the Columbia University as a full-bright scholar and did his A. M. degree under Richard Hofstadter and a brilliant production titled *Evolution of American History* (World Press) has come to our hand. It was professor Tripathi who acquainted the readers with the philosophy of history. The credit of Tripathi is that he analysed his works in the context of the philosophical outlook of Thucydides, Herodotus, Namier, Ranke, Toyenbee, Braudel, Laduri in one hand and Bankimchadra, Dayanada and Vivekananda on the other. Tripathi did not forget to utilise the archival sources of both home and abroad and the vernacular literature written in Bengali and Sanskrit in writing his books. Another striking feature of Tripathi's writings and works is that he has situated Blake, Dickens frequently. He actually intertwined philosophy, history and literature in a common platform. This short communication may be treated as a token of respect and centenary tribute to Professor Amales Tripathi, a full-bright scholar and Ashutosh Professor of the Department of History, University of Calcutta.

---

[25] National Book Trust, 1972.

Book Review

Bangabandhu and Bangladesh, Sharif uddin Ahmed (ed.), (Dhaka: The University Press Limited and North South University 2021), pp. 432, price: Tk. 1400/-

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was the greatest Bengali ever born. He is the father of the Bengali nation and the creator of the Bangladesh nation-state. Had there been no bold, undaunted, inspiring and fathomless patriotic leadership of him, there would have no Bangladesh state. It would still remain a colony of Pakistan. He made it happen through the 1971 War of Liberation in which 3 million people sacrificed their lives. Mujib was then in Pakistani custody awaiting junta's gallows as he was sentenced to death by hanging by a military tribunal in a sham trial on charge of treason. Barring a few Pakistani collaborators, Bengalis of all walks of life fought against the Pakistan occupation army in the name of their beloved leader, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, unfailingly following his clarion call made in his historic 7th March Address, winning victory in the War of Liberation on December 16, 1971. This was followed by Mujib's triumphant home coming on January 10, 1972. Such events were unprecedented with no parallel in history.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is intrinsically inseparable from the Bangladesh state. The year 2020 marked the birth centenary of the Father of the Nation, as he was born in 1920. This was followed by the first 50th years of Bangladesh's independence in 2021. In order to commemorate the two great events, the year 2020-2021 was declared as `Mujib Barsha' [Mujib Year] by the Bangladesh government. An array of multifaceted programmes was adopted at state, individual and institutional levels, which included, among other things, learned discussions, publication of books, commemorative volumes, etc.

One such commemorative volume published jointly by the University Press Limited (UPL) and the North South University (NSU) came to my hand. The idea of bringing out the volume was conceived by the NSU authority, as the Editor tells us, while crafted by an Editorial Board with Sharif uddin Ahmed, a former faculty of History, University of Dhaka, currently serving as Professor of History and Philosophy, NSU, as Editor. The volume drew my keen interest on four counts. First, Bangabandhu,

War of Liberation and Bangladesh State formation comprise the major areas of my academic interest and works; second, North South University is the first and foremost non-government university in Bangladesh; hence, its academic activities deserve attention from the academia; third, the Editor Sharif uddin Ahmed is widely known for his works on the Dhaka city and not known to have written anything (book, book-chapter or an article in a journal) on Bangabandhu or Bangladesh War of Liberation before the present edited volume, which roused my interest to see how did he manage it; finally, the blurb of the volume asserts, "We hope that this publication will remain a sought-after source for anyone working on Bangladesh's history, both locally and internationally."

The publication contains the names of Board of Trustees of NSU, A Timeline of Bangabandhu's Life, Acknowledgements, Editor's Note, Introduction, Prologue, Contents, Epilogue, Index, About NSU and the Founders of North South University. Mention may be made that, besides the general task of editing, the Editor himself has written the Editor's Note, Introduction, Epilogue and a write up (no. 46) in the volume in his name. The work is an anthology of 47 write ups divided into two sections– Bengali and English, being written by an arrary of people (politicians, journalists, academicians, photo journalist, freelancer, etc.) at different times, many of which were earlier published either in newspapers or in books. For instance, while Tofail Ahmed's write up (no. 1) and that of Professor Dr. Mijanur Rahman (no. 15), were published in *newspapers*[1]*,* Shamsuzzaman Khan's write up (no. 12) was published in a book edited by Abdul Wahab.[2]

The editor should have mentioned this giving the dates and mediums of earlier publications in the cases of reproduction of the write ups in proper places of his volume. However, he refrained from doing so. `An Anthology (or Assorted Essays) on Bangabandhu and Bangladesh' would have been a more appropriate title for the work in view of its contents in the place of one, as entitled. I wonder, how could a learned work, be it a compilation, contain the names of Board of Trustees and founding members of the said university?

Let us now turn to pages on which the learned Editor endeavored to give the readership of his view of Bangabandhu's statehood ideal including the reason for involvement in the Muslim League/Pakistan movement. To quote him, "Bangabandhu started working with the Muslim League for the betterment of the conditions of the Muslim community of India, especially in Bengal" (Epilogue, p. 423). He further writes, "His [Bangabandhu's] campaign [in the 1946 elections] resulted in their political, social and cultural freedom, being realised in the victory of the Muslim

League and its demand for Pakistan" (Epilogue, p. 423). He continues, "Soon, Bangabandhu faced a dire situation he could never have imagined. The Pakistani ruling coterie headed by Governor-General Muhammad Ali Jinnah declared that Urdu *should* be the state language of Pakistan," (p. 423)[3]

These set forth a number of questions to answer: Did Bangabandhu believe in the Indian Muslims constituting an integrated community or was he not all along aware of the Bengali identity while engaged himself in the Muslim League/Pakistan movement? Was the 1947 Pakistan comprising of the two wings with glaring differences in almost every respect (history, language, culture, strand of faith, etc.), again, being distanced by more than a thousand mile of India's territory, in commensurate with Bangabandhu's statehood ideal? Was there any word called 'Pakistan' in the 1940 Lahore Resolution? How to explain the move initiated by Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, though unsuccessful, for United Independent Bengal as a third state outside both India and Pakistan preceding the partition, in which Bangabandhu played an active role, along with a section of Bengal Provincial Muslim League and Congress leaderships? Was it not a fact that Bangabandhu favoured the establishment of an independent state in the eastern region of India, as stipulated in the 1940 Lahore Resolution, which reflected his distinct statehood ideal?[4] How could one, as Sharif uddin Ahmed definitely does, as mentioned above, hold the view that the 'political, social and cultural freedom' of the Bengali Muslims were also 'realised in the victory of the Muslim League and its demand for Pakistan'? If that was so, then, why did the language movement take place so early in East Bengal (first phase, March 1948) in which Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman played a leading role, resulting in his imprisonment by the Muslim League government along with others? It is now widely known that the state of Pakistan came into being with state language controversies between the Bengalis and non-Bengalis engaged in the Pakistan movement.[5] As a matter of fact, such a debate dated long back.[6] Hence, how could the Editor hold the view, as already seen, that Bangabandhu 'could never have imagined' the state language policy of the Pakistan rulers including Jinnah in favour of 'only Urdu'? Any informed reader of the book would readily agree that, given his academic background (Professor of History), the Editor must not have failed to see things in proper perspective instead of holdings contentious views.

In the book, fundamental mistakes abound.[7] These pertain to dates, name of Fazlul Huq's party [Krishak Sramik Party, and not Krishak Praja Party] joining the United Front (1954), the oft-quoted declaration of Bangabandhu at the end of his 7th March

Address, the first Prime Minister [Tajuddin Ahmad, and not Sheikh Mujibur Rahman] of independent Bangladesh, the designation of the Chief of the provincial government [Chief Minister, and not Prime Minister] after 1947 partition, dates of arrest and releases of Bangabandhu, holding of Awami League's council meetings, presentation of Bangabandhu's historic 6-point programme, to cite a few (I feel impelled to write a separate review detailing out all these things). Such mistakes must not be there in an edited volume.

The Editor Sharif uddin Ahmed himself contributed a write up (no. 46, pp. 399-413) in the book under the title, 'Final Imprisonment of Bangabandhu and Triumphant Return from West Pakistan'. One may raise the following questions: Did Bangabandhu return from 'West Pakistan' or Pakistan? After the emergence of Bangladesh, was there any 'West Pakistan' state, or it instantaneously became Pakistan? The way the second part of the title phrased, this may even create the impression that Bangabandhu's return was from 'West Pakistan' to 'East Pakistan'. Will that be wrong or refutable since the writer did not spell out in the title where did Bangabandhu return to? Needless to say that the puzzle looms large as a result of naming 'West Pakistan' by the learned editor.

Let us now turn our attention to 'A Timeline of Bangabandhu's Life' on inner pages of the book (pp. xiv-xvi). This chronicled the major events in Bangabandhu's life from his birth in 1920 to his falling victim to assassins' bullets in the brutal August 1975 killing. Usually, such a snapshot-style account of a distinguished personality is very useful to a reader as well as to researcher provided the chronicle is comprehensive and factually correct. Unfortunately, it is falling far short of both considerations. For instance: Bangabandhu's starting of schooling at *Gopalganj Primiary School;* getting married in the *year 1938;* coming first into contact with A. K. Fazlul Huq and Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy *in 1939;* going into hunger strike *for 13 days from 14 February* during the 1952 language movement; presentation of 'Six-point *mandate'* [programme] *in an AL-Party Convention* in Lahore in 1966; election as party president *on 1 March* 1966; winning landside victory in the East Pakistan Provincial assembly & *Pakistan National Constituent Assembly elections on 7 December* 1970; courting *arrest on 25th March mid-night* (italics mine)– these are all incorrect statements/information. The following are the corrected versions:[8]

First, Bangabandhu's schooling started at Gimadanga-Tungipara Primary School (English medium) in Tungipara (not in Gopalganj); second, got married in 1932/33 (not in 1938) at the age of 12/13; third, first contact with Fazlul Huq and Suhrawardy in 1938 (not in 1939); fourth, went into hunger strike for 11 (eleven) days (not 13

days) in Faridpur jail from 16 February (not 14 February) during the second phase of the language movement in 1952; fifth, attempted to present Six-point programme in the Subject Committee of the all-party convention in Lahore but the Committee flatly refused to consider it for inclusion into the agenda in view of its 'extremely radical character'. So, he could not present it there. The statement made in the book is wrong. It may be further pointed out that in protest, Bangabandhu dissociated himself and his party from the convention. Upon his arrival in Tejgaon (old) Airport, Dhaka on 11 February 1966, he made the first public presentation of his Six-point demand before a group of journalists; sixth, elected President of Awami League on 19 March (not on 1 March) in the 3-day council meeting (18-20 March) held in Hotel Eden (now, non-existing) in Motijheel, Dhaka in 1966; seventh, the central assembly of former Pakistan was called National Assembly (not National Constituent Assembly) and the elections to both National and East Pakistan Provincial Assemblies were held on 7 and 17 December 1970, respectively (not on the same date i.e. 7 December); eighth, Bangabandhu was arrested by the Pakistani commandos in the early hour of 26 March (not on 25 March), while immediately before his arrest he declared Bangladesh's independence. There are other mistakes, too, in the Life Timeline of Bangabandhu in the book. Bangabandhu's courting arrest on 11 March 1948 during the first phase of the language movement is conspicuously absent from the chronology. Though the matters of the profile were compiled by another person, a hundred million question creeps in the mind of a careful reader: Can the learned Editor exonerate himself from all the fundamental factual mistakes, as mentioned above?

Finally, I would not say that the book at hand has no worth at all. There are some good reminiscences and write ups. However, how could one recommend such a book to readership when it is fraught with abundant factual mistakes and lack of conceptual clarity of serious nature? The celebration of Bangabandhu's birth centenary and the first fifty-year of Bangladesh's independence (golden jubilee) marked mushrooming of publications on Bangabandhu and Bangladesh, many by all and sundry, without caring for quality. It's a pity that, though edited by a noted historian, the book on *Bangabandhu and Bangladesh* is no exception. I wonder, how could UPL, being the internationally reputed learned publisher in Bangladesh, be associated with the publication of such a book as a co-publisher?

Harun-or-Rashid*

* Former Vice-Chancellor of National University; Bangabandhu Professorial Fellow at Heidelberg University, Germany and currently Member of the Council, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh.

Notes and references

1. *Daily Amader Samoy*, 17 March 2019 and *Daily Ittefaq*, 18 March 2020, respectively.

2. Abdul Wahab (ed.), *Bangabandhur Shaat Marcher Bhason : Itihash O Tatto* (in Bengali), Dhaka: Mowla Brothers 2014, pp. 308-317.

3. Italic type mine. Jinnah's declaration regarding the State language of Pakistan was: "Make no mistake about it. There can be only one State language [...] and that language [...] can only be Urdu." He made this declaration in his convocation address at Curgon Hall, University of Dhaka, on 24 March 1948. See *Dhaka University: The Convocation Speeches, vol. 2, 1948-1970,* compiled by Serajul Islam Islam Choudhury, University of Dhaka 1989, p. 24. Three days before, on 21 March, Jinnah made a similar pronouncement while addressing a public meeting in Racecourse (currently Suhrawardy Uddyan). In both places, his address dwelling on State language policy invoked instantaneous protest. For his address in Racecourse, see Oli Ahad, *Jatiyo Rajniti 1945-1975 (*in Bengali), Dhaka: Khosroj Kitabmohol 1997, pp. 53-62.

4. For Bangabandhu's Bengali identity, his involvement in the Muslim League/Pakistan movement, the 1940 Lahore Resolution, Bangabandhu's statehood ideal, his role in Suhrawardy's move for United Independent Bengal, his leadership role in the 1948 and 1952 language movement, etc., see Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, *Ausamapta Atmajiboni* [The Unfinished Memoirs], (Dhaka: UPL 2012); Harun-or-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh : Bengal Muslim League and Muslim Politics, 1906-1947, (*Dhaka: UPL 2003, 2012, 2015, 2021); Harun-or-Rashid, *From 1947 Partition : Bangabandhu and State Formation in perspective,* (Dhaka: UPL 2021); Harun-or-Rashid, *Bangio Muslim League : Pakistan Andolon, Bangalir Rastrobhabna o Bangabandhu (*in Bengali), (Dhaka: Anyaprokash 2018); Harun-or-Rashid, *Bhasa Andolone Bangabandhur Bhumika (*in Bengali), (Dhaka: Anyaprokash 2020); Syed Shahryar Iqbal (ed.), *Sheikh Mujib in Parliament (1955-1958),* (Dhaka: Agamee Prokashani 2016).

5. For language controversies between Bengali and non-Bengali Muslims in the Muslim League and Pakistan movement, see Harun-or-Rashid, *Foreshadowing of Bangladesh;* Harun-or-Rashid, *Bangio Muslim League: Pakistan Andolon;* Harun-or-Rashid, *Bhasa Andolone Bangabandhur Bhumika.*

6. See Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengla Muslims, 1871-1906 : A Quest for Identity,* (Dhaka: Oxford University Press 1998).

7. Sharif uddin Ahmed (ed.), *Bangabandhu and Bangladesh,* (Dhaka: UPL and North South University 2021), pp. 15, 17, 34, 60, 132-133, 275-278, xv.

8. For corrected versions of various dates, names of institution and assembly, events, occurrences, etc. provided by the reviewer against this note, see Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, *Ausamapta Atmajiboni;* Harun-or-Rashid, *Bangabandhukosh : Jatirpita Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahmaner Shachitra Jibon-brittanta* [Encylopaedia of Bangabandh: Life-Sketch of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman with Pictorial illustration], (Dhaka: Journeyman Books 2021); Harun-or-Rashid, *Bhasa Andolone Bangabandhur Bhumika;* Harun-or-Rashid, *'Amader Bachar Dabee' Chhoi-Dafar Panchash Bachhor* [Our Charter of Survival : Fifty years of Six-point], (Dhaka: Bangla Academy 2016); Harun-or-Rashid, *Bangabandhur Ausamapta Atmajiboni Punorpat,* [Bangabandhu's Unfinished Memoirs Re-visited], (Dhaka: UPL 2020, 6th print)*;* Harun-or-Rashid, *Muldharar Rajniti : Bangladesh Awami League Council 1949-2016* [Mainstream Politics : Bangladesh Awami League Council 1949-2016], (Dhaka: Bangla Academy 2016).