JOURNAL
OF
THE ASIATIC SOCIETY OF BANGLADESH
(HUMANITIES)

Vol. 68 **No. 2** **December 2023**

Editor
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ASIATIC SOCIETY OF BANGLADESH

Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh (Humanities) is published by the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh in June and December every year. Scholarly articles relating to ***Peoples and Nature of Asia*** are considered for publication in the Journal. It also receives books for reviewing.

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Website : www.asiaticsociety.org.bd

Published by The Asiatic Society of Bangladesh

Price Tk. 200.00 (Two hundred taka)

ISSN **1015–6836**

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

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Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh **(Hum.), Vol. 68(2), 2023, pp. 153-174**
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Artworks as Protest after Rana Plaza Collapse: Frames, Emotions, and Injustices in the Workers' Rights Movement in Bangladesh

Samina Luthfa*

Abstract

This article details the framing of emotions and workplace injustices through creative avenues and the politics of communication by activist artists from all over the world that worked in the aftermath of the Rana Plaza collapse in 2013 at Savar near Dhaka in Bangladesh. Analyzing poems, photographs, and dramatic performances, used during the protests against Rana Plaza owners, factory owners and the government, I argue that such creative works not only frame the injustices against workers but also the reflexive, affective and moral emotions to motivate audiences in resisting such injustices. After the collapse of Rana Plaza, activists framed their protests trying to express their own anguish and incite different kinds of emotions among their audience that will in turn make them active in protest. Although it is impossible to measure the impact of these creative works of art as protest, these art works are from local and international artists and were presented to transnational audiences, which sheds light on the diffusion of the protest around the world.

Key words: Rana Plaza, injustices against workers, reflexive, affective and moral emotions, art, protest.

Introduction

Whether it is popular or exclusive, art is a major component of protest that mobilizes material and symbolic resources, endorses movement framing, activates constituencies, sensitizes the broader public, and produces social change by renewing cultural traditions.[1] Joe Hill, the legendary labour activist and song writer once wrote, "A pamphlet - no matter how good, is never read more than once. But a song is learned by heart and repeated over and over."[2] Similarly plays, cinemas, photos, paintings, sketches, performances, and poems all are creative avenues that can be rich sources of political ideas and social analysis. When politics means discursive performative communication to some scholars[3], some would be interested to gauge

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1 L. Mathieu, 'Art and Social Movement', S.A. Soule, K. Hunt, and D.A. Snow (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements,* (Blackwell Publishing 2004), pp. 354-368

2 J. Goodwin and J. M. Jasper (Eds.), *The social movements reader: Cases and concepts,* (No. 12), (John Wiley & Sons, 2009), p 185

3 D.N. Pathak and S. Perera, 'Introduction: Towards an inconclusive scheme of performative communication', *Culture and Politics in South Asia*, (Routledge India 2017), pp, 1-26.

the politics of performance and the art forms, for example, on a stage or at the central Shahid Minar in Dhaka, with a discursive and political communication agenda. Not that these two are very different in their aims, the expressions of these two are also similar. This article looks at some such artwork that sprung after a horrendous man-made disaster in a building near Dhaka that housed seven apparel factories and collapsed in one morning of 2013. Using social movement studies framework, it analyzes the type of framing used, and affective influence of such art and performances.

After the collapse of the plaza, there were many difficult tasks including short-terms ones like conducting the rescue operation, transportation of the wounded to the hospital, their treatment, transfer of the dead bodies to their respective families, compensation, and rehabilitation of the dead and the wounded, and the families that lost loved ones in the tragedy. In the long-term, the long-awaited inception of inspection of compliance in factories for the state to initiate and monitor, to change sections of laws to improve the legal and human rights of the workers and setting up of state-based monitoring mechanism to keep the industry owners accountable for workplace environment and rights were also present in the public discourse. According to Hussain and Luthfa[4], although majority of these activities were the responsibilities of the state, most of these were left to be handled by the NGOs. Therefore, activists had to remain alert to fulfill and monitor the tasks which were the state's responsibility. Nonetheless, this article describes the background of using art as resistance in the political movements and activism after the collapse. Furthermore, it explores the nature and scope of framing used in the selected artworks and most importantly how these framing aspired to incite nuanced forms of emotions (both reflexive, affectual, and moral).

This article explores the following research questions; what type of frames are used in the creative activism in the aftermath of Rana Plaza collapse, what audiences are targeted, and the types of emotions these frames play with. Before moving on to answer the questions, I present a brief description about what happened in the case of Rana Plaza and who were responsible behind the worst industrial disaster in Bangladesh, then a brief review of the literature that deals with framing, emotions, and audience of social movement for social and environmental justice. Then, I discuss the artworks chosen from an activists' website that has translated creative works for both vernacular and international audience.

4 S. Hussain and S. Luthfa, "After Rana Plaza: Why were NGOs left to pick up the pieces in the aftermath of the Rana Plaza factory collapse?", *Open Democracy,* (Open Democracy 2014), https://www.opendemocracy.net/opensecurity/shahadat-hossain-samina-luthfa/after-rana-plaza, accessed on 2.12.2019.

Background: The Collapse and the Aftermath

On April 24, 2013, traffic on the Dhaka–Aricha Highway was sparser than usual due to the nation-wide *hartal* called by the then-oppositions of the ruling Awami League.[5] Rana Plaza's owner, Sohel Rana (who wanted to defy *hartal*) forced the workers to enter the building disregarding their concerns about it being vulnerable that was evacuated the day before due to visible cracks in its columns. The workers feared that if they did not work on that day, their salary would not be disbursed until the end of May and therefore, they were forced to enter the building that morning. Then there was a power cut, the generators started automatically and within a few minutes the plaza collapsed with a huge noise. The upper floors of Rana Plaza fell fast in succession making the bottom half of the building crush under its weight. Within seconds, the eight-storied building was reduced to a wreckage[6] and around 1175 workers were killed.[7]

Choudhury, Luthfa and Gayen[8] also reported about major structural problems and governance issues of the building that were responsible for the collapse. Despite being a vulnerable structure with numerous structural limitations, its existence and sustenance as an industrial hub for big western retailers expose the true vulnerability of the industry. This vulnerability stems from the fact that brands go to Bangladesh not only because of the cheap labour but also because of the lax rules and regulation of the government that overlooks many wrongdoings and helps the frontier capitalism to accumulate profit quickly. Structurally, the Plaza did not have RAJUK approval as an industrial unit, broke government's building code of conducts and was built partly over a landfilled pond violating the Water Bodies Act and had a weak base. The vibration of the generators in each floor combined with thousands of sewing machines and undersized columns threatened the building's internal strength that finally, led to the collapse of the structure. Savar Municipal Corporation could not stop the establishment of such a vulnerable structure that ignored the building code, fire safety code and water-bodies policy of the country.[9]

According to the police investigation the following individuals were found liable for the collapse of the building and the loss of lives: the owner of Rana Plaza, the owners

5 Jason Motlagh, "The Ghost of Rana Plaza", *VQR – a national journal of Literature and Discussion*, Vol. 90, Issue 2, (Spring 2014),https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/bangladesh-ghosts-rana-plaza, accessed on 2.12.2022

6 Ibid.

7 Z. Choudhury, K. Gayen and S. Luthfa, *Women in Readymade Garment Industry: Understanding Capabilities and Vulnerabilities of Female Workers in Bangladesh*, (Bangladesh Mohila Parishad, 2016), pp. 121-124

8 Ibid, pp.130-132

9 Ibid, p. 132

of the apparel factories situated in the building, government officers, engineers and town planners of Savar municipality, the Department of Inspection of Factories and Establishment (DIFE), and the RAJUK for not monitoring the building of such a structure violating laws of our land.[10] However, activists argue that in accordance with national and international laws, it is the liability of the government of Bangladesh to protect human rights in the country, and it has failed in its duty to guarantee the rights and safety of those factory workers. Both national and multinational companies including the retail brands that ordered from these factories have also failed to maintain their responsibilities under national and international law. The executives of the apparel factories in the building who ordered the workers to get inside the building to work, even though it was evacuated the day before due to the appearance of cracks, were also violating the workers' human rights. Even though these factories ought to go through extensive social audits to be eligible to supply for the big multinational brand retailers, the collapse is a transparent illustration of the futility and insufficiency of these so-called 'social audits' in Bangladesh.

Scholars also identified that right after the collapse, government agencies were as non-adept in tackling issues as they were in stopping the disaster from happening. Therefore, in the aftermath of the collapse, activists and non-government agencies, groups and associations of citizens carried out a major share of responsibility for rescue, relief, and rehabilitation of victims and survivors.[11] During the first few days of the collapse, the activists also had the burden of organizing on-street protests, to get the perpetrators arrested. In brief, general people and activists were involved in rescue, rehabilitation and many other activities as well as on street protests to ensure justice for the workers killed or injured at the collapse. They used street protests, road marches, collective blood camps, fund raising and a lot of creative works including photography, paintings, songs, plays (both for street and stage), poems and stories.[12] Across social movement literature, artwork has been regarded as part of the symbolic work of identity making and making of the movement itself. The cultural aspects of movements are no longer sidelined in such literature. The so-called 'artwork' is regarded as central to the framing of injustices and create awareness among the public discourse.

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[10] Ibid, pp. 135-136

[11] S. Hussain and S. Luthfa,"After Rana Plaza: Why were NGOs left to pick up the pieces in the aftermath of the Rana Plaza factory collapse?", *Open Democracy,* (Open Democracy,2014), accessed on 2.12.2019

[12] Samhati, *24she April: Hajar Praner Chitkar* [*24th April: Outcries of athous and souls*], (Bangladesh Garments Workers Solidarity, 2015),andwww.outcriesofthousandsouls.org, 2018.

Conceptual Framework: Framing, Emotions and Injustices

Framing

In social movement literature, framing has a central place. A group of researchers conceptualize frames as "negotiated shared meanings" or "claim-making performances" embedded in a "repertoire of action" that include the definition of the injustice, the agency and the identity demarking 'we' versus 'they' with a view to organizing potential supporters, attract by-standers and demobilize antagonists.[13] Conversely, Steinberg[14] suggests that framing is a dialogic activity by the activists where they are 'constantly responding to the standpoint of the dominant opponents'.[15] I use the concept of strategic cultural framing to understand the process of framing affective emotions through creative projects in the aftermath of a massive industrial disaster to garner the support of the by-standers in Bangladesh. In this analysis, my emphasis is solely on the creative rationale and process of the educated, middleclass, autonomous agents of political protests and not on the 'amorphous irrational crowd' that can create frames of moments of kick and moments for clicks for methodological limitations (see Chowdhury[16] for more on the amorphous irrational crowd and their picture-thinking)

Snow, Vligenthart and Ketelaars[17] suggest that frames aid the interpretive work of protest first, by focusing attention by clustering the elements that requires attention

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[13] R. D. Benford and D. A. Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment", *Annual Review of Sociology,* Vol. 26, 2000, pp. 611-639; W. A. Gamson, *Talking Politics*, (Cambridge University Press 1992); D. McAdam, J.D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald (eds.), *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings,* (Cambridge University Press1996); C. Ryanand W.A. Gamson, 'Are Frames Enough? (from The Art of Reframing Political Debate)', J Goodwin, J.M. Jasper (Eds.), *Social Movement Reader*, (Willey-Blackwell 2009), pp. 167-74; C. Tilly, *Regimes and Repertoires*, (University of Chicago Press 2006); D. A. Snow, "Framing Processes, Ideology, and Discursive Fields." *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*. Snow, David A., Sarah A. Soule and Hanspeter Kriesi (eds.). Blackwell Publishing, 2003. Blackwell Reference Online, 23 November 2012: http://www.blackwellreference.com/subscriber/ tocnode.html?id=g9780631226697_chunk_g978063122669718; M.N. Zald, 'Culture, Ideology and Strategic Framing'. D. McAdam, J.D. McCarthy and M.N. Zald (eds.), *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*, (Cambridge University Press, 1996). pp. 261-274.

[14] M.W Steinberg, "The Talk and Back Talk of Collective Action: A Dialogic Analysis of Repertoires of Discourse among Nineteenth-Century English Cotton Spinners", *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 105(3), 1999, pp 736-780.

[15] Ibid.

[16] N. S. Chowdhury, *Paradoxes of the Popular: Crowd Politics in Bangladesh*, (Stanford University Press 2019), pp. 31-61

[17] D. A. Snow, R. Vligenthart and P. Ketelaars, 'The Framing Perspective on Social Movements: Its Conceptual Roots and Architecture'; David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, Hanspeter Kriesi, and

and what can stay outside of the realm of attention. In addition, such frames also have "articulation functions" by which process the various dispersed and muddled elements of the scenario are bound together to convey one coherent set of meanings. Finally, frames have "transformative functions" too that proposes revising the way some of the highlighted objects are viewed or understood.[18] They also argued that the core framing task is motivational framing or the agency component of collective action frame[19] that involves amplification of a justification for action that goes beyond the diagnostic and prognostic framing. Motivational framing, in other words, constructs the motive that pushes actors to action, overcoming both the fear of risks of joining any collective action and the so-called "free-rider" problem. It addresses the obstacles to action by accentuating the severity of the problem, the earnestness of taking instant action, the possible effectiveness of joining the protest/ action, the moral obligation to act, and the improvement of one's status.[20]

Emotions

Emotions are much debated in the social movement literature and still gets peripheral importance as a factor influencing social movements. Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta[21] categorizes emotions as immediate reflex emotions that comes suddenly and subside fast, longer-term affective loyalties or orientations like moods, trusts, love; and moral emotions based on complex cognitive understandings, like 'compassion for the unfortunate and indignation towards injustice'.[22] They also argue that even reflex emotions encourage unreasonable acts only occasionally, let alone the other types. Emotions involve complex judgment processes and make protestors more driven, alert, and rational. However, even crowds behave rationally, most of the times, except for during moments of sudden outbursts provoked by externalities. Even when these outbursts or other mistakes are performed, we need to remember that making mistakes is not irrational, to not learn from it and to continue to make the same mistakes are.

Emotions can be treated as strategic tools too, from the protestors' point of view. One major motive of protestors is to stimulate the police forces into discrediting

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Holly J. McCammon, *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (2nd edition), (John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2019), pp.392-398.

18 Ibid, p. 395

19 Ibid. p. 396

20 Ibid, p 396

21 J. Goodwin, J M. Jasper and F Polletta, 'Emotional Dimensions of Social Movements'. D.A Snow, Sarah A Soul and Hanspeter Kriesi (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, (Blackwell Publishing 2003), pp. 410-430.

22 J.M. Jasper, "Emotions and Social Movements: Twenty Years of Theory and Research", *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 37(1), 2011, pp. 285-303.

themselves through violent repression, for example, and such responses can be strategically incited by arousing reflex emotions. On the other hand, affective emotions that can be either positive or negative commitments to a group or cause and based on both fondness, instrumental calculations, and morality but are the reasons why protestors participate in movements instead of being by-standers. They do not just organize to follow material interests, but wants to benefit those they love and penalize those they hate.[23]

Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta[24] also argue that when people protest to protect a coastline or historic building, or want better work environment for garment workers, or the honor of a nation or group to which they feel loyal or responsible for are nothing less than affective loyalties. Also, respect and trust are crucial in politics since we tend to believe the statements of people and organizations who we trust. Movement leaders also often try to arouse a feeling of hope or optimism among participants, "a sense that they can have a positive, transformative effect through their collective action."

In addition, compassion is a complex cultural moral feeling without which, the transnational movements against slavery, sweatshops, the World Trade Organization, or the US war against Iraq would not have become so broad. Compassion as an emotion is very important in understanding the cultural activities in Bangladesh after Rana Plaza collapsed. These activities when targeted towards the international audience compassion becomes very relevant.[25]

Framing Emotions for the Audiences

The appeal to or use of emotion is one of the central features of motivational framing. Such a frame should incite action by drawing on the severity, urgency, efficacy, moral propriety, and status enhancement.[26] Protestors plan about what kinds of emotions to frame in their communication to incite the urgency of the situation that leads to protests, and what kinds of emotions to try to awaken among movement

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[23] S. Luthfa, "Creative work as protest: Framing Injustices against RMG workers in Bangladesh", *The Daily Star*, October 2, 2019

[24] J. Goodwin, J. M. Jasper and F. Polletta, "Emotional Dimensions of Social Movements", *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule and Hanspeter Kriesi (eds.), Blackwell Publishing, 2003, Blackwell Reference Online: 23 November 2012<http://www.blackwellreference.com/subscriber/tocnode.html?id=g9780631226697_chunk_g978063122669719>

[25] Ibid

[26] D. A. Snow, R. Vligenthart and P. Ketelaars, "The Framing Perspective on Social Movements: Its Conceptual Roots and Architecture", David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, Hanspeter Kriesi, and Holly J. McCammon (eds.), *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (2nd edition), (John Wiley & Sons Ltd 2019). pp. 392-410.

participants, targets, and opponents. When such protestors are making claims against or in favor of something in a public space as an arena[27] or a stage[28] to mobilize support for their cause, their aims are first, voicing their claims, and second, attracting attentions of the by-standers who would support them to achieve their claims. In such a stage, individual or collective actor(s)participate in public acts (like speeches, banners, festoons, leaflets, sit-ins, strikes, and more aesthetic forms of protests like street plays, songs, art-shows and so on) centering around their expectations, an active audience witness what is staged and some of them might become autonomous enough to take sides favoring or opposing the claims being made.

Art as contentious resource: Framing Injustice against Workers

Tilly[29] defined contentious actions as performances which refers to the improvisations in mobilizing support. Mathieu[30] suggests that art and contention merge in practice when protesters mobilize artistic resources or works in their protests. For example, on street protests often parody traditional songs, chants slogans in verses, illustrate posters with drawings or photographs, pickets with a specific attire, and so on. Such aestheticization of protest happens with a politicization of art.[31]In protests, artwork can be used in two ways, as a practice or as a resource. When a piece of art being used by a protest was not meant to be political by its creator, is given a new meaning by the protestors, that art is categorized as a contentious practice. On the other hand, when art itself is one of the various resources that movements produce to mobilize, these are labelled as contentious resources.[32] However, we also find artworks that are not created for a specific protest but for some other protest in the past and is then co-opted as a tool in the repertoire of performance of a newer movement. I shall categorize them as legacy resources. All these three types of resources and practices are symbolic works of social movement mobilization.

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27 W. A. Gamson, 'Bystanders, Public Opinion, and the Media'. D.A. Snow, Sarah A. Soul and Hanspeter Kriesi (eds), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, Blackwell Publishing, 2003. Blackwell Reference Online: 23 Nov. 2012 <http://www.blackwellreference.com/subscriber/tocnode.html?id=g9780631226697_chunk_g978063122669712>

28 S. Luthfa, "Showcasing Environmental Justice Movements from the South: comparing the role of old and new media in Bangladesh", *Society and Culture in South Asia*, Vol. 5, Issue 2, 2019, pp. 290–328.

29 Charles Tilly, *Social Movements, 1768–2004*, (Paradigm publishers 2004)

30 L. Mathieu, 'Art and Social Movement', David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, Hanspeter Kriesi, and Holly J. McCammon (eds.), *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (2nd edition), (John Wiley & Sons Ltd. 2019).), pp. 354-367.

31 Ibid. 357

32 Ibid

Whether popular or exclusive, art is a major tool of mobilizing social movement that supplies material and symbolic resources, supports movement framing, inspires constituencies, prepares the broader public, and produces social change by renewing cultural traditions. Such work is not simple to envisage and requires complicated processes of front and backstage work. Behind making the political or artistic performance presented front stage (media/ stage) there is always a back-stage manufacturing center where the political or aesthetic "would-be performers" juggle their ideas, write scripts, design the presentation of their ideas, form coalitions/ entourage, decide how to communicate her emotion, improvise, and rehearse – the everyday work of cultural production of activism happens. Mass and social media are such stages where activists showcase and sometimes accentuate their claims through performance.[33]

The Data

To understand how the creative work and its framing of emotions after the collapse of Rana Plaza worked, I have chosen a book that stores a lot of such works and has a website dedicated to it with English translation of most of the artistic works. From that book I purposively chose two songs, one photograph, one exhibition of memorial quilt, one street play, and one performance art by Bangladeshi and foreign artists. The book of anthology is produced and published by a left leaning activist group called Bangladesh Garments Shamhati (Bangladesh Garment Workers Solidarity). The book is a good source of secondary information based on years of research by activists. It contains a list of the deceased, wounded and missing workers with approximately the most complete information on their origin and demographics. It also presents a good collection of immediate responses from activists as well as artists who were protesting the injustices against the Rana Plaza victims from the very onset. The works of activists whose creative contents I am focusing on are presented here too. So, I cite the 'activist' artists and their works to reveal the deliberate process of framing against injustices. In the process, they use affective loyalties and moral emotions so that the injustice against the workers becomes well known around the world. The anthology has also been partially translated by the same group of cultural activists and is uploaded in a website.[34]

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[33] S. Luthfa, "Showcasing Environmental Justice Movements from the South: comparing the role of old and new media in Bangladesh", *Society and Culture in South Asia*, Vol 5, Issue 2, 2019, pp. 290–328.

[34] Samhati, *24she April: Hajar Praner Chitkar* [*24th April: Outcries of athousand souls*], (Bangladesh Garments Workers Solidarity, 2015)

Table 1: Framing emotions for different audiences

Type of Audience	Artwork	Framing	Types of Emotions		
Bangladeshi	*Shunte paccho ki*- Song Contentious resource	Diagnostic & Motivational	Anger, Fear	Outrage	Indignation, Hope
	Karkhana keno bondi shibir – Song Legacy resource	Motivational	Anger	Outrage	Indignation, Hope
	Jatugriha – play Legacy + Contentious resource	Diagnostic & Motivational	Anger, fear, hate	Outrage	Indignation, Compassion, Hope
Both	The Last Embrace – photo Contentious Resource	Motivational	Fear, Anger	Outrage	Guilt, Compassion
Westerners	Dilora's performance Contentious Resource	Diagnostic & Motivational	Horror, Fear, Anger	Outrage	Guilt, Compassion, Hope
	The Memorial Quilt Legacy+ Contentious Resource	Motivational	Anger	Outrage	Guilt, Compassion, Hope

Source: Author's formulation.

The Songs of Defiance

The first song is *Shunte paccho ki?* [Can you hear me?] by a group called *Samageet*, comprised of activist singers who wrote and first sang the song after Rana Plaza collapsed in Savar to create awareness about the inhuman working conditions in the ready-made garment sector and protesting deaths at Rana Plaza. Amal Akash wrote the lyrics and music was composed by Amal Akash and Khalequr Rahman Arko. I quote from Shahidul Alam and Rahnuma Ahmed's translation, and find that the song speaks about hope, when they say, 'Bury not a throbbing heart, I still breathe'. The poet says:

> "Can you hear me out there?
> Hey people, can you hear?
> Corpses piled high, brick rock concrete
> Bury not a throbbing heart, I still breathe.
> Bury me not alive
> Mother, o mother
> I still breathe life"[35]

Here the emotion that the poet is aiming to frame first is the reflex emotion of anger/ frustration of the workers' plight who are literally trapped under the debris of Rana

[35] Shahidul Alam and Rahnuma Ahmed, www.outcriesofthousandsouls.org, 2018, accessed on 2.12.2022

Plaza and symbolically under the juggernaut of capitalist exploitation. Some of the trapped workers under Rana Plaza had to be rescued by cutting their limbs off using blunt instruments and yet their basic urge was to breathe and to survive. All the surviving victims who were stuck under the rubble wanted to live, to escape from under this trap so that they were not buried alive! Their outcries reminded us that even before the big collapse the workers of the readymade garment sector were still caught under the steamroller of high output, and fast production in the apparel sector that accumulates corpses and crushes workers under its concrete greed. From under such traps, they are crying out to breathe. However, as soon as we read more, we realize that the wider goal of the song writer is to prompt indignation towards an inhuman system that confines the workers inside factory buildings and kills them.

This song also exposes the diagnosis of how the industry is making profit by using the workers lives. With their blood, sweat and tears, the profit earnings of the owners in Bangladesh and the foreign retailers increase and 'glints in the sky'. However, he does not forget to ask, "Why then must I burn, and as ashes return". The workers report, "Your dreams I stitch, with each handle I turn…Aah aah aah aah". And also laments,

> "Why's factory a death trap, on worker body feeds
> Tears of blood flow freely, my sacrifice it needs."[36]

The writer does not only depict a story of the workers' struggles and sufferings but also vows to stop such systemic violence and exploitation that enables the march of all the corpses. He promised that she will not stand such marches. And retorts saying,

> "March of the corpses, no longer will I stand
> Corpses piled high, must end, I demand.
> My heart still pumps, don't bury me alive.
> Mother o mother"

He reminds us that the workers who are either stuck under the collapsed building or the inhuman system of contracting and sub-contracting for readymade mass fast fashion brands are shouting to our conscience to stop the march of corpses. We must remember that the worker says, "I still breathe, mother, we still have life". The outcry of their souls is directed towards the arousal of compassion among the citizens of Bangladesh. The song writer wants to communicate with the people so that they help the workers live; to the global retailers so that workers are allowed to survive; and towards the world so that it enables their hearts to pump. This is the moral obligation the singers of the song are reminding us of. In this song, we found 'art as contentious

[36] Ibid

resource' that created diagnostic frames of the injustices done against the workers, aimed to incite anger, hope and outrage as well as compassion and moral obligations to favor the workers who were smashed under the heavy structure of exploitation by big brands, local owners and the government employees and supporters of the ruling party – the powerful people. This song is a great example of framing emotions as art to use it as a resource for a specific movement, in this case, the activism to deliver justice to the dead and the wounded.

Another song titled *No More Press Notes* written and composed by Kafil Ahmed exposes how successive governments dealt with the unacceptable working conditions in the sweatshops of Bangladesh. Research findings suggest similar results.[37] Though written and composed earlier than the collapse, the song is about the inhuman working condition of the RMG workers and the lax government response to curb such crimes in the factories, and therefore, activists used this song quite often to frame the inability of the government to take steps to stop the heinous death traps in apparel factories in Bangladesh. The song resonated with the spirit of the activists who were protesting to achieve justice for the dead and the surviving workers from the collapse. The song is based on framing the unjust hours and inhuman working conditions in the factories that are like prisons and when the workers die there, governments issue only press-notes although such notes change nothing after the tragedies.

Rana plaza collapse that tainted the image of fast fashion in the world forever, is regarded as the harbinger of changes in the sector, though 'accidents' like this did not stop happening. Since the perpetrators of such negligence never get punished, the process of misusing lax government rules, monitoring and governance for profiteering continues. More workers die or get hurt despite press notes published and therefore, the song writer wants the government to take some honest and sincere steps to bring change to the inhuman system where workers are locked from outside to stop them from 'stealing' and left alone to die when the factory building catches fire or collapses and not writing press notes only. Here, from Naeem Mohaiemen's translation, the frames are diagnostic in the first stanza, where the poet laments the reality where s/he is locked up and burnt to death:

> "You have locked me up, you have burnt me to death.
> Press Note, only Press Note
> I don't want, I don't want any more Press Note"[38]

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[37] Z. Choudhury, K. Gayen and S. Luthfa, *Women in Readymade Garment Industry: Understanding Capabilities and Vulnerabilities of Female Workers in Bangladesh*, (Bangladesh Mohila Parishad 2016).

[38] N. Mohaimen, www.outcriesofthousandsouls.org,2018, accessed on 2.12.2022

In the next stanza the diagnostic frames turn into prognostic ones chanting slogans of defying the "prison". He declares that the factory is a jail for thousands, where they work but never gets paid. Then he chants again and again "I defy you", "Yes, I defy you", "I defy my prison" and "I defy your prison". It reads as follows:

> "Trapped in this suffocating room
> I defy my prison
> I defy your prison
> I defy you"[39]

This song is especially suitable to illustrate the inefficiency of the agencies that are paid by people's tax money and not perform their duties to ensure the safety of the buildings that houses our nations' GDP earners. The stanza of defiance is used to stimulate a sense of determination to protest the present situation. It portrays the dream of any apparel workers to have a better life, away from the greed and exploitation. At the end, the poet urges the workers to unite and smash the chains that keeps them trapped inside a burning or collapsing factory building. However, the song also portrays a more profound urge to smash the suffocating system of exploitation. Here the song takes a moral emotional turn with motivational framing:"

> "Somewhere a flute plays
> Time to wake up at last
> Come friend, Come with me
> Smash these chains at last
> Come workers of the world
> Smash these chains at last"[40]

Whether the chains were to be smashed or not, the factories of Bangladesh stopped locking the gates of factory floors while workers were inside after a lot of lobbying after the Tazreen fashion fire in November 2012, when more than 120 young workers burnt to death while the building holding their factory burnt for 12 hours. It is impossible to say if these songs changed anything, but awareness was raised even among factory owners not to lock workers inside.

Both the songs are researched and written by the activists who organized several cultural protest rallies to mourn the losses in Rana Plaza, to demand implementing rule of law and safer working environment in the apparel industry and to end the lack of justice for these workers. They had also raised money to salvage the injured workers, pay for their treatments and rehabilitations of the victim families until the Rana Plaza Fund was organized by the global retail brands to compensate the victims. Therefore, activists are framing the injustice using words that demonize the

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[39] Ibid
[40] Ibid

desire of global economy in the peripheral nations where sweatshops and sub-contracting in non-compliant factories were routine for the industry.[41] The activist artists have translated their work to upload in the websites to make global consumers aware about the death traps in Bangladeshi garment sector where their blouses are being sewn. The song writers and activists are deliberately using words for raising awareness so that the workers participate in the protest. Bangladesh Garments Solidarity works in the field to raise awareness among workers to voice their concerns too.

The Photograph that Haunts

Now I shall describe a Photograph titled *The Last Embrace* by Taslima Akhter[42], where two victims amid the rubble of Rana are seen in a deathly embrace in the Rana Plaza debris. The photo was taken on 25th April 2013, the day after the collapse. Time Photo Department on named it the most haunting photograph from Bangladesh and expanded that it was also the most heart wrenching photo, capturing an entire country's 'grief in a single image'.[43] Eminent activist and photographer, Shahidul Alam called the photo deeply disturbing and hauntingly beautiful at the same time. He also argued that this photograph would torment us in our dreams to remind us to 'never again'.[44]

Taslima Akhter, the photographer and the President of Bangladesh Garment Workers' Solidarity who is also one of the editors of the book from where most of the artworks described in this article are taken, writes that for her how she felt after she took the photo was the most important. She felt uncomfortable looking at it— "it haunts me. It's as if they are saying to me, we are not numbers — not only cheap labor and cheap lives…As a witness to this cruelty, I feel the urge to share this pain with everyone. That's why I want this photo to be seen." [45]

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41 S. Luthfa, "Creative work as protest: Framing Injustices against RMG workers in Bangladesh", *The Daily Star*, October 2, 2019

42 T. Akhter, "Death of a Thousand Dreams: a photo essay on the Rana Plaza collapse and the aftermath", S. Luthfa, T.U Khan and M Kamal (eds.), *The Bangladesh Environmental Humanities Reader: Environmental justice, development victimhood and resistance*, (Lexington Books 2022). pp. 135-144.

43 Time photo department, "A Final Embrace: The Most Haunting Photograph from Bangladesh", http://time.com/3387526/a-final-embrace-the-most-haunting-photograph-from-bangladesh/, May 8, 2013, download date: 1.10.2018

44 Ibid

45 Samhati, *24she April: Hajar Praner Chitkar* [*24th April: Outcries of athousand souls*], (Bangladesh Garments Workers Solidarity 2015)

Figure 1: The Last Embrace

Source: T. Akhter, http://time.com/3387526/a-final-embrace-the-most-haunting-photograph-from-bangladesh/download date: 1.10.2018

As an activist photographer, she finds herself engaged in movements for better working condition, good pay and human rights for workers in the apparel sector of Bangladesh. She says she felt compelled to remain engaged with these workers because as humans we all deserve dignity in life and the work we do. So, she argued, as a Photographer, "I have not only taken photos, but I also took part in collecting the oral historical anecdotes to keep them in our collective memories as humans and not as numbers." She uses the photograph to create the affective bonds for the whole world to notice and do something to change. This photo frames the horrors of being stuck under the crushed juggernaut of development. It framed the injustice against the workers in Rana Plaza, it framed the affective emotions of outrage and fear to incite moral obligation to take steps to stop such heinous crimes against the workers only for political or financial benefits of owners. The photographer also did not want people to forget what happened in Rana Plaza. She wants this photo to incite indignation that will compel Bangladeshi government to take actions to bring justice to those who were victims. As an audience, to me the photo makes me cringe with guilt for letting these inhuman practices to continue to take lives. The photo is haunting because it is both inciting outrage as well as churning up guilt among those of us, the bystanders, to feel the inefficiency of our actions.

Transnational Guilt through Performances

Carla Novi (UK), Helena Waldman (Germany), and Robin Berson (USA) are artists who has based their artwork on Rana Plaza collapse. They worked to create

awareness about the terrible working conditions in Bangladesh that seem too far away and disconnected from the westerners' lives though they are closely related to each other. This is partly because the workers that were crushed under the structure of Rana Plaza were producing fast fashion for these same westerners and the way such production regimes are constructed on the foundation of greed for profit, is exactly the reason that makes the workers' lives dispensable. All three artists' works were created from that guilt – the guilt of being part of such an inhumane system of exploitation in the name of development and employment. I present here the works of two of them, Novi and Bernson.

1. Rana Plaza Project

Two months before the collapse, Carla Novi visited Dhaka as part of making her documentary and she interviewed fifteen workers who worked in the-then Rana Plaza. Upon returning to the UK, when she heard about the deadly disaster, she returned to Bangladesh to search for those fifteen lives and found only one – Dilora who survived the destruction. Dilora was flown to Scotland to perform or represent the one voice that could tell the horror stories of how she survived. Novireports,

> I thought that if I could amplify one voice in a country where the voices of garment workers are muted and westerners choose to consume products coated by odourless sweat and colourless blood; if one voice could tell her story in one of the countries actively engaged in 21st century slavery under the guise of supporting social economical development; if only that voice could be heard by those who can't hear beyond the borders of their comfortable lives…then, maybe then, we can experience social change.[46]

Figure 2: Performance by Carla Novi and Dilora (2015) in Scotland, UK

Source: HPC (athousandcries.org)

[46] Ibid, Samhati, 2015

Novi also wrote about the impact of the performance.[47] She argued that Dilora's voice and her story captivated the audience in the UK. She reported that some of the audiences were in tears; others were absolutely numbed as they listened to her words. "When the performance ended, there was a deafening silence in the room."[48] Novi argued that people did not move because they were struggling to convince themselves about the trueness of the stories they heard about the lives of people who sewed their shirts. They left the auditorium without being the same. According to Novi, the audience also had to carry the voices from Rana Plaza to their hearts. Although it is impossible to measure how much impact and in what form such framing of emotions created by the artwork can have on the action of people who are ready to act against the injustices, there is a strong chance that artworks incite different types of emotions in potential supporters of a cause. Therefore, Novi's narration about how the audiences were frozen after the performance exposes the power of performance and art as resistance. According to her, for the audiences, it was possibly the first time to comprehend that behind every Rana Plaza victim (dead or alive), or every apparel worker in any developing countries in global south, is a real individual with a real life and story to tell. When this realization dawned something changed in that room.

Novi's attempt is showcasing first, the voice of a survivor of Rana Plaza collapse to describe the horror, second, effort to incite guilt and indignation among the western consumer and last and the most important one is the hope to create social change through the audiences. Novi's work can be categorized as a transnational performance of Rana Plaza Activism that is using motivational framing to bring change to the extant practices.

2. The Memorial Quilt

Since this disaster resonated to the international consumers and protestors, through another work of photography exhibition using Bangladeshi photographs, Robin Berson, an American artist created a memorial quilt for Bangladesh. Bersen connected the Bangladeshi Tazreen fire incident and Rana plaza collapse with that of New York's Triangle Factory Fire incident. Berson created a memorial quilt for the triangle fire victims who died of a factory fire in 1913 in New York. The situation of Bangladeshi apparel workers after Tazreen and Rana Plaza incidents encouraged her to sew another memorial quilt with photographs of Tazreen and Rana Plaza victims.

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47 C. Novi, "On a Performing Art: Thoughts on Rana Plaza project", www.HPC (athousandcries.org), 2018.

48 Ibid

In this sense, the guilt for Bangladesh that grew out of these two incidents equated with that of the Triangle Memorial Quilt remembering an incident hundred years ago.

For the Bangladeshi quilt, Berson collected photos using help from Bangladeshi activists from the posters draped by family members of victims and survivors seeking for missing workers in Rana Plaza and Tazreen. Berson preserved and used these images as she received them –unkempt, crumpled, and faded. Bersen states that like the Triangle quilt, many activists and volunteers were engaged to create the quilt for Bangladesh. However, contrary to the commotion caused by the Triangle blaze in New York and America that resulted in the development of many legal instruments and institutions to monitor workplace conditions, in Bangladesh the protesting workers were scattered and lost in the labyrinths of global capitalism.

Figure 3: Berson's Memorial Quilt on Bangladesh

Source: Akhter and Ahmed 2015 HPC (athousandcries.org)

"What we've done," says Berson, "is exported tragedy".[49]Workers from countries like Bangladesh not only keep the line of production unbroken, but also work under severe, inhumane, hazardous conditions. Berson's quilts have been exhibited in many US cities and she hopes that these quilts will prompt compassion among her viewers for the humanity, beauty, and vulnerability shared by the dead youths.[50]

[49] Ibid, Samhati, 2015
[50] S. Luthfa, "Creative work as protest: Framing Injustices against RMG workers in Bangladesh", *The Daily Star*, October 2. 2019

Simultaneously, they can reinforce the sense of global workers unity and responsibility among people across the world. She has literally framed the injustice and used another tragic incident that is close to the American people's heart and juxtaposed the appearances of American women with that of the Bangladeshi women who lost lives a century later in equally ruthless working conditions. So, affective emotions of trust and moral emotion of compassion are targeted to be incited among the audiences at the global centre about how their greed is taking lives in the peripheries of global economy. Therefore, the injustice frames have been successfully mainstreamed with global audience.

Jatugriha: The Street Play

Last but not the least, I discuss here, a street play that was written by me, directed by Mohammad Ali Haider and produced by BotTala– a performance space. As an activist performer, playwright, and researcher, in this play, I have framed injustices against our workers in Tazreen and Rana Plaza out of the anger I had after these disasters struck us. The play is titled *Jatugriha* (The house of melted wax) that was produced by a Dhaka based theatre troupe comprising of youngsters, BotTala– a performance space in the aftermath of Rana Plaza collapse. I wrote this play after the Tazreen fire incident in November 2012, but only a month or so after our first show (March 15, 2013) of the play, Rana Plaza crumbled. I wrote the play so that we do not forget what the Tazreen victims went through. Before touting the growth and development of the country, we should not forget the lives that were burnt by the incessant hunger for profit, lack of compassion, and disordered governance in the name of development, fast and mass production of western fashion. I wanted everyone to remember how these workers must have experienced to burn to death. What were they pondering in their last minutes? We read stories in the newspapers that women cut off each other's locks in a desperate attempt to avoid the fire catching up to them. Churred carcasses were found at Tazreen in clinches just as they were captured on camera in the rubble of Rana Plaza.

After Rana Plaza collapse Jatugriha was updated with new information and scores of shows were held in worker-intensive neighborhoods of Savar, Ashulia, Tongi, Gazipur. Months and years passed, the victims of the collapse are yet to receive compensation, all missing victims could not be recognized even after DNA tests, local factory owners, the owner of the building or BGMEA never paid compensation. Even, the Prime Minister's relief fund could not show transparent disbursement of all funds it received during the aftermath of Rana Plaza which is mentioned in the play. Ten years after the collapse, Jatugriha is still relevant and is showcased on the10th year anniversary.

Figure 4: Shows of Jatugriha in front of the infamous illegal BGMEA building and at a workers' rally in Savar near Rana Plaza in Dhaka

Source: facebook page of BotTala– a performance space, the theatre group
https://www.facebook.com/groups/bottala/posts/10165486639165526/

In such a setting, in the play, on a van rickshaw, dead bodies started to talk. They take us to the last hours of their lives, how they were burnt alive. They say that no one killed them, they just died! Inspired from 'no one killed Jessica', I wanted to infuse the outrage against the system among the apathetic citizens for whom even after these worst disasters everything could go on as usual. Our audiences were mostly local middle class and workers, and I used Kafil Ahmed's song 'Press note' to

sketch the dream of better working condition to make them have hope than despair. The play was directed by Mohammad Ali Haider and translated by Munasir Kamal and Saumya Sarkar. The play opens with a song:

> "Jatugriha burns, the bees burn too
> The Pandavas had a tunnel to escape
> But we have no exit.
> Still, no one murdered us
> We just died.
>
> [Three-wheel van puller, Nobi, is trying to paddle fast. But his load is so heavy that his feet refuse to work. He feels dizzy and nauseated.]
> Nobi: Ufh, the stench! I can still smell it! The smoke and the stench are stuck in my head! Bodies: Stuck in your head!
> Nobi: …So many dead! Burnt to ashes! Ashes and coals! They have crammed those coals, ashes and bones into these sacks. And the stench! So many mothers bereft because of them! They have murdered so many people!
> Fancy: Stop it, Nobi bhai. I wasn't murdered.
> [Song] Amare keu khun kore nai (no one murdered me)
> Nobi: How did you die then, stupid girl?"[51]

Then the girl tells how she died and chats about how whenever the workers want their dues, or better working conditions, they are labelled by the owners as conspiring against the industry. They tell their genuine worries about what will happen to their families after they have died. Dead workers tell the audiences their stories. It creates a reality where they live on very little pay, inhuman personal vulnerabilities, and ruthless working conditions to accumulate profit for a very small group of irresponsible and greedy people who desire to make money disregarding the value and dignity of many workers' lives. These owners perceive the workers as numbers, so they are unmoved when a few or a few hundred dies by building collapse or fire.

In this play, I remind audiences about the atrocious working conditions that turned the workers into churred remains, or crushed limbs under the fake house of development via industrialization. The factory building were death traps just as the *Jotugriho* was for the *Padavas* in *Mahabharata*. It is built for the residents to burn alive. Capitalist industrializations are meant for unjust working conditions and collapse and burning of factories with workers locked inside. The framing of injustices against the workers in Tazreen or Rana Plaza is depicted here through the voices of burnt corpses. The emotions that are infused among the audiences are anger, outrage, guilt, and indignation. At the end of the play Kofil Ahmed's song incites hope to defy this prison, the Jotugriho.

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[51] S. Sarker and M. Kamal, http://www.athousandcries.org/cul/can-you-here-me.html, 2018, accessed on 2.12.2020.

Conclusion

Rana Plaza collapse and its aftermath saw changes in the ruthless working conditions of the apparel industry in Bangladesh[52]. Scholars showed that in the wake of the Rana Plaza tragedy, the Accord and the Alliance were launched as two separate private initiatives alongside the national initiative to improve the workplace safety of the RMG workers in Bangladesh. Together, these three initiatives created multi-level labour regulations, there were many factories inspected, access to labor unions eased, awareness about the safety features of buildings increased, rented factory spaces are no longer accepted and other safety situations improved significantly[53]. Nonetheless, one has to be cautious against over-generalizing the success, and though some changes occurred, we are far from creating a sector free from making workers vulnerable in personal and workplace environments. Much of this success can also be attributed to the long-continued effort of the activists struggling to end such dreadful labour practices since the last few decades. Some of the credit might as well go to the artists who framed the injustice through emotional, affective messages that helped create moral obligation for people to work against such brutality. Most of such artworks emphasized on prompting key reflexive (anger, fear) and complicated affective and moral emotions (outrage, guilt, indignation, compassion, hope) in the public discourse to bring changes in the working conditions of apparel workers in Bangladesh. However, Table 1 shows that the artworks which were mostly for Bangladeshi audiences were not looking for inciting guilt as much as the ones that were for the western audiences. Also, the major forms of framing were either diagnostic or motivational in nature. The contentious resources were either created to protest Rana Plaza collapse or comprising of legacy resources.

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52 M. Alam, P. Singh and K. Pike, "The Post-Rana Plaza Regime: Multi-level labour regulation in Bangladesh's RMG sector", *Relations industrielles/Industrial Relations*, Vol. 76(4), 2021, pp.708-732.

53 Ibid.

Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh **(Hum.), Vol. 68(2), 2023, pp. 175-192**
DOI: https://doi.org/10.3329/jasbh.v68i2.70362

Gender and Sexuality in Contraceptive Advertising in Bangladesh (1972-2011) – An Audience Perspective

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Abstract

'In our time sex outside marriage was a taboo. But now it is increasingly happening [...]. In today's context [...] it is very important to build awareness.' Such perspective from Mitiis indicative of a contemporary phenomenon with regard to portraying pre/extra marital sexual intimacy in condom advertisements (ads) in Bangladesh. Drawing from research findings of 36 in-depth interviews, this paper interrogates women's responses to new-old (non)normative presence of sexuality in these ads, across three social classes and three generations. The paper reflects how social class, age and other identities might shape mediated conversations about normativity vs. shifting "realities" of sexuality in contemporary Bangladesh. The discussions suggest although some women want to see a reflection of the "real", which is, the increasing practices of pre/extra marital sex, many like to see the "ideal", the "traditional" forms of sexuality depictions in these ads. What seems significant – with regard to the portrayal of sexual intimacy, a majority of the women talk at a much-generalised level: not always tying into their experiences or their own families. They continuously engage with a dialogue with the ads, and often compare an idealised earlier period with "now" which they consider problematic.

Key words: Gender, Sexuality, Advertisement, Audience, Representation, Patriarchy, Women.

Introduction

> Let me tell you from my experience of "love". We also loved, had good times together before marriage. But that is different from what happens now. Now it is very dirty, it is all about sex. Love in this generation is very much sexual.

The above perspective from Sopna, an upper-class older generation woman, is indicative of a contemporary phenomenon with regard to portraying pre/extra marital sexual intimacy in advertisements (hereafter, ads) for condoms in Bangladesh.[1] Since the mid-1990s there has been a major change in depicting "intimate relationship" in these ads.[2] Whilst ads for birth control pills continued to present birth control within a marriage framework, condom ads are increasingly portraying sensuous sexual

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[1] U.B.F. Sultana, "Representation of Gender and Heterosexuality: A Study of Contraception Advertisements in Bangladesh – 1971 to 2011", *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh Humanities*, Vol.63(2), 2018, pp. 205-245.

[2] *Ibid*.

moments, and in most cases the marriage frame remains absent.[3] Hence, drawing from the research findings of 36 in-depth interviews of a large research project, this paper interrogates women's responses to new-old (non)normative presence of sexuality in these ads, with regard to their own/lived experiences of sexuality across three social classes and three generations. A selection of respondents from these different social categories and their intersecting perspectives allows this paper to reflect how social class, age and/or other identities might shape mediated conversations about normativity vs. shifting "realities" of sexuality in contemporary Bangladesh. Audience media studies[4]have pondered upon the necessity to shift our attention from ad contents to audience's everyday lives, to explore how they make meanings of the ads 'with very different sorts of interests'.[5] Therefore, this paper deliberates women's interpretations of contraceptive ads advertised in Bangladesh with regard to their lives and experiences of sexuality, and thus, it contributes to the knowledge of audience media studies with regard to addressing sensitive issues, like sexuality.

The paper brings forth three significant issues. The first highlights the different situations that limit women's opportunity to watch these ads in daily life. This is important in making visible the practicalities of investigating women's reflections on contraceptive ads. The second issue outlines women's views about the ads: what they particularly recall, what they like about the images, jingle or content of the ads, as well as how they challenge or identify themselves with regard to the representations in the ads. Whereas this issue mainly focuses on how women talk about these ads, in the remaining final issue women discuss how contraception is experienced in everyday life, partly in relation to the ads. Here women discuss the changing morality around sexuality through the lens offered by contraceptive ads. This outlines the tensions, emotions and disappointments of women about the contemporary public display of sexual intimacy. The paper further investigates whether there are any differences in women's interpretation of the ads according to their social class, generation and other intersecting identities.

Gender, Sexuality and Contraceptive Advertising – Reflection from Literature

Studying audience participation in ads is a growing significant area in global media research, despite the fact that there are considerable debates surrounding the

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3 *Ibid.*

4 See for instance S.E. Bird, *The Audience in Everyday Life: Living in a Media World*, (London: Routledge 2003); P. du Gay, S. Hall, L. Janes, H. Mackay and K. Negus, *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman*, (London: Sage 1997); S. Moores, *Interpreting Audiences: The Ethnography of Media Consumption*, (London: Sage 1993) and R. Silverstone, *Television and Everyday Life*, (e-Library: Taylor & Francis 2003).

5 *Ibid,* S. Moores.

audience's active or passive engagement in creating and/or changing meaning in the ads.[6]Danesi (2002)[7]emphasises the power of audience reception: audiences may decide to accept or reject a particular ad based on the representation showcased in the ad. Since the late 1970s, what Moores (1993)[8] broadly identifies as an "ethnographic turn" has taken place in audience research. Among these studies, Bird (2003)[9], Du Gay *et al*. (1997)[10], Moores (1993)[11] and Silverstone (2003)[12] for instance, shift the audience reception approach from "audiences" to the "audience in everyday life". This latter refers to the ways media, including advertising, provides cultural frames for thinking and talking about aspects of everyday life. In this regard, Silverstone's (2003)[13] reflection on television viewers who may come up with very different meanings of a media content, depending on their varied socialisations and diverse experience of everyday life provides a useful analytical perspective for the various interpretations of contraceptive ads that women in this paper offer.

Nevertheless, in the global field of media and cultural studies, there is hardly any substantial scholarly work that considers issues around contraceptive ads from a feminist point of view. Moreover, little attention has been devoted to exploring the audience reception and responses towards these ads. Among the available studies, Jobling (1997)[14] unveils what he refers to as the politics of "racist heterosexuality" in Britain in the context of contraceptive ads. He discusses condom advertising in Britain from the 1970s to 1993.Related to Jobling's research, Agha and Meekers (2010)[15] measure the success of a social marketing programme by analysing the

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6 C. Carter and L. Steiner (ed.),*Critical Readings: Media and Gender*, (Maidenhead: Open University Press 2004); D. Deacon, M. Pickering, P. Golding & G. Murdock, *Researching Communications: A Practical Guide to Methods in Media and Cultural Analysis*, (London: Hodder Education 2007); M. Horkheimer, and T. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, (New York: Seabury Press 1972); J. Kim, S.J. Ahn, E.S. Kwon and L.N. Reid, 'TV Advertising Engagement as a State of Immersion and Presence', *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 76, 2017, pp. 67-76; V. Nightingale and K. Ross (ed.),*Critical Readings: Media and Audiences*, (Maidenhead: Open University Press 2003); R. Silverstone, *Op.cit*.

7 M. Danesi, *Understanding Media Semiotics*, (London: Hodder Arnold 2002).

8 S. Moores*, Op.cit*., 1993, p. 1

9 S.E. Bird, *Op.cit*.

10 Du Gay *et al*., *Op.cit*.

11 S. Moores*, Op.cit*.

12 R. Silverstone, *Op.cit*.

13 *Ibid*.

14 P. Jobling, 'Keeping Mrs Dawson Busy: Safe Sex, Gender and Pleasure in Condom Advertising Since 1970', in M. Nava, A. Blake, I. Macrury and B. Richards (ed.), *Buy This Book: Studies in Advertising and Consumption*, (London: Routledge 1997).

15 S. Agha and D. Meekers, 'Impact of an Advertising Campaign on Condom Use in Urban Pakistan', *Studies in Family Planning*, Vol. 41(4), 2010, pp. 277-290.

impact of a condom campaign in Pakistan. They conducted two advertising impact surveys among urban married men to study their attitudinal changes after the condom ad was broadcast on private TV channels and on radio stations for three consecutive months, in 2009. However, the study gives heavy emphasis to numbers and measurement, whereas such social phenomena are more likely to be revealed through talking to people directly, asking for in-depth opinions or sharing everyday experiences.

With regard to Bangladesh, Harvey (1984)[16] focuses on two market studies, to examine the impact of family planning ads to encourage people for birth control. Needless to mention, the respondents were only from well-off families, educated, and urban. Analysing the direct responses from the consumers the study notes that the ads addressing the son's future and family needs are more popular compared to those ads that gave importance only to a wife's wellbeing. In fact, the latter was the least mentioned theme even by female consumers. The study does not investigate the reasons behind audience preference towards a particular form of representation, rather concludes that family planning ads are more successful whilst associated with a family rather than with a woman as individual. An analysis from a feminist perspective perhaps could have provided a different analytical perspective to these findings. Moreover, the scope of the study was also restrictive, as poor people with no literacy and non-readers of newspapers were not considered for taking part in this research.

It is thus essential to study attitudes to contraception in a more comprehensive way, taking into account different generations, social classes and different demographic areas and include women's responses towards contraceptive ads. This is what this paper intends to do.

Research Methodology

This paper is based on feminist qualitative research. 36 in-depth interviews were conducted across three social classes and three generations to explore and understand women's interpretation of contraception advertisements that appear in different media of Bangladesh; to what extent women identify with the portrayal of sexuality, intimacy and birth control by the various advertisements for contraception.

Women who had viewed or might remember contraceptive ads and were willing to discuss their views about these ads with regard to their lived experience of sexuality

[16] P.D. Harvey, 'Advertising Family Planning in the Press: Direct Response Results from Bangladesh', *Studies in Family Planning*, Vol. 15(1), 1984, pp. 40-42.

were selected as respondents for in-depth interviews. Selection of the respondents involved both purposive and snowball sampling, as my intention was to select women from three different social classes: 'upper', 'middle' and 'poor' and from three different generations. The idea behind choosing women from different generations was to enable a particular age group to reflect on a particular decade of contraceptive ads and the corresponding socio-cultural contexts. Hence, I assumed that women aged fifty plus (older generation, who were born before 1961) are more likely to be able to focus on the contraceptive ads which appeared in the first two decades (1970s and 1980s) of the post independent[17] Bangladesh. Women aged between 35 and 49 (middle-aged generation, who were born between 1962 and 1976) may better remember the ads that appeared in the 1990s and onward, and the younger generation, aged below 35 would be able to reflect on the ads published in the decade from 2000 onward. Apart from class and generational position, attention was paid to selecting respondents from urban as well as rural areas. I thought that selecting women from different geographical locations[18] in addition to the capital city Dhaka would allow me to include diverse women's experiences. Hence, among the 36 interviews, 25 were held in Dhaka city, nine were in different towns and two were held in two villages (one in Bagunda village in Mymensingh, another in Gokarna village in Brahmanbaria).

With regard to "social class", in Bangladesh there is no unique way to label people in specific class terms, and there are huge debates around "class" and its application. This is reflected in some key sociological and anthropological studies.[19]To avoid complexities, I decided to follow my respondent's self-identified class status. Therefore, in this paper my reference to "upper-class" indicates women from the well-off urban families in Dhaka, highly educated (excluding a few who could not

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[17] After nine months' liberation war against Pakistan Bangladesh made its victory on 16th December, 1971.

[18] These locations were selected depending on my professional and kin networks; initial informal contact was made with different women through my networks to approach them for taking part in the in-depth interviews.

[19] See for instance, N. Kabeer, 'The Quest for National Identity: Women, Islam and the State in Bangladesh', *Feminist Review*, Vol. 37 (Spring),1991, pp. 38-58; D. Lewis, *Bangladesh: Politics, Economy and Civil Society*,(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2011);S. Feldman, 'Historicising Garment Manufacturing in Bangladesh: Gender, Generation, and New Regulatory Regimes', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, Vol.11 (1), 2009, pp. 268-288;T. Haque, 'Body Politics in Bangladesh', in B.S.A, Yeoh, P. Teo and S. Huang (ed.) *Gender Politics in the Asia-Pacific Region*, (London: Routledge, 2002), pp.41-60;S.C. White, *Arguing with the Crocodile: Gender and Class in Bangladesh*, (London: Zed Books, 1992); and S.C. White, 'Beyond the Paradox: Religion, Family and Modernity in Contemporary Bangladesh', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 46 (5), 2012, pp. 1429-1458.

continue education after high school or college, due to marriage) and mostly with high social capital. "Middle-class" means the families who possess less wealth than the upper class, urban (but not necessarily based in Dhaka) women. A few from this class are highly educated, but the rest have only completed primary school or high school education. Women from the "poor class" in this research are from rural as well as urban poor families; only a few attended primary schools, the rest cannot read or write (except being able to write their names for signature). A couple of them have their own small agriculture land, but all of the poor women have to earn through low paid jobs to manage daily family needs. I commonly refer to them as the "poor class", without specifically mentioning urban or rural, because originally, they migrated from villages and most of them keep moving back to their villages every now and then.

Viewing Contraceptive Ads – the Scope of Memory

> It becomes harder to specify exactly where media audiences begin and end. The conditions and boundaries of audience hood are inherently unstable.[20]

During my interviews, I asked if they could recall any specific contraception ads or anything they remember from a particular ad. Many women remember brand names of different pills and condoms but not what the ads were about. Again, some women mention incidents from government sponsored family planning ads and commercial contraceptive ads, yet had forgotten the specific brand name. Several women recall the popular jingle '*Aha mistiki je misti amader choto songsar*' ('Oh wonderful, so wonderful our small family!') from *Maya* ad, and '*budhdhiman houn thik kajti korun*' ('Be wise, and act right')– a key slogan. This slogan was used in the state sponsored family planning ads and in some of the *Raja* Condom ads, during the 1980s and the early 1990s and broadcast many times on BTV during those decades. They remember these, as they appeared many times in different forms of print and electronic media. For instance, Bondhon (u/y)[21] says:

> If I can recollect correctly, the first thing I remember about family planning ads, is a symbol. I was three or four years old. There was a sign that appeared in these commercials, a father and a mother with their two children with a message 'small family is a happy family'. This is my earlier recollection of the idea of family planning. Then there was another very interesting advertisement I remember, that used to say '*budhdhiman houn thik kajti korun*' ('Be wise, and make the right decision'). This was in

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[20] S. Moores, *Op.cit*., 1993, p. 2.

[21] The first initial letter next to each woman's name stands for her class status, and the last letter indicates her generation category. For instance, in this case, 'u' indicates upper class and 'y' indicates younger generation. Hereafter, I indicate each woman's class and generation category next to her name, by the initial letter of her class and generation.

> early eighties, I think. We did not have so many TV channels then, and it was advertised many times, so I remember this clearly.

Bondhon's recollection of the symbol and the two messages appeared many times in state sponsored contraception ads, as well as in the *Raja* Condom commercials between the 1970s and the 1990s.[22]Her childhood memories, indicating the process of how a child becomes informed about contraception, further indicate that there are very specific things women remember from different family planning ads, if not the complete ad. Her recollections also highlight the period when BTV was the only TV channel, so that women were more likely to see these contraceptive ads.

Other situations also influence women's chances of watching these ads. For example, Soma (u/m), Saima (u/m) and Koni (m/y) indicate that satellite television brought opportunities to view more channels, reducing the likelihood of sticking to one channel for long, and perhaps limiting the chance of seeing TV commercials including those for contraception. Barnali (m/m) believes that there are so many TV channels; she might have missed out on some commercials. Furthermore, as her husband lives abroad, she does not find it necessary to think about contraception implying that she might not register some ads. Similarly, Nasima (m/o) and Nazneen (u/o) explain that they do not pay much attention to these ads, as they no longer need to use contraceptives.

For Musarrat (u/o) and a few other women, there were particular constraints that limited the possibility of watching TV. Musarrat lived in a joint family, and as the eldest of the daughters-in-law with huge family responsibilities, did not have enough time to watch TV. For others family conventions were a constraint, as Farha (u/y) describes,

> I grew up in a very conservative environment. My parents bought a TV when I was in class ten. If there was any ad of this kind, we, I mean, the young used to leave the room.

For Farha the restriction was religious, and also for Sopna (u/o), who seldom watched contraception TV commercials before marriage. Restrictions were even stronger in the case of Nazu (m/o), whose husband disliked watching TV as she makes explicit:

> We were never allowed to watch TV in front of our uncle.[23] I used to be busy with our children, their studies; all of them were at a growing up age. And he was a man of temper (*ragi*). Very bad tempered. When he was around, I stayed far away from TV, because he

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[22] U.B.F. Sultana, *Op.cit*.

[23] Although he was not my uncle, Nazu's application of this relational term is a traditional way of referring to one's husband when talking to others, as she believes that pronouncing her husband's name is a sinful act.

> disliked watching TV. And he hardly turned on the TV. By the time it was ten/eleven in the night, kids had finished studies, and we all went to bed.

Nazu's narrative indicates how gender as a relationship of power operates at any stage of everyday life, including women's scope for watching TV. Press (1991:69)[24] in the context of American middle-class women stresses:

> Since television watching is an activity that often occurs in conjunction with one or several others in the family, […] or for women, in bedrooms they may share with husbands, the act of negotiation what show to watch, or when to watch television at all, can be a fairly tricky power negotiation.

Although Press[25] did not clarify whether such "negotiation" of American women involves giving up, certainly this was the case with Nazu; she gave up on watching television due to her husband's bad temper. As Silverstone (2003)[26] opines, 'Watching television [can be] a highly gendered activity, gendered in relation to hierarchies of domestic politics, and in the consequent different qualities of time-use and control over space'. These experiences also point to the many ways which may restrict women's viewing of TV and contraception ads in particular.

Unlike women from the upper and middle class, for poor women, the constraints are more materialistic. As Shamsunnahar (p/o) explains: 'I cannot recall, nor do I remember much now. I leave for work in the morning, return at night, neither do I get time to watch TV*'.* She further adds that she does not have a TV or electricity in her house. However, she watched a few TV contraceptive commercials whilst working as a domestic help in someone else's house; yet she cannot remember very clearly and she cannot understand print ads because she is illiterate. It is clear that Shamsunnahar and many other poor women cannot watch TV as most of their time is spent on making ends meet for their families, with illiteracy further curtailing access to print ads and to understanding. Therefore, some women remember that there was *Raja*, *Maya* and *Femicon* advertised on TV but cannot recall the ad content, as is apparent in Hena's (p/m) comment: 'Am I that educated? No! I do not understand these'. Hena's inability to talk about contraceptive ads makes her explain that women like her who are less educated, cannot understand let alone remember the ads. Minu (p/o) too says that she cannot read and that is why she cannot understand or remember these commercials. However, she does recall that ads for *Maya*pill used to mention that if a woman takes this pill, she can prevent pregnancy. That is how she

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[24] A.L. Press, *Women Watching Television: Gender, Class and Generation in the American Television Experience*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991).

[25] *Ibid*.

[26] R. Silverstone, *Op.cit*., p. 151

understood the ad was about birth control. Thus, even though these women blame their own education level, Minu's case indicates, it is also that these ads are not very clear in their contraceptive information– a concern raised by some women from the upper and middle class too.

One of the issues arising from this discussion is how, given these difficulties, these women managed to have opinions regarding the ads. During our conversations, I showed them the ten 'sample ads'[27]which helped to jog their memories of contraceptive ads and to reminisce. But it is in the context of the constraints, which I have discussed above, that women's interpretation of the ads needs to be considered.Ang[28] and Silverstone[29] rightly argue audience participation takes myriad forms: not only interpreting meaning of texts but also relating these meanings to personal experiences.

Representing Sexual Intimacy: Women's Responses

> [W]hat is sexual (erotic) is not fixed but depends on what is socially defined as such and these definitions are contextually and historically variable. Hence sexuality has no clear boundaries – what is sexual to one person may not be to someone else or somewhere else.[30]

Women's discussions on sexual intimacy in the ads do not necessarily stay within the bounds of contraception ads. Rather, the women continuously shift between "reality" and "media representations" largely articulating that media should not encourage the moral decay of the younger generation by visualising intimate sexual moments. A view most of the women in my research shared about contraceptive advertising is that ads for female methods of contraceptives are based on a post married life whereas those for condoms are vague in terms of birth control information and seem to show pre/extra marital sexual intimacy. Koni (m/y) puts it this way:

> Usually, they show a man and a woman walking together holding hands. Or sometimes they present intimate scenes, for example, a couple embracing each other, and then the brand name of the condom appears on the screen.

Humaira (u/m) and several other respondents argue that condom ads always try to convince the audience that their brand ensures pleasurable sex, and that there is

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[27] To help women to recall memories, I chose ten ads from the electronic and print media, covering all the decades. In this paper, I refer to these ads as "sample ads" (the images of these ads are available in Sultana, 2018).

[28] I. Ang, 'Culture and Communication: Toward an Ethnographic Critique of Media Consumption in the Transnational Media Realm', *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 5, 1990, pp. 239-260.

[29] R. Silverstone, *Op.cit*.

[30] S. Jackson, 'Interchanges: Gender, Sexuality and Heterosexuality: The Complexity (and Limits) of Heteronormativity', *Feminist Theory*, Vol. 7(1), 2006, pp. 105-121.

always suggested sexual content in these ads. Some women, pointing to some of the sample ads mention that in the condom ads it did not occur to them that the couple was married. Accordingly, a major discussion point was whether the ads should portray pre/extra marital sexual intimacy and, if so, how explicitly. The women expressed four different viewpoints represented in the diagram below:

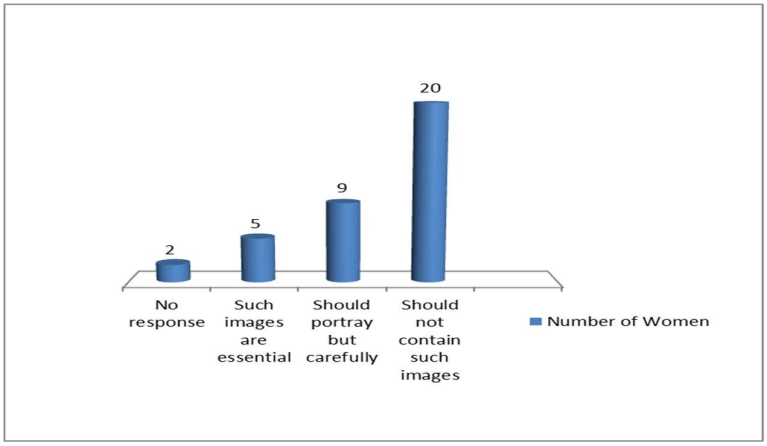

Figure1: Graphical Presentation of Opinions on Pre/Extra Marital Sexual Intimacy

The first group of women (20 out of 36)[31] believe that depictions of pre/extra marital relationship in condom ads are problematic: firstly, it gives a *baje shikkha* (bad education) to the young generation by encouraging immoral sex. The concerns expressed are about what attitudes are morally "right" and "wrong" in relation to sexuality. In this connection, pre/extra marital sex and pregnancy are identified as *ultapalta*(disorder), a breach of the "proper"/"right" sexual behaviour as defined by social norms and religion. In this context White's[32] observation adds further significance: 'sex represents a defining, negative motif in Bangladesh society, it stands for chaos, disorder, and loss of control'. Even though sexual relationships outside of marriage exist in the society, a portrayal of them in ads is believed to influence the young generation; as is claimed by some of the women I interviewed. For example, Shamsunnahar's (p/o) understanding is influenced by a moral code

[31] Among these 20 women: 2 belong to the older and 1 to the younger generation, in the upper class; 2 belong to the older, 2 to the middle-aged and 4 to the younger generation, in the middle class; and 3 belong to the older, 3 to the middle-aged and 3 to the younger generation, in the poor class.

[32] S.C. White, *Op.cit*., 1992, p. 152.

defining a "right" sexuality. She calls premarital sexuality a "new problem" for the young generation.

> Times have changed now; girls go with unknown guys and friends. Unmarried girls make love. Then they roam shamelessly with an illicit baby bump (*pet badhaiya nia ghuira beray*)! What a chaotic time! Everything is so *ultapalta* (disordered) now! This is not right. Advertisement should show the right thing – they should always show husband and wife.

Shamsunnahar's application of the term "*pet badhano*" has a very negative connotation in Bangla. It is applied to indicate a pregnancy which is out of wedlock, hence unexpected and "unglorified". Social expectation towards such pregnancy is to keep it hidden, and be ashamed of it. Hence, when she sees such women walk around in public, out of surprise and frustration she calls it a "chaotic time". Likewise, Eti (p/y), whose husband had an extramarital sexual relationship and abandoned her for that woman, used sarcasm to express her anger:

> It is a chaotic age *Apa*(Sister)! Now what means a husband, and what a friend? Everything is a complete *ultapalta* (chaos). Such relationship before marriage is not good. And advertisements should not show it. But things happen still. We cannot deny it, *duniyatai nosto hoiya gese* (rather, it is a sign that the world has gone spoilt).

But Farha's (u/y) position emerges from her religious belief; she stresses:

> Premarital sexual relationships exist, and I think 90% male-female engage in premarital sex. On this matter I am totally religious, I do not support this. And if I know someone is doing this, I suggest her to end it.

Nasima's (m/o) opinion brings to light a second reason for women opposing such representation:

> I think commercials should be based on a country's context, shouldn't it? Our country is not that liberal, is it? I know nowadays some young girls and boys get closer before marriage. They should be careful. But ads should always show marriage, family. Whatever the situation is now, by showcasing unmarried couples they cannot reach the mass of people.

The way to "reach the mass of people" became evident in Champa's (m/y) contribution (also echoed by some of the poor women):

> If they show family, there is no problem in watching together with family members. Sometimes they show a guy taking a woman in his lap, or they cuddle (*japtaiya dhore*) each other, how can we see this in front of our growing children?

Champa's and others' apprehension indicates that viewing sexual intimacy in front of other family members is embarrassing, as well as shameful in front of growing children. Therefore, they either change the TV channel, or start doing something else in an attempt to demonstrate that they are not concerned about what is being displayed on the TV; or the young usually leave the room, and thus consciously act

to "passively engage"[33] with these kinds of representations. Moreover, for poor women with little/no literacy, representing a family and the contraceptive packet bears particular connotations. For them these are the signs through which they understand that this product is to be used for birth control. For example, Khadiza (p/y) explains that the image of marriage or a family on a pill or condom packet communicates clearly to people like her who cannot read.

The second group of women (9 out of 36)[34] suggest that ads may display sex between unmarried couples, but the message should be carefully communicated, so that it does not encourage "immoral" sexual activities. For instance, Humaira (u/m) thinks that there are many young boys and girls who become sexually active before marriage. However, ideologically this is not accepted in the society. For boys, to some extent there has been flexibility, but for girls, society would never accept a girl who had sex before marriage. Even if sexual relationships exist outside marriage, they are in secret; they are not open or encouraged. Therefore, she thinks that the ads should contain a message of birth control for those engaged in sex before marriage. But she also believes that if they encourage premarital sexual activity there will be a backlash against such representation: 'Because, I believe we are not in a situation yet to pronounce that contraception is for all adults, for all, whoever is sexually active! No, it is not the time yet'. Although Humaira considers such representations as a timely requirement but she further points to the necessity for a "responsible depiction". Pointing to sample ad 10 (*Panther Dotted* condom) she complains that the new bride has been portrayed as a "sex slave" in this ad.

Sopna (u/o) and Ferdous (m/o), argue for the necessity of such depictions, albeit they are highly critical about sexual love prior to marriage in the young generation. Such emotional reaction from an older generation woman to the transformation of asexual love before marriage to an overemphasis on the sexual is not limited to Bangladesh. Langhamer (2013),[35] drawing on the Mass-Observation archive in Britain noted one woman writing in 2001, who commented:

> […] now sex comes much earlier on. Living together, even in the sixties, generally meant you were going to get married. But not now. Even being engaged doesn't seem to mean you're going to get married.

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[33] M. Danesi, *Op.cit*.

[34] Among these nine women: two belong to the older and four belong to the middle-aged generation in the upper class, one belongs to the older and one belongs to the middle-aged generation of the middle class and the last one belongs to the older generation in the poor class.

[35] C. Langhamer, *The English in Love: The Intimate Story of an Emotional Revolution*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 209-210

Therefore, Sopna thinks that ads should portray unmarried couples, because it is a demand of the times, but not in a way that encourages premarital sexual activity. For an example, she refers to a TV ad for the *Hero* condom (aired in 2009), where the end statement boldly asserts:

> Do not take risk. Ensure self-security first. That is why, advanced quality condom *Hero* – protects you from unplanned pregnancy and severe sex diseases including HIV/AIDS. As long as you have *Hero*, there is no risk. *Hero*!

According to Sopna, such depiction is problematic as it encourages promiscuous sexual behaviour by showing a young, unmarried couple, and including the visual command 'As long as you have *Hero*, there is no risk *Hero*'. According to her, this suggests that with a condom any unmarried couple can engage in any kind of (immoral) sexual activity. To her, "risk" in sexual activity for a man connotes having sex with someone other than his wife. However, Ferdous (m/o) thinks that contraceptive ads published these days are suitably "modern". Looking at the sample ad 7– *U & ME* condom she points to the girl's Western outfit and to the couple having fun, to confirm her viewpoint: 'it is not clear whether they are husband wife; it does not need to be. They do not need to present married couple always, as sex beyond marriage exists now'. Her idea of a "modern" ad is interchangeable representationally with "modern sexuality" and this modernity, she believes, increases contraceptive awareness. Nonetheless, she is very critical about the existence of such sexual practice, as it does not fit her understanding of "proper" sexual behaviour:

> Things were not that open before, at least there was some sort of shame. Oh God! What happens in our *Dhanmondi* Lake! I wonder from which family these girls are? They sit there with boys as if they are glued to each other in such an embarrassing way that you will have to take your eyes off. *Sharirik somporko* (physical relationship) before marriage is not right. It is sinful. And I have seen these relationships do not lead to marriage at the end. They break up.

Even though Ferdous's understanding of "right sexual behaviour" seems not to apply to men – she does not comment on the boys who are with these girls – her comments bring to attention how religious views are deployed to justify sexual and gender morals. Like Farha, however, Ferdous is not a strict follower of religious doctrines, but still draws on it to validate an everyday moral order. As White (2012)[36] describes: '[w]here things do not just come naturally, however, religion may be brought in with society to ensure proper behaviour […]'. For Ferdous the forfeit for such "sexual immorality" is the failure of such relationships to ever culminate in marriage, which

[36] S.C. White, *Op.cit*., 2012, p. 1442.

according to her is the ultimate goal of love. Ferdous thus, not only suggests for a moral sexual life, but also encourages the construction of female "docile bodies"[37], 'not through punishment, but by teaching [women] to accept those expectations as their own and to live as if they might be punished at any moment'.[38]

Further conversations with Ferdous and several other women reveal that it is not only the depictions in contraceptive ads that they are worried about. They are also reluctant to accept other changes, such as many young girls' "Western" clothes, lifestyles and sexual behaviour, which they consider are the upshot of a Westernised modernity. These women consider that premarital sexuality is a new phenomenon, an outcome of socio-cultural changes brought by modern technologies like the cell phone, satellite TV, and the internet. The approach in condom ads especially to background marriage and family but highlight sexual pleasure seems to them to bestow approval on promiscuous sexual behaviour. This makes these women particularly concerned about such ads. Importantly, displaying sexual intimacy in public space as well as pre/extra marital sexuality, are understood as an influence of Westernised sexuality and a non-Bengali attitude. Their critical but arguably partial understanding of "Westernised sexuality" reduces "Westernised sexuality" to a monolithic category. But perhaps such perceptions emerge from a postcolonial consciousness: an effort to saving "Bengali culture" from the Western cultural invaders.

A third, but small group of women (5 out of 36)[39] propose that considering ongoing social realities, it is essential that the ads include pre/extra marital sexual relationship. For instance, Miti (u/y) suggests:

> In our time sex outside marriage was a taboo. But now we cannot control it. It is happening and increasing in new generation, and you cannot stop that. Better it is wise to use protection. It is better to be safe than sorry. In today's context, it is not necessary to portray married couple; rather, I think it is very important to build the awareness. [Sic]

Similarly, Doli (m/m) also thinks that such depictions are essential to create awareness which is necessary to prevent premarital pregnancy. But, Rina's (p/m) approval for displaying sex beyond marriage in condom ads is derived from her belief that condoms should be used only during 'unreliable sexual relationship', and

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[37] M. Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

[38] S.L. Bartky, Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power, in R. Weitz (eds.) *The Politics of Women's Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance, & Behaviour* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 76-98.

[39] Among these five women, three belong to the upper-class younger generation, one to the middle-class middle-aged generation and the last one to the poor class middle-aged generation.

not in conjugal life. As she says: 'I don't want my husband to use a condom, because I know he does not go to *kharap jaega* (bad places, i.e., brothel), I trust him'. Therefore, she thinks pre/extra marital sexual relationships can be included in condom ads to promote safe sex. Bondhon (u/y) addresses the same trust concern from a different perspective. According to her, the prevalence of advertising representations, which associate the condom with "promiscuous" sexual behaviour, thus raises an issue of trust.

Consequently, when the condom is more an emblem of protection against HIV/AIDS and STD than birth control in the contraception ads, such representation strengthens the social discourse: '[…] use of condoms indicates that the partners are not sexually exclusive and signals a lack of mutual trust'.[40] This leaves women with a dilemma – whether to go for condoms or not; because going for a condom would mean that they do not trust their husbands. Accordingly, Bondhon suggests that sexual intimacy needs to be portrayed in not only condom ads, but in any kind of contraceptive ad to promote safe sex and birth control. She further expresses deep frustration about the double standard society maintains – permitting sexual objectification of women's bodies in ads, yet maintaining strict "policing" in the name of protecting the honour of the nation when it comes to contraceptive advertising. Similarly, Meghla (u/y) supports the portrayal of sexual intimacy to create awareness for both safe sex and birth control, and further recommends that pill ads should stop portraying marriage as the only context for using pills, as many unmarried girls, including her, are prescribed pills by doctors to regularise menstruation.

The final small group of women who did not respond are Tushar (p/y) and Nazu (m/o). Tushar did not address this aspect due to her limited knowledge of these ads. Nazu on the other hand, was more interested in talking about her life without reference to sex, mostly discussing about how busy she was in performing her responsibilities as a wife and a mother, which, as she recounted, barely allowed any time to think about other issues. This was a common style of talking about sex observed mostly in the older generation women, as if sex was not that important, just a mundane part of married life and that was it.

The "Lived" Vs. the "Represented" Sexuality and Gender Roles: Concluding Thoughts

One of the significant issues the research has revealed is that women are constrained in their access, consumption and understanding of contraceptive ads. With regard to

[40] S. F. Rashid, 'Small Powers, Little Choice: Contextualising Reproductive and Sexual Rights in Slums in Bangladesh'. *IDS Bulletin*, Vol. 37(5), 2006, pp. 69-76.

audience response to contraceptive ads, two issues are pertinent: firstly, the act of watching contraception ads is not encouraged in Bangladesh, rather "ignoring" such ads is a norm. Secondly, the act of interpreting these ads – discussing contraception with an outsider, in this case with me – is still culturally considered an embarrassing act. Thus, an investigation of the constrained responses on contraception ads in my research revealed: a paternalistic power presence curtails women's opportunity to watch TV; with this, material limitations (lack of electricity, absence of a TV, extended workload and no leisure time for women) and religious restrictions upheld by some of the women also essentially hamper the act of watching. Interestingly, women who mentioned about materialistic limitations or gender politics in TV viewing did not consider mobile phones or internet to be alternative media platforms for them. Infact, none of the respondents consider these as their personal choice of media. Rather, some of them, as mentioned before, initiated discussions on modern technologies (mobile phones, satellite TV and the internet) in order to blame these for influencing young generation to adopt Westernised life-style; leading to engage in premarital sexual activity, at an early age. Furthermore, notions of "sexual privacy"– what to disclose and what not, together with socio-cultural and moral restrictions on public discussion of sexual issues, also limit the scope of viewing and/or discussing these ads. Thus, there are many restrictions posed on watching and discussing contraceptive ads.

Despite such constraints, however, the in-depth interviews with women across three social classes and generations revealed that women have a diverse range of valuable experience and knowledge about contraceptive ads and when discussing ads, they also relate the various representations to aspects of their everyday lives. One such opinion, though from a small group of women, indicates that the ads reproduce certain expectations towards women which are patriarchal. For instance, presenting women as shy, solely responsible for birth control and bringing happiness to the family by her use of contraceptives, actually present sexuality and birth control as an extension of women's conjugal role. They consider such depictions problematic as these lead to a tension for not fitting the category of an "ideal wife". Hence, these women question these patriarchal gender roles in real life and also in depictions in the contraceptive ads. The research findings suggest that such awareness emerged due to a consciousness of women's rights in some of these women, developed from receiving higher education, or from the various awareness raising activities throughout the country to reduce gender inequality. Again, some of them hold such perspectives due to different upbringing, or simply due to varied lived experiences. In contrast, the majority of the women interviewed accept such representations, for what

seem to them as traditionally defined characteristics for an "ideal Bengali woman", which they aspire to achieve in their real lives. Similarly, although pre/extra marital sex is an actuality, a majority of the women do not want to see a reflection of such realities in the condom ads; as the concern is such depictions may encourage "immoral" sexual practices. Rather, these women are reluctant to allow any kind of sexual intimacy to be portrayed in these ads. In contrast, echoing the contemporary sexual realities, a small number of women consider that the contraceptive ads need to demonstrate pre/extra marital sexual relationships.

A final insight that I want to offer with regard to women's responses towards various depictions in the contraceptive ads is: the responses varied not only due to women's divergent social classes and generations, but also depending on women's varied lived experiences of contraception, upbringing, influence of Westernised education and an awareness of gender equality. There were clear distinctions in women's responses across different classes and generations with regard to two particular issues: firstly, women from the poor class spoke less about the representations in the ads compared to the other classes, as they had fewer opportunities to view ads and limited literacy impeded their full understanding of ads. Secondly, on the representation of pre/extra marital sex in the condom ads, it is mostly the younger, upper-class women who uphold a relatively "progressive" view of sexuality. Again, due to differences of upbringing, even within the same social class and same generation, women had dissimilar experiences of contraceptive ads. For instance, Farha and Bondhon were from the upper-class and belonged to the same younger generation. However, whereas Farha's upbringing in a religiously "conservative" family restricted her watching of TV and the contraceptive ads until a certain age, there was no such restriction for Bondhon. Rather, Bondhon was never discouraged from asking questions about contraceptive ads even in her childhood.

Nonetheless, one of the interesting aspects to emerge during the discussions about the ads was that when representation of sexual practices in the ads was raised, women expressed their opinions mainly in relation to how such depictions of sexuality had or might have impact on the larger society and Bengali traditions. They found it more difficult to refer to their own sexual experiences. Indeed, McQuail[41] was right to opine, 'Media use can … be seen to be both limited and motivated by complex and interacting forces in society and in the personal biography of the individual'.

To conclude, the media landscape is changing rapidly and its digitalisation has created massive scope for advertising. However, anecdotal evidences suggest that

[41] R. Silverstone, *Op.cit*., p. 143

although ads for contraception continued to be portrayed inadequately, nonetheless, there has been striking changes in the contents of such ads. Therefore, further research is essential in the context of changing media landscape; how audience perceptions interpret such changes both in terms of contraceptive ad contents, as well as how the increased availability of media impacts audience's viewing patterns and gender dynamics of media viewing in a family setting.

Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh **(Hum.), Vol. 68(2), 2023, pp. 193-206**
DOI: https://doi.org/10.3329/jasbh.v68i2.70363

Interfaith Dialogue: An Islamic Framework

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Abstract

This study analyses the concept of interfaith dialogue, a widely popular issue, from an Islamic perspective with a view to mitigating religious misunderstanding and promoting interfaith harmony. The study adopts qualitative content analysis based on historical elucidations of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. For this purpose, historical documents including both classical and contemporary Islamic literature have been analysed along with recent scholarly journal articles, theses, dissertations, as well as reliable online contents. The findings reveal that Islam accepts interfaith dialogue as a necessary condition for promoting peaceful coexistence and interfaith harmony in every society. The Qur'an has laid a great emphasis on maintaining unity in diversity. The Prophet (PBUH) was a model for mitigating interfaith conflicts throughout his life. Though a few Qur'anic verses seem incongruous with interfaith dialogue and harmony, upon investigation, they are attested to be applied to specific circumstances only. Finally, it concludes that Islam, being a universal religion, plays a unique role in mitigating interfaith encounters and encouraging peaceful coexistence among the followers of different religions and cultures of the world.

Key words: Interfaith dialogue, peaceful coexistence, Islam, Qur'an, sunnah.

Introduction

Religions, in general, teach love, tolerance, and sympathy for one another irrespective of their differences in beliefs and rituals. But nowadays, people belonging to different religions are divided into conflicts, hatred, and enmity.[1] Many tragic events have stigmatised human history on the grounds of religion.[2] In this situation, it is necessary for people of all faiths to get together to mitigate interreligious tensions. Interfaith dialogue is considered an effective instrument for mitigating interfaith tensions and promoting mutual understanding and harmony among religions.[3] As Leonard Swidler, one of the leading scholars of interfaith dialogue, terms interfaith dialogue as the heart of the dialogue of any kind, which he

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[1] K. N. Islam, "World Peace Through Interreligious Dialogue", *Religions for Peace,* (Dhaka: Academic Publishing House Ltd., 2022), pp. 11-22.
[2] Human Right Watch, 2016, Retrieved: 15 July 2020, from: www.hrw.org.
[3] M. Elius*et. al.*, "Islam as a religion of tolerance and dialogue". *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, Vol. 18, No. 52, 2019, pp. 96-109.

regards as one of the most comprehensive human disciplines. He also mentions that the world has constantly felt the need for dialogue, but subsequently the 'Fall of the Wall' in 1989, and later 9/11, compelled people of the world to realise its need further.[4] Emphasising the necessity of interfaith dialogue, Hans Kung, a renowned scholar of interfaith dialogue, is said to have mentioned: "No peace among the nations without peace among the religions. No peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions."[5] Thus, dialogue among religions is necessary for establishing peace in the world.

Islam, a religion of peace, emphasises the essential unity of mankind for the common benefit of all. It regards humanity as one family, the *ummah*,[6] and puts emphasis on universal brotherhood.[7] Islam teaches that God has created all human beings irrespective of race, colour, class or territory, and they belong to the family of God. That is why, it prohibits all kinds of intervention related to other faiths, and enquires to preserve beliefs and practices of all despite their commitment to a religion different from its own.[8] Islam holds that every individual depends on each other and thus, inspires societal integration for maintaining and promoting stability, peace and understanding. The holy Qurʾan contains numerous convictions on maintaining peaceful relationships among various communities.[9] Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) life provides ample instances of dialogue with the adherents of different faiths. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) also maintained genuine and equitable socio-economic relations with them.[10] He used to visit and aid the sick and distressed regardless of

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4 L. Swidler, 'The History of Inter-Religious Dialogue'. Catherine Cornille (ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. 2013), pp. 3-19. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118529911

5 L. E. Provencher, "A Critical Analysis of the Islamic Discourse of Interfaith Dialogue", MA Thesis, The University of Arizona, 2010, p. 24.

6 Mohammad Elius, "Understanding Religious Diversity, Tolerance and Peace-buildings: An Islamic Approach", F. Huda, M. J. Alam, S. Farid, T. D. Rozario and A. Sayem (eds.), *World Religions and Culture: Interfaith Education in Bangladesh,* (University of Dhaka, 2022), pp. 51-74.

7 N. S. H. Khair, M. Ahmad, M. K. N. Z. Nazri, M. R. M. Nor, K. M. K. Hambali, "Integration of Multicultural Society: Islamic Perspective", Retrieved 20 January 2020, from: http://www.ipedr.com/vol42/024-ICKCS2012-K10014.

8 M. R. M. Nor, I. Khan, M. Elius, "Analysing the Conceptual Framework of Religious Freedom and Interreligious Relationship in Islam", *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies.* 8(2), 2018, pp. 309-334.

9 Al-Qurʾan, Surah al-Nisa, 4:1; Al-Hujraat, 49:13; Al-Imran, 3:64; Al-Maeda, 5: 48; Al-Nahl, 16: 125.

10 M. Z. Haq, "Muslim's Participation in Interfaith Dialogue: Challenges and Opportunity". *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* Vol. 49, 2014, pp. 613-646.

their religious affiliations.[11] His rule in Madinah is a pertinent example of a harmonious relationship among various religious and ethnic communities. History provides examples that people of other religions received favourable treatment in various Muslim territories and their religions were safeguarded as well.[12] Nowadays, people have misunderstood Islam as they lack proper Islamic knowledge as well as are influenced by ongoing propaganda against Muslims and Islam. On the given circumstance, this research is expected to help reduce misunderstanding about Islam, and thus, contribute to mitigating interfaith tensions around the world.The purpose of this research is to provide an Islamic framework of interfaith dialogue through analysing the Qur'anic teachings and the Prophetic approaches toward the people of other religions with special reference to the concept of diversity, tolerance, freedom of religion, justice and equality with a view to mitigate misunderstanding about Islam and promote interfaith harmony in the world.

Definition and Purpose of Interfaith Dialogue

The term 'dialogue' originates from the Greek word 'dialogos' which means 'through words'.[13] Thus, dialogue is a kind of communication that occurs through words.[14] According to Collins English Dictionary, "dialogue is a communication or discussion between people or groups of people".[15] Accordingly, dialogue is, by and large, a discussion, discourse and conversation between two or more groups or individuals so as to share and learn from one another.[16] In the words of Leonard Swidler, dialogue is a conversation on a common issue with differing opinions.[17] It is to be mentioned that there are differences between dialogue and debate. Debate aims to defeat the other whereas dialogue aims to understand the view of others.[18]

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[11] M. I. I. Tirmidhi, *Sunan-al-Tirmidhi*, Vol. 3, (Egypt: Sharika Maktaba Wa Matbah Mustafa Albani Al-Hobla, 1975), p. 328

[12] I. Khan, M. Elius, M.R. M. Nor, M. Y. Z M. Yusoff, K. Noordin, and F. Mansor, "A Critical Appraisal of Interreligious Dialogue in Islam", *SAGE Open*. October-December 2020, pp. 1–10.

[13] B. David, "Difficult Dialogues" (Clark University), Retrieved 17 June 2017 from https://www2.clarku.edu/difficultdialogues/learn/index.cfm.

[14] M. Elius et al., "Islam as a religion of tolerance and dialogue", Op. cit. pp. 96-109.

[15] Collins English Dictionary, Accessed 10 January, 2022 from https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english

[16] K. M. Karim and S. A. Saili, "Inter-faith dialogue: The Qurʾanic and Prophetic perspective, *Journal of Usuluddin,* Vol. 29, 2009, pp. 65-94.

[17] L. Swidler, "The Dialogue Decalogue: Ground Rules for Interreligious Dialogue", in *Dialogue for Interreligious Understanding: Strategies for the Transformation of Culture-Shaping Institution*, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 47-52.

[18] F. Haque, "Countering Religious Militancy through Interfaith Cooperation: An Islamic Perspective", Accessed 28 January 2023 from http://www.ihmsaw.org/resourcefiles/1288447470.

Therefore, dialogue stresses on good communication to promote mutual understanding and mitigate ignorance.[19] Similarly, Gerard Forde is said to have elucidated that dialogue seeks to increase worthy relations among people.[20] Hambali *et al.* (2013) assert that dialogue is a unique way to integrate man's social life; it provides an opportunity to improve their relationships and avoid stereotypes.[21]

Interfaith dialogue, as we understand it, means all constructive and positive relations with individuals and societies of other religions with the aim of mutual enrichment and understanding.[22] Moreover, mutual imitation is not the way of interfaith dialogue. It is just a mutual understanding between the people of various religions. It asks to be strict to one's own faith and considers others worthy of respect as individuals.[23] Muhammad Shafic and Mohammed Abu-Nimer stress that agreement and uniformity are not the goals of interfaith dialogue; rather, it is a collaboration of different religions for the common welfare.[24] Bishop Patrick D' Rozario comments that interfaith dialogue is not to prove one religion true and another untrue by comparing these two religions and also not to make one new religion combining the teachings of all other religions; rather, it is to increase co-operation in terms of communication and understanding between them.[25] While explaining the purpose of interfaith dialogue Raimundo Panikara mentioned:

> The aim of interreligious dialogue is understanding. It is not to win over the other or to come to a total agreement or a universal religion. The ideal is communication in order to bridge the gulfs of mutual ignorance and misunderstanding between the different cultures of the world, letting them speak and speak out of their own insights in their own languages.[26]

According to Leonard Swidler, the purpose of joining interfaith dialogue with those of other religions is to make our world a better place for dwelling.[27] Similarly,

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[19] R. Panikara, *The Interreligious Dialogue*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), p. 10.

[20] B. Popovska, Z. Ristoska, and P. Payet, "The Role of Interreligious and Interfaith Dialogue in the Post-Secular World", Accessed 31 December 2022 from https://academicus.edu.al.

[21] K. M. K. Hambali, S. Sintang, N. Senin and S. Shahrud-Din, "Interfaith Dialogue in the Context of Comparative Religion", *Middle East Journal of Scientific Research,* Vol. 14 (12), 2013, pp. 1599-1612.

[22] Ibid.

[23] M.A.G. Forde, "What is interreligious dialogue?, *A Journey Together: A Research for Christian Muslim Dialogue*, (Wilton: Cois Tine, 2013). Retrieved: 10 July 2019 from www. Coistine.ie.

[24] M. Shafic and M. Abu-Nimer, *Inter-faith Dialogue: A Guide for Muslims,* (London and Washington: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2007), p. 2.

[25] B. P. D' Rozario, "Antaḥdharmiẏa sanlap samparke prathamik dharaṇa" (The Primary Concept about Interfaith Dialogue), *Oikotan*, Vol. 16, 2004, pp. 6-15.

[26] R. Pankara quoted in K. N. Islam, *World Peace through Interreligious Dialogue*, *Op. cit.,* pp. 11-22.

[27] Leonard Swidler, "The History of Inter-Religious Dialogue", *Op. cit.,* pp. 3-19.

Provencher argues that interfaith dialogue brings communities into a common understanding of harmony and respect.[28] For Vivekananda, the purpose of interfaith dialogue is to make us better humans and not to convert to a new faith.[29] Thus, the prime cause of interfaith dialogue is to promote unity in diversity to establish harmony and peaceful coexistence in the world. It is to be mentioned that interfaith dialogue is not limited to organizational activities. It is one kind of shared relationship or interaction which takes place among individuals and communities on various levels. Nowadays, most cities or countries are occupied with people belonging to different religions like Muslims, Jews, Christians, Buddhists, Hindus etc. Every kind of positive relationship between these groups of people can be connected to interfaith dialogue. This positive relationship includes relations between neighbors, classmates, colleagues, friends etc. Thus, dialogue may take place in every situation, and when it occurs between religious groups or individuals, it is termed as interfaith or interreligious dialogue.

Islamic Framework of Interfaith Dialogue

Various terms have been used to denote dialogue in Islam i.e., '*mukalmah,', Jadal' 'mujadalah 'mufawaḍah', 'muhajjah' 'ḥiwar,' and 'ḥadith'*.[30] The word *ḥiwar* has been stated three times with the meaning of dialogue in the Qurʾan,[31] and it is considered as the most suitable word for dialogue. The Qur'anic word *ḥiwar* entails a form of dialogue involving two or more groups or persons aiming to correct errors, provide opinions, create facts, and respond to wrong interpretations.[32] Miriam Sabirah Ashki holds that the word *ḥiwar* signifies an exchange of ideas and thoughts approaching a mutual understanding or awareness, which is closer to the meaning of present-day dialogue.[33]Another word closer to *hiwar* is *jadal* which means a conversation to a convincing debate through arguments found in the discussion among theological scholars.[34]Islam inspires all kinds of discussion for promoting good in society, and that is why it asks Muslims to help each other in goodness and not in sin and transgression.[35]

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[28] L. E. Provencher, "A Critical Analysis of the Islamic Discourse of Interfaith Dialogue", M. A. thesis, The University of Arizona, 2010, p. 18

[29] Leonard Swidler, "The History of Inter-Religious Dialogue", *Op. cit.,* pp. 3-19.

[30] M. Zia-uI-Haq, "Muslims' participation in interfaith dialogue: challenges and opportunity", *Op. cit.,* pp. 613-646.

[31] Al-Qurʾan, 18: 34; 18: 37; 58:1

[32] S. B.Humaid, "Islam and dialogue with the other", *Interfaith Dialogue: Cross –Cultural Views*, (Ghainna Publication, 2010), p. 30.

[33] M. S. Ashki, *Islamic Approaches and Principles of Dialogue*, (Salam Institute for Peace and Justice, 2006), p. 16.

[34] Ibid. p. 17.

[35] "And help one another in goodness and piety, and do not help one another in sin and transgression" (Al-Qur'an, 5:2).

Islam holds that God has created the universe and He is the sole authority of it. Everything in the universe is dependent on and related to one another. Human beings, as creations of God, are not exceptions. They are also dependent on each other regardless of their religious or ethnic affiliations. Thus, Islam accepts diversity as a God-given phenomenon,[36] and Islamic worldview is, thus, based on unity in diversity.[37] God does not differentiate in bestowing His mercy upon the universe. In this case, the identity of religion does not carry any special favour.[38] So, Muslims are bound to believe in all the Prophets sent by God and show equal respect to them.[39] Reminding the unity of Prophethood, the Qurʾan clarifies that all Prophets of God professed the first testimony (*shahadah*). In other words, they all proclaimed *Tawhid* or Oneness of God.[40] It also says that the message of all Prophets is fundamentally the same as they came from the same source.[41] Thus, there is no superiority of the Prophets or their messages over each other.

The Qurʾan also reminds Muslims of their same origin and asks them to maintain harmony in differences.[42] Furthermore, the Qur'an emphasises two relationships: the relationship with God (*ʿibadah*) and the relationship with fellow human beings (*muʿamalat)*. To improve the relationship with God, it is necessary to improve the relationship with other human beings which can be achieved through interfaith dialogue. There are many Qur'anic verses and Prophetic traditions which acknowledge the importance of religious diversity, mutual co-operation, and interfaith harmony.[43]

The Qur'anic Principles of Interfaith Dialogue

For a sincere and successful dialogue, courteous dealings either by words or deeds are crucial. The Qurʾanic injunction for Muslims is to adopt the highest courteous attitude to others.[44] Therefore, the Qurʾan asks Muslims to speak logically with

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36 Al-Qur'an, 10:99; 11:118.
37 Mohammad Elius, Diversity, tolerance and peacebuilding…, *Op. cit.,* pp. 51-74.
38 Al-Quran: 17:20
39 Al-Qur'an 2: 285; 22: 67
40 Al-Qurʾan 21: 25
41 Al-Qurʾan 41:43.
42 M. Elius, I. Khan and M.R. M. Nor., "Interreligious Dialogue: An Islamic Approach". *KATHA,* Centre for Civilizational Dialogue, University of Malaya. Vol. 15, 2019b, pp. 1-19.
43 M. R. M. Nor *et al.,* "Analysing the Conceptual Framework of Religious Freedom and Interreligious Relationship in Islam", *Op. cit*., pp. 309-334; I. Khan *et al.,* "A Critical Appraisal of Interreligious Dialogue in Islam", *Op. cit.,* pp. pp. 1-10; M. Elius *et al.,* "Islam as a religion of tolerance and dialogue", *Op. cit.,* pp. 96-109.
44 M. Ayoub, "Nearest in Amity: Christians in the Qurʾān and contemporary exegetical tradition", Lloyd Ridgeon (ed.), *Islam and Religious Diversity: Critical Concepts in Islamic Studies,* (London & New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 129-154.

lovely words while conversing with the followers of other faiths, and argue with them, if needed, in maintaining the highest courtesy.[45] As a religion of peace, Islam teaches to avoid potential conflicts in society. Therefore, the Qur'an forbids Muslims to insult others for their contradictory beliefs.[46] For unity among various faith groups, the Qurʾan reminds us of the same source of origin of mankind and encourages us to know one another. As the Qurʾan states:

> O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes that you may know each other (not that youmay despise each other). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Godis (he who is) the most righteous of you. And God has full knowledge and iswell acquainted (with all things).[47]

According to the Qur'anic teachings, God created Adam and Ḥawwa (Eve), and made them the source of all mankind in this world. Therefore, all human beings share the same origin regardless of their religions. Muhammad Hashim Kamali maintains that the same origin is the indication of equal status of mankind regardless of their different religious identities.[48] Extending the same view it is argued that the Qurʾanic teachings inspire Muslims to co-exist peacefully with those around them despite their ethnic, religious, and cultural variances, and promote tolerance and respectful behaviour in the case of daily communications.[49] Again, the Qur'anic verse (49:13) guiding us to be acquainted with one another indicates interfaith dialogue.[50]After necessitating interfaith dialogue, the Qurʾan has shown the way for a successful dialogue. To avoid contradictory issues in dialogue the Qurʾan emphasises the common issues of different religions.[51] Hence, the 'common words' between religions will be the basis of interfaith dialogue. So, any kind of contradictory issue between the parties should be avoided. In his seminal work, *Christian Ethics*, Isma'il Raji Al-Faruqi also asserts that dialogue between the people of different religions would be based on ethical guidelines of human life in its place of theological defence on the nature of God.[52] Similarly, Fatmir Shehu argues that the theological issues of

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45 Al-Qurʾan, 16:125.
46 Al-Qurʾan, 6:108.
47 Al-Qurʾan, 49: 13.
48 M. H. Kamali, "Diversity and Pluralism: A Qurʾanic Perspective", *Islam and Civlisational Renewal,* Vol. 1(1), 2013, pp. 27- 54.
49 N. Senin, F. Grine, W. A. W. Ramli, K. M. K. Hambali, and S. F. Ramlan, "Understanding the 'other': the case of Al-Biruni (973-1048 AD)", *International Journal of Ethics and Systems*, Vol. 35(1), 2019, pp. 1-19.
50 K. M. K. Hambali, N. F. A. Rahman, A. Awang, A. Ghazali, A. N. S. M. Sallam, "Inter-Religious Dialogue Activity: An Experience among Undergraduate Students in Selected Universities in Malaysia", *Akademika,* Vol. 89(1), 2019, pp. 71-82.
51 Al- Qurʾan, 3:64.
52 I. R. al-Faruqi, *Christian Ethics: A Historical and Systematic Analysis of Its Dominant Ideas*, (Montreal: Mc Gill University Press, 1967), p. 33.

different religions should not be the basis of interfaith dialogue; rather, it should be based on all aspects of human life. He remarks that the main concern of interfaith dialogue is to solve problems, not to create confusion about their religion; its focus should be to increase mutual awareness which helps decrease conflicts between them.[53] Kamali's view on interfaith dialogue also goes against theological issues of religions as he points out that when the Christian representatives from Najran met the Prophet (PBUH) and started to discuss a theological issue of Christianity which was contradictory to Islam; accordingly, both parties could not reach an agreement on the issue and made a peace treaty on common interest.[54] Thus, anything that contradicts between religions should not be the issue of interfaith dialogue.

Again, justice is a prerequisite for establishing peace, prosperity, and interfaith harmony. Consequently, it is vital for a multi-religious society to maintain unity in diversity. The holy Qur'an highlights justice in every aspect of life.[55]In this connection, al-Tabari points out that Muslims can never be unjust or unfair to anybody irrespective of their religions; they must be fair in their treatment of others.[56] That is why the Qur'an does not support any force in the affairs of religion. Islam does not approve anything that causes violence or killing. As violence is always an obstruction to peace and harmony and causes death and destruction, the Qurʾan altogether prohibits all kinds of violence in the world. The Qur'an affirms: "Whoever kills a soul unless for a soul or for corruption [done] in the land - it is as if he had slain mankind entirely. And whoever saves one - it is as if he had saved mankind entirely".[57] There is no ambiguity in this verse: killing an innocent soul whether he/she is a Muslim or non-Muslim is equally punishable, and that is compared with the killing of all humanity. Thus, Islam protects the rights of every individual whether he/she belongs to a religion or not.

Freedom of religion is articulated in many verses of the Qur'an. Though Islam provides complete freedom in the case of religion, it is not free from criticism. For example, Robert Spencer[58] has attacked Islam by criticising that Islam motivates its

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[53] F. Shehu, "Inter-Religious Dialogue and Contemporary Peace- Building: From Hostility to Mutual Respect and Better Understanding", *Beder Journal of Humanities* (BJH), Vol. 1, Issue 3, Spring 2014, pp. 59-76

[54] M. H. Kamali, "Diversity and Pluralism: A Qurʾanic Perspective", *Op. cit.,* pp. 27- 54.

[55] Al-Qur'an, 05:08.

[56] M.I.J Al- Ṭabari, *Jamiʿ al-Bayan fi Taʾwil al- Qurʾan*, (Beirut: Muʾassasah al- Risalah, 2000), p. 321.

[57] Al-Qurʾan, 5: 32.

[58] Robert Bruce Spencer is an American anti-Muslim author and blogger. In 2003, he founded and has since directed a blog that tracks what he considers Islamic extremism, known as Jihad Watch.

adherents to kill people of other religions if they do not agree to embrace Islam.[59]He has quoted the Qurʾanic verse: "Fight those who do not believe in Allah or the Last Day and who do not consider unlawful what Allah and His messenger have made unlawful and who do not adopt the religion of truth".[60]

To understand this verse of the Qur'an, it is necessary to understand the background of its revelation. In fact, the verse was revealed during the battle of *Tabuk* when the Non-Muslim Arabs and the Romans became united to abolish the Muslim community.[61] It was, indeed, a tough situation and a severe threat for Muslims. Given this difficult situation, Allah ordered Muslims to encounter their enemies and save Islam. This was a wartime defensive policy and is not an injunction against non-Muslims.[62] Analysing the commentaries of the Qur'anic verse (9: 29) Arif Kemil Abdullah opines that it was related to the aggression and hostility of the people of the book, but not their religion.[63] So, there is no scope to fight for converting people to Islam. The basic spirit of Islam is as follows:

> Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes - from being righteous toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly. Allah only forbids you from those who fight you because of religion and expel you from your homes and aid in your expulsion - [forbids] that you make allies of them. And whoever makes allies of them, then it is those who are the wrongdoers.[64]

These verses make it clear that Muslims are not obligated to fight against non-Muslims only for their differences in religion. Islam only allows fighting against those non-Muslims who initiate fighting against Islam and Muslims as well as ousting them from their houses only because they follow Islam. Al-Ṭabari comments on these Qur'anic verses that Muslims must be fair and just while conducting with non-Muslims and uphold positive relationships so long as there is no open hostility toward Islam and Muslims.[65] Al-Qurṭubi and Ibn Kathir maintain that the verses prohibit fighting with those non-Muslims who do not see Muslims as their enemies

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[59] R. B. Spencer, *Religion of Peace: Why Christianity is, and Islam isn't,* 2007, Retrieved 15, 2018, from https://www.amazon.com/Religion-Peace-Christianity-Islam-Isnt/dp/1596985151.

[60] Al-Qur'an, 9: 29.

[61] M. Elius et al., "Islam as a religion of tolerance and dialogue", *Op. cit.,* pp. 96-109.

[62] M. R. M. Nor *et al.*, "Analysing the Conceptual Framework of Religious Freedom and Interreligious Relationship in Islam", *Op. cit.,* pp. 309-334.

[63] A. K. Abdullah, *The Qurʾan and Normative Religious Pluralism: A Thematic Study of the Qurʾan.* (Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2014), p. 211.

[64] Al-Qurʾan, 60: 8-9.

[65] M. I. J. al- Ṭabari, *Jamiʿ al-Bayan fi Taʾwil al- Qurʾan*, (Beirut: Muassasah al-Risalah, 2000), p. 321.

and fight against them.[66]So, there is no room for fighting for Muslims against non-Muslims only because they do not follow Islam; rather, it has been permitted only as a defensive tactic when the other party attacks Muslims and deprives them of their rights.

Analysing the verse, M. W. Khan divides the twenty-three years of the revealing period of the Qur'anic verses into two segments: twenty years of peaceful time between Muslims and non-Muslims, and the rest three-year wartime between them; the Qur'anic verses related to war belong to the later segment while the verses related to peace, justice, morality, and worship of God belongs to the former segment. So, this verse does not provide a general rule for Muslims.[67]

In the same way some other Quranic verses have also been criticised by the opponents. For examples, the Qur'an states: "The believers should not make the disbelievers their allies rather than other believers – anyone who does such thing will isolate himself completely from God- except when you need to protect yourselves from them. God wants you to beware of Him: The final return is to God".[68]

This verse is misunderstood due to the lack of correct knowledge of its background of the revelation. The background of the verse is known from Abdullah ibn Abbas's narration that some Jews along with Kaʿb ibn Ashraf (the group leader) befriended a group of Muslims including al-Ḥajjaj Ibn Amar al-Anṣari intending to create dispute and misunderstanding among Muslims. Given this particular situation, Allah revealed this verse to make the Muslims aware of those particular people and their conspiracy so that they could not misguide Muslims.[69]

Another misunderstood verse of the Qur'an is: "You who believe, do not take the Jews and Christians as allies; they are allies only to each other. Anyone who takes them as an ally becomes one of them- God does not guide such wrongdoers."[70] According to one narration, the verse was revealed during the battle of *Uhud* when many Jews and Christians were the de facto enemy of the Muslims who conspired to destroy the Muslims completely and who were in a state of war.[71] Another narration

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66 A. A. M. Al- Qurṭubi, *Al-Jamiʿ li al-Aḥkam al-Qurʾān*, (Cairo: Dar al-Qutb al-Misriyyah, 1964), p. 58; I. I.U. I.Al-Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qurʿan al-ʿAzim,* Vol. 3, (Daru Tibbiyyah, 1999), p. 90.

67 M. W. Khan, *Islam and World Peace*, (New Delhi: Centre for Peace and Spirituality International), 2015, p. 22.

68 Al- Qur'an, 3: 128.

69 M. I. J. al- Ṭabari, *Jamiʿ al-Bayan fi Taʾwil al- Qurʾan*, *Op. cit.,* p. 53.

70 Al- Qurʾan, 5:51.

71 I. I. U. I. al-Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qurʿan al-Aẓim.*, Vol. 3, (Daru Tibbiyyah, 1999), p. 132.

says that the verse was revealed to inform Muslims of some hypocrites among the Jews and Christians who conspired against Muslims.[72]

To understand these verses, Said Nursi is cited by Ahmet Kurucan and Mustafa Kasim Erol that the Qurʾanic verses are always valid, but their validity depends on the behaviour of individuals in a given place and time. In a state of peace, these verses cannot be applied to non-Muslims where they are not involved in conspiracy and enmity against Muslim communities, and do not wage war.[73] This is also supported by the examples of the Prophet (PBUH) when he punished the Jews of Banu Qurayza for violating the Charter of Madinah upon the judgement of their approved arbitrator, and at the same time he maintained the treaty with another Jewish tribe, Banu Nadir.[74] Islamic scholars recommend that there is no generality, without exception, in the Qurʾan or *hadiths*.[75] Therefore, it is not right to generalise certain issue based on a particular Qurʾanic verse if some other verses carry different meanings.

Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) response to Interfaith Dialogue

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) spent his life in dialogue with people of various religions and cultures for the promotion of peace in the world.[76] He dealt with believers, disbelievers, atheists, and idolaters in the most harmonious way.[77] He equally showed solidarity with the people of all religions, cultures, and ideologies. Positive engagement in solving societal problems was always the priority of Muhammad (PBUH) even before he achieved Prophethood.[78] He did not differentiate in treating Muslims and non-Muslims, and used to visit both Muslims and non-Muslims with equal importance while sick.[79]

There is no example where the Prophet (PBUH) showed hatred to anybody, even his enemies.[80] This is evidenced when the disbelievers persecuted the Prophet (PBUH)

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72 A. A. M. al-Qurṭubi, *Al-Jami li al-Aḥkam al-Qurʾan*, *Op. cit.,* p. 216.
73 A. Kurucan and MK Erol, *Dialogue in Islam: Qurʾan- Sunnah- History*, (London: Dialogue Society, 2012), p. 100.
74 Ibid, p. 42.
75 M.H. Hasan, "Interpreting Islam and Plural Society", *Op. cit.,* pp. 99- 121.
76 M. Zia-ulHaq, "Muslims' participation in interfaith dialogue: challenges and opportunity", *Op. cit.,* p. 632.
77 A. Kurucan and M. K. Erol, *Dialogue in Islam: Qurʾan- Sunnah- History*, *Op. cit.,* p. 70.
78 A. A. M. I. Hisham, *Sirah al-Nawawiyyah,* Vol. 1, (Egypt: Shakira Maktaba, 1955), p. 157.
79 M. I. I. al- Tirmidhi, *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, (Egypt: Sharikah Maktabah wa Maṭbaʿah Muṣṭafa Albani Al-Ḥubla, 1975), p. 328.
80 M.R.M. Nor *et al.*, "Analysing the Conceptual Framework of Religious Freedom and Interreligious Relationship in Islam", *Op. cit.,* pp. 309-334.

bitterly in Ṭaʾif while preaching Islam, he did not expect their destruction. Instead, he asked God to forgive them.[81] In his Prophetic life in Makkah, the polytheists caused inhuman suffering to him and his companions, and cut off all kinds of societal relationships; even they boycotted the Prophet and his companions for about three years. However, when the Prophet (PBUH) conquered Makkah in 622 CE, instead of taking revenge, he declared amnesty.[82] This is the symbol of Prophet's (PBUH) love for humanity irrespective of race, religion and ethnicity.[83]

Generally, a country where people of different religions live needs to have a common code of conduct to maintain peace and harmony. Such a common code of conduct came from the state of Madinah established by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). When Prophet (PBUH) migrated to Madinah and established an Islamic state, Muslims were not the majority there. Instead, Jews and Christians were the majority. The Prophet made a constitution, famously known as the 'charter of Madinah', with the agreement of all parties irrespective of their religious and ethnic backgrounds. This constitution allows the followers of every religion to perform their religion freely. There wasno interference in the practices of any religion.[84] The charter was made to form a community based on common interests.

The Prophet (PBUH) made many treaties with non-Muslims to establish peace and harmony in society. He made a peace treaty with Najran Christians which is considered as the earliest example of interfaith dialogue in Islam. The Prophet (PBUH) permitted the Christians to perform their prayers in his mosque, and Christian and Muslims performed their prayers under the same roof.[85] This treaty was maintained throughout the Prophetic and caliphate period.[86]Another treaty of the Prophet was with Ḥarith ibn Kaʿb and his tribe. The Prophet ensured the complete freedom of their religious practices.[87]

The treaty of Hudaibiyyah is a breakthrough of interfaith dialogue in the history of Islam. This unlocked the door of interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims. Muslims were relatively strong at the time of the treaty. Despite, Muslims accepted

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[81] M. Elius *et al.*, "Interreligious Dialogue: An Islamic Approach". *KATHA,* Vol. 15, 2019, pp. 1-19

[82] Mohammad Elius, "Understanding Religious Diversity, Tolerance and Peace-buildings: An Islamic Approach", *Op. cit.,* pp. 51-74.

[83] M. Elius *et al.*, "Interreligious Dialogue: An Islamic Approach", *Op. cit.,* pp. 01-19

[84] I. Khan *et al*., "A Critical Appraisal of Interreligious Dialogue in Islam", *Op. cit.,* pp. 1-10.

[85] M. R. M. Nor *et al.,* "Analysing the Conceptual Framework of Religious Freedom and Interreligious Relationship in Islam", *Op. cit.,* pp. 309-334.

[86] A. Y. Yaqub, *Khirāj*, (Al-Qahirah: Maktabah al-Azhariyyah, n.d.), pp. 84-87.

[87] A. Kurucan and MK Erol, *Dialogue in Islam: Qurʾan- Sunnah- History*, *Op. cit.,* p. 80.

several terms raised by the opponent contrary to their interests in order to avoid conflicts between them. This shows the sincerity of the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) in establishing peace in society.[88] It is noteworthy that clause 5 of the treaty was against Muslims as it said: "If a man from the Quraish, without his guardian's permission, joins Muhammad, he shall be returned, but if someone from Muhammad's group comes to the Quraish, he shall not be returned."[89] This was in fact humiliating for the Muslims. That is why the companions of the Prophet (PBUH) were not ready to accept this proposal. The Prophet (PBUH) calmed them by saying: "We want peace and accepted their proposal only for peaceful coexistence and interfaith harmony.[90]

Besides, the Prophet (PBUH) showed utmost compassion and generosity to his neighbours. He asked Muslims to consider their neighbours as themselves. He also emphasised on supporting neighbours in need. It is reported by Ibn Abbas that the Prophet of Islam warned: "He cannot be a true Muslim who makes his stomach full leaving his neighbours hungry at his side"[91] Again, the Prophet did not tolerate those who caused sufferings to their neighbours. That is why he further said: "He cannot be a genuine believer, the Prophet (PBUH) mentioned three times, from whose hands his neighbour is not safe".[92] It is noteworthy that the Prophet did not distinguish his neighbours based on their religions. A neighbour may be a Hindu, a Muslim, a Jain, a Christian or even an unbeliever. According to the direction of the Prophet (PBUH), a Muslim's responsibility is to feed and serve his/her neighbours without considering their tribal or religious affiliation.

The Prophet (PBUH) paid special attention and homage to non-Muslims during his Prophetic life. It is narrated that "once the Prophet (PBUH) saw a funeral procession crossing him. He (the Prophet) stood up while witnessing. Then the Prophet was informed that the dead body was of a Jew. Hearing this, the Prophet replied, was he not a human being?".[93] This tradition clarifies how the Prophet (PBUH) showed love and respect to the people of other religions.

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88 I. Khan *et al.*, "A Critical Appraisal of Interreligious Dialogue in Islam", *Op. cit.,* pp. 1-10.

89 K. Yasir, "Political Foresight of the Prophet: A Textual Analysis of the Treaty of Hudaibiya", 2015. Retrieved March 13, 2020 from https://www.academia.edu/20267103/Hudaibiya_Treaty_-_A_Textual_Analysis.

90 Sulhul Hudaibiyah: The Peace Treaty with Quraysh, Retrieved 13 March, 2020, from https://www.academia.edu/38288354/Treaty_of_hudaybiyyah.

91 A. Ali, *Kanz al-Ummal fi Sunan al-Aqwalwa al- Af'al,* (Beirut: Muʾassasah al-Risalah, 1981), p. 53

92 Ibid, 509.

93 M.I. I. Al-Bukhari, *Al-Bukhari in Mawsu'ah al-Ḥadithh al-Sharif al-Kutub al-Sittah*, (Riyad: Dār al-Salam, 2000), p. 102.

Conclusion

The study shows that interfaith dialogue is one of the crucial issues in the present socio-political circumstance of the world. Islam accepts interfaith dialogue as a necessary means for maintaining sustainable peace and harmony in the world. That is why the journey of Islam has been advocating sincere relations with the people of other religions since its inception in the 7th century Arabia. The Qur'anic teachings and the Prophet's dealings prove that Islam provides equal opportunity to the people of all religions. Though a few Qur'anic verses appear clashing to peace and harmony among religions, upon examination, it is verified that these verses were revealed in a given situation when certain non-Muslims were involved in conspiracy, hostility and waged war against Muslims. In normal situation, these verses cannot be applied. Besides, the Prophet (PBUH) was the embodiment of the Qur'an. He spent his entire life dealing with Muslims and non-Muslims alike. He equally showed solidarity to people of all religions, cultures, and ideologies. From his boyhood he had been engaged in solving societal problems for people to live in peace. Furthermore, there is no example where the Prophet (PBUH) showed hatred or enmity to anybody because of religion. He always prayed to God for the forgiveness of his enemies. The Prophet (PBUH) formed an ideal community in Madinah including Muslims, Jewish, polytheistic, and other ethnic groups where there was a common legal, economic, military, and political goal. In his model state of Madinah, the Prophet (PBUH) ensured complete freedom of religion. He also made many treaties and agreements with non-Muslims for strengthening interrelationships and promoting interfaith harmony. Finally, it can be said that Islam is a home of promoting unity, peace and harmony among humanity irrespective of the religious convictions of the people.

Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh **(Hum.), Vol. 68(2), 2023, pp. 207-218**
DOI: https://doi.org/10.3329/jasbh.v68i2.70364

A Harmonious Synthesis of Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism in the Matrix of Chinese Culture: An Overview

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Abstract

This paper proposes a process of synthesis based on Chinese socio-historical context in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the synthesis of three major religious traditions of East Asia such as Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. At the same time, to be considered is the syncretic approach through which these religions have attained popularity throughout all Eastern and Far Eastern parts of Asia. Thus, in order to make a reasonable justification for the current study, an attempt is made to explore how these religions have appeared to be more or less similar to each other in case of their beliefs and practices. The purpose of the current paper is to decipher the points where and how these three religions interact with each other in terms of belief and practice that is based on a cultural bridge between China and other East Asian countries. This paper offers an overview of the harmonious synthesis of Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism in the matrix of Chinese culture. In conclusion, it points out a new mode of syncretism which can be called "Hybridization"- a new insight into the process of synthesis.

Key words: Three Traditions, Syncretism, Assimilation, Incorporation; Imitation, Accumulation.

Introduction

East Asia has turned to be a lucrative place for researchers to decipher the cultural diversity in a larger geographical setting. As Sino-culture has a tremendous impact on this region, the researchertake China as a model to analyze the harmonious synthesis in Chinese Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism. One of the reasons to analyze these traditions is that these are common in all East Asian countries, and they all represent more or less Chinese characters.[1] Regarding the predominant Chinese culture, Reischauer compared the relationship between China (especially Northern China) and East Asia to that of Greco-Roman civilization and Europe.[2] Huntington

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[1] East Asian cultural sphere, Retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Asian_cultural_sphere, (accessed on 4 August 2022).

[2] Edwin O. Reischauer, "The Sinic World in Perspective", *Foreign Affairs,* Vol. 52(2), 1974, pp. 341-348.

presents the Sinic world as the only one that is based on a cultural rather than religious identity.[3] This influence of Chinese culture makes it a model to understand the religious syncretism in East Asia. Hence, the researchertake China as a measuring scale to understand the synthesis of three traditions. In China, culture is not influenced by religion, rather all Chinese religions are more or less influenced by culture. The influence of Chinese culture is so strong that it cannot be erased from people's minds.[4] But it is important to mention that Confucianism was the most prominent force in shaping the culture of the world's most populous nation for more than two thousand years.[5]

The ways in which syncretism happens in three East Asian traditions are very peculiar. At this point, it is important to note that although these old traditions are syncretic in nature, they never mix together to become a unified whole. Rather, they stand with their own identity even after they are influenced by one another. This is the point to be further clarified that how the three creates a one synthetic concept after being unchanged with their persistent themes. Thus, the current paper demands a thorough study to reassess the concept of syncretism in the light of East Asian traditions i.e., Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism.

Historical Upheavals in China

During the course of about 3500 years of history, the Chinese developed their own distinctive ideas concerning man's origin, nature, destiny and his relation to the universe in which he lived. Therefore, no such religious system is found in China as in the West.[6] Thus, lacking the idea of a personalistic creator external to the cosmos, the Chinese developed an approach to religious life that led to the rejection of monotheism.[7]Although traditional Chinese religiosity does not embrace the Abrahamic concept of One God, this certainly does not mean that supernatural beings are not venerated or worshiped, especially in the traditions of Chinese origin. These entities may take the form of deities, saints, immortals, trees, animals and other aspects of nature, fairies, spirits etc.[8]

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3 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order,* (Simon & Schuster1996).

4 Wang Dunqin, *The Influence of Confucianism on Molding Zhang Jian's Cultural Character*, (Nangtong University Press 2002).

5 Frederick Tse-shying Chen, "The Confucian View of World Order", *Indiana International &Comparative law Review*, Vol. 1, Issue 1,1991, pp.45-69.

6 Howard Smith, *Chinese Religions*, (The Trinity Press, 1968).

7 Derk Bodde, 'Harmony and Conflict in Chinese Philosophy', Arther Wright (ed.), *Studies in Chinese Thought,* 3rd ed., (University of Chicago Phoenix Book, 1967), pp. 20-24.

8 Eileen Barker, 'Religion in China: Some Introductory Notes for the Intrepid Western Scholar', Yang, F. and Lang, G. (eds.), *Social scientific studies of religion in China: methodology, theories, and findings*, (Brill 2011), pp. 109-132.

Historically, the rise of the great Han dynasty marks the end of the Classical Period of Chinese religious and philosophical thoughts. This period is divided into two segments: The first half is known as the "Spring and Autumn" period (206 BCE-9 CE), named after the Spring and Autumn Annals, a chronicle covering the years 722-481 BCE supposedly written by Confucius.[9] The classical period saw the birth of Confucianism and Taoism as a native religious philosophy of China. The Han period was the witness to the rise of Confucianism as a state cult, the development of Taoism as a mystic cult, and the advent of Buddhism.[10]. However, Buddhism is not mentioned separately in the dynastic history during the Han period. The reason is that Buddhism is considered as a part of Taoism, not a different religion. Therefore, Han Buddhism remained under the shadow of Taoism. But various intermixtures are found to have happened during this shadowy period[11]that have remained persistent to continue to do so until today. Thus, in spite of having many philosophical and ethical differences among Chinese Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism we can see a harmonious coexistence of these three religions in modern-day China. At this point, however, a thorough study is called for with a view to discovering a common ground where these religions stay together with their internal differences.

1. Synthesis in Buddhism

One of the outstanding facts of Buddhism in the history of Chinese philosophy has been its tendency and ability to synthesize[12]. Although various Buddhist schools arrived in China from India, only those schools which tempered themselves with Chinese culture endured. More interesting fact is that the schools which originated in China are much more popular than those which originated in India.

1.1. Synthesis with Chinese Culture

As a foreign religion, Buddhism has many aspects that do not match with traditional Chinese culture, such as the concept of suffering, existence as an illusion, living celibate life etc. In the long history of its journey throughout China, it has synthesized its philosophy with traditional Chinese culture.[13] Thus, Buddhism which in the beginning knew no god and had no worship, came to present to the Chinese a

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[9] Joseph A. Adler, *Chinese Religions*, (Laurence King Publishing Ltd., 2002).

[10] Ian Mabbett, "The Beginnings of Buddhism", *History Today*, Vol. 52, Issue, 1, 2002, Retrieved from:https://www.historytoday.com/archive/beginnings-buddhism, (accessed on January 12 2023).

[11] Adler, *Op.cit.*

[12] Xinyi Ou, "The Successful Integration of Buddhism with Chinese Culture: A Summary", *Grand Valley Journal of History*, Vol. 1, Issue 2, 2012, pp. 1-6, Retrieved from: https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/gvjh/vol1/iss2/3 (accessed on 12 January 2023).

[13] *Ibid.*

multitude of new divinities, and a whole new system for making them real to the people.[14] Various new concepts are introduced in it as an impact of the dominant Chinese culture. As for the strong influence of the concept of filial piety in Chinese culture, Buddhism had to absorb it. Whereas the main motto of Buddha is to liberate the soul from the burden of this world, Chinese Buddhist deities give earthly instruments as blessings.[15]

1.2. Humanisation of Deity

The humanization of Chinese Buddhist deities is surely a Chinese influence. As a result, the historical Buddha (Gautama the Buddha) lost his popularity in China and also in other Eastern countries. In such a case, the historical Buddha appeared to the Chinese as the manifestation of their popular deity *Kuan-yin* or *Kuan-shai-yin* who is well known as Avalokiteshvara. It is important to note that *Kuan-yin* is the short of *Kuan-shai-yin*, a phrase signifying "a being who hears the cries of man."[16] Historically, from the T'ang period (618-907 AD), he turned to a woman, or the Goddess of Mercy. At the same time, Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva also transformed into a deity with feminine features and he is also worshiped as the female deity.

1.3. Ancestral Cult

As for strong Confucian influence, various Chinese Buddhist Schools were bound to adopt the concepts of "linking the two worlds". As far as human relation is concerned, followers of the Pure Land School of Buddhism transfer their merits to their ancestors with a view to linking the two worlds. Thus, transferring one's merit to one's ancestors is considered the most meritorious act in Pure Land School.[17] As there is a filial obligation toward parents who have died, the Chinese Buddhist scholars develop a concept of purgatory or hell. A purgatory is a place where the dead rests for a short period after the departure of this world. Purgatory gives some kind of certainty that one can communicate with the ancestors and transfer merits to them. By means of the priesthood, it is possible to make contact with them, and through their mediation, the beloved dead can surely and speedily be liberated from the pains of purgatory.[18] It is important to mention that the Buddhist concept of rebirth is also linked with the ancestral cult of Confucians. The Buddhist monk, therefore, claims that one should not do harm to plant and animal life.[19] Moreover, at

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14 Karl Ludvig Reichlet, *Religion in Chinese Garment*, (Lutterworth Press 1951).
15 Xinzhong Yao, *An Introduction to Confucianism*, (Cambridge University Press 2000).
16 S Beal, *Buddhism in China,* (Princeton University Press1884), p.119.
17 Moor, *Op.cit*.
18 Reichlet, *Op.cit.*
19 *Ibid.*, p.110.

each of the large Buddhist monasteries there are ancestral tablets. There is a special room where the tablets for the soul are placed when a monk dies, where offerings and prayers are made in a thoroughly Confucian manner.[20]

2. Synthesis in Taoism

Taoism is the religion which has an intimate relation with Buddhism from the very beginning. Although Buddhism borrowed elements from Taoism right after the former grew strong, the later acquired more Buddhist concepts to put impact over the masses. Ultimately, in East Asia, Taoism acts like a melting pot where concepts from Buddhism, Confucianism, and indigenous beliefs find their own places.

2.1 Synthesis with Buddhism

Taoism as a religion became established at a time when Buddhism was infiltrating into China. At first, Buddhism seems to have been accepted as a foreign teaching with great similarities to Taoism. Friendly contacts grew up in which Taoists assisted in the translation of Buddhist texts, and Taoist terms were taken over to explain Buddhist concepts.[21] For it could not be concealed that Buddhism became increasingly the leading religion for the masses of China. The only salvation for the Taoist community was to lean upon the one that was stronger and adopted as many Buddhist elements as possible. Because it was not easy to maintain oneself alongside the dominant Buddhist community.[22] Therefore, various concepts of Buddhism are borrowed by the Taoists to make it at the same pace as its contestant.

2.2 Deification of Lao-tzu

Taoism, like Buddhism, has no permanent central authority to which all believing Taoists can submit. The Taoists, in order to prove both the antiquity and the superiority of their religion, place the birth of Lao-tzu before the creation of heaven and earth. They claim that as creation resulted from his departure, like the Buddha, Lao-tzu answers the prayers of the people for protection and salvation.[23]At a certain stage, the Taoists developed both the idea of the Supreme Tao and the idea of incarnation. The historic Lao-tzu, therefore, was considered one of these incarnations. It is clear that the Taoist idea of incarnation is undoubtedly a Buddhist

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20 *Ibid.*, p.118.

21 Jiahe Liu, Dongfang Shao, "Early Buddhism and Taoism in China(A.D. 65-420)", *Buddhist-ChristianStudies*,Vol.12,1992,pp.35-41,Retrieved from: https://www.jstor.org/stable/1389953 (accessed on 12 January 2023). https://doi.org/10.2307/1389953

22 Reichlet, *Op.cit.*,1951, p.88.

23 Smith (1968), *Op.cit*., p.108.

importation of the doctrine of the two bodies of the Buddha: the *Dharmakaya*, or the body of essence, and the *Nirmanakaya*, or the body of manifestation.[24]

2.3 Taoist Pantheon

Faced with the Buddhist teaching in relation to innumerable Buddhas and *bodhisattvas* the Taoists proclaim that their immortals are divine instructors "*t'ien–tsun*," who teach the Taoist adepts to follow their footsteps. They now begin to surround their universe with a hierarchy of innumerable gods who match up to the Buddhist pantheon. The shadowy figure of Huang-Lao, for example, is replaced by a triad of 'Celestial Honored Ones' (T'ien Tsum), who is raised far above the human sphere and has never been incarnated as men. Under these 'Celestial Honored Ones', there is a host of superior and inferior divinities such as station-gods, genii, deceased heroes, good men and virtuous women. All these became objects of worship.[25]

2.4 Concept of Underworld

While Buddhism[26] espoused beliefs in Karma and rebirth, it notably lacks concepts associated with an afterlife or an underworld[27]. As Buddhism gained traction in China, particularly through its Mahayana branch, its adaptable nature allowed it to incorporate elements from Chinese pantheons into its teachings. Through this process

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[24] K.S. Ch'en, *Buddhism in China- A Historical Survey*, (Princeton University Press1964).

[25] Smith, *Op.cit.*, p.108.

[26] To proceed, it is important to note that Buddhism is primarily characterized by its two major schools: Theravada (or Hinayana) Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism. Theravada Buddhism, also known as Hinayana Buddhism or the "Small Vehicle," is considered the earliest form of Buddhism closely aligned with the founder's original vision. It is often referred to as the "Teaching of the Elders." While its founders are believed to have been closest to the Buddha, it's worth noting that the term "Theravada" or "Hinayana" was commonly used in India to denote any monastic sect, which directly applies to this tradition. On the other hand, Mahayana Buddhism, or the "Great Vehicle," emerged approximately 400 years after the passing of Gautama the Buddha. It has become the most widespread and popular form of Buddhism in the world today, spreading from its initial acceptance in countries such as China, Korea, Mongolia, Japan, Sri Lanka, and Tibet to various points worldwide. The Mahayana school holds the belief that all human beings possess a Buddha nature and can attain transcendent awareness, with the aspiration to become a Bodhisattva. This perspective contrasts with Theravada or Hinayana Buddhism. For a good discussion, see J. J. Mark, "A Short History of the Buddhist Schools", *World History Encyclopedia*, (2020, September 29). Retrieved from: https://www.worldhistory.org/article/492/a-short-history-of-the-buddhist-schools/(accessed on 6 November, 2023); S. A. Hai, 2007, *Indian Philosophy*, (The University Press Limited 2007); N. K. Chakma, *Buddhism in Bangladesh and Other Papers*, (Abosar, Dhaka 2007); andনীরুকুমারচাকমা, *বুদ্ধ: ধর্মওদর্শন*, (অবসর, ঢাকা২০০৭).

[27] The underworld was conceived as a vast parallel or alternate version of the earthly realm, replete with its own houses and furniture, streets and gardens. It was a realm teeming with souls in transition as they journeyed toward their eventual reincarnation in the world of the living. Retrieved from: http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/cosmos/prb/underworld.htm#to(accessed on 6 November 2023).

of assimilation, Mahayana Buddhism integrated notions of heaven and hell, commonly referred to as the 'Underworld,' along with various other Chinese elements. This shift contrasts with the original tenets of Hinayana Buddhism. Mahayana Buddhism's assimilative approach facilitated a harmonious adaptation to the new culture and effectively connected its own concept of rebirth with the Chinese concept of the Underworld. Consequently, the assimilation of Buddhism in China gave rise to Sino-Buddhist syncretism. The Mahayana schools of Buddhism, for instance, have embraced the Indian concept of continued personal existence, either through transmigration into animals or other living entities, or through the Chinese belief in translation into one of the numerous heavens or hells, where souls are rewarded or punished based on their earthly conduct. However, over time, this concept of a future state within Mahayana schools was embraced by the Chinese mindset and integrated into Taoism. Consequently, Taoists borrowed the overall structure of their underworld from Buddhism and incorporated it into Taoism.[28]

2.5 Taoist Ethics

In the blend of Confucian and Buddhist ethics, Taoism also developed a code of ethics. *The Book of Secret Blessing*, for example, contains a whole series of ethical statements. It makes no pretense of lofty philosophy, but presents the rules of life in Confucian thought and tone. Such as practice of righteousness, filial piety, loving younger ones and respect toward elders, being merciful toward the orphan, and compassionate toward the widow etc. Sincerity is given the foremost place as it is considered to be the root of all good instincts in Taoism.[29] In addition to confession of sin, in the attempt to bring about prohibition of the slaughter of animals, as well as in the designation “The Religion for the Promotion of Peace in the Universe” are gleams of the influence of Buddhism.[30] As per these ethical statements, we can assume that both Confucianism and Buddhism had a strong influence on Taoism.

2.6 Taoist Literature

Before the coming of Buddhism, the Chinese had a lack of imagination in thinking. In the early stages of Taoism, the Taoist scholars worked primarily on alchemy, divination, hygiene, and breathing exercises and so forth. But the sources for this kind of literature were limited. Meanwhile, the Buddhist sutras gave them a huge supply of thought. Specially, the Mahayana Sutras gave them a rich granary of imaginations. For this reason, the Taoists in the 5th century just borrowed and copied the Buddhist scriptures and named it as their own. Sometimes they were so careless

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28 *Ibid*., p.108.
29 Reichlet, *Op.cit.*, 1951, p.92.
30 *Ibid.*, p.94.

in their copying process that they unconsciously forgot to omit even the name of Buddha. For example, some lines are cited from so-called Taoist works:

> Of all the teachings of the world, the Buddha's teaching is foremost.
> Our master is called the Buddha, who follows the incomparable teaching.
> The host of saints and immortals has already realized the way of the Buddha.[31]

In addition, they combined a biography of Lao-tzu similar to that of Buddha. And in line with three parts of the Buddhist *Tripitok*, the Taoists also developed a canon consisting of three parts.[32]

2.7 Image Worship

To worship a statue or a pictorial image was totally unknown to pre-Buddhist China. Lao-tzu did not even mention the worship of gods, much less the worship of images. Buddhism brought with it the art of making statues and a rich heritage of cave painting. In mountainous China, for an instance, this skill flourished rapidly. Although the Taoists borrowed the idea of making statues and images from the Buddhists, they never bother to admit it.[33] When Buddhist monks ascended to the position of *Arhats* (lo-han), they were so much venerated in China. And after their death, the cult of worshiping their images became popular. This is the primary ground of justification for the idea of image worship borrowed from Buddhism. Thus deep spirituality in original Taoism soon disappeared, and in its place appeared the fantastic dream stuff about the wonderlands of East and West such as local gods, guilds and nature deities.[34]

2.8 Hermitage and Monk

Buddhism brought with it the concept of monastic life, which was previously unknown to China. The monastic life contrasts with the traditional Chinese social structure. In spite of this, the number of Buddhist monasteries grew so wide that Taoism soon adhered to it.[35] Under the influence of Buddhism, thus, gradually the Taoists raised their monasteries throughout China. But it is true that most of the Taoist priests live in the society, not in the monasteries. However, during the sixth century, in imitation of Buddhism, Taoist priests who lived in monasteries became celibate, and at the same time, nunneries were established for women.[36]

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31 Ch'en, *Op.cit*., p.234.
32 *Ibid*.
33 *Ibid.*, p.85.
34 Reichlet, *Op.cit*., p.94.
35 *Ibid.*, p.94.
36 Smith (1968), *Op.cit*., p.109.

2.9 Concept of Karma

The Buddhist concepts of Karma and rebirth were likewise appropriated, as indicated in the following passage:

> The Taoist saints, since countless aeons in the past ....have all depended on the merits of their past lives to attain the Tao of the present; they have, without exception, reached their present state through the accumulation of merits derived from their former careers...[37]

This was in contrast with the earlier Taoist doctrine of the transmission of the burden. The concept of rebirth previously existed in Taoism, but there was no inclination of Karma of previous birth. With the influence of Buddhism, Taoism took the concept that one has to take the burden of his or her previous birth.

3. Synthesis in Confucianism

Originating in the same land, there are many similarities between Confucianism and Taoism. Thus, Confucianism and Taoism have much in common. However, the best picture of synthesis of the three religions is depicted in the movement of Neo-Confucianism.

3.1 Harmony of Heaven, Earth and Humanity

The goal of establishing a harmony of heaven, earth, and humanity is emphasized in both Confucianism and Taoism. At the abstract level, the ideal state is considered a harmony of heaven, earth, and humanity. However, the collapse of the political order indicates that something is wrong in the cosmos as a whole. In Confucian cosmogony, man is considered an organ in a vast organism. This vast organism, as for their belief, is the universe. Arguably, he is a part, though small but has functional relationships to larger whole (like organs in organisms). To make it plain, in Confucian cosmogony, the human body is represented as a microcosm reflecting the macrocosm of the universe.[38]

3.2 Neo-Confucianism

In China it is often called “Sung-Ming lixue” often shortened to “lixue”, as it originates in the period of Song and Ming dynasties. Although the Neo-Confucians were critical of Taoism and Buddhism, the two did have an influence on the Neo-Confucian philosophy. In addition, a good number of terms and concepts are found to have been borrowed from both Taoism and Buddhism.[39] Actually the motto of Neo-Confucianism is to cut the extravagant element that penetrates into the Confucian belief system due to a long attachment with Taoism and Buddhism. However,

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37 Ch’en, *Op.cit*., p.123.
38 Smith, *Op.cit.*, p.101.
39 *Ibid.*

although Neo-Confucians were very critical to Taoism and Buddhism, they unconsciously adopted various Taoist and Buddhist concepts. And ultimately, they gradually went further from the old teaching.

3.3 Combination of Naturalism and Humanism

As far as the concept of a combination of naturalism and humanism is concerned, the Neo-Confucian philosophers directly accepted a naturalistic cosmology of Taoist origin. There was little cosmological explanation in early Confucianism. For this reason, to build a logical cosmology, Neo-Confucian scholars borrowed the naturalistic philosophy of Taoism.[40]It was the Neo-Confucian movement which can be called a second attempt to combine Taoist naturalism and Confucian humanism. It was a conscious movement that revived the thought and culture of pre-Buddhist China. They returned directly to the humanist teaching of Confucius and his school with a view to overthrowing and replacing much Indian and non-Chinese thought and culture of medieval China.[41]

3.4 The Tai-chi Symbol

An instance of the combination of Taoist naturalism and Confucian humanism is the use of the concept of *Tai-chi*. Actually, *Tai-chi* is a Taoist symbol. *Tai-chi* is a circle with a white and black part, embracing one another. The white is named as Yang and the black is named as Ying. They hold the opposite character. Yang is for light, good, heaven and male elements while Ying is for dark, evil, earth and female elements. As the opposite character embraces one another, there is eternal tension. And with this tension, the creation runs. *Tai-chi* is mainly used by the Taoist to explain the activity of the universe. Also, the Chinese martial art system is very much Taoist in nature because it uses the concept of *Tai-chi* as a system of fighting against the enemy.[42] Also the Neo-Confucians use this symbol (though in a different way), to discuss their creation theory.

3.5 Study of Principle or *Li*

The concept of *li* was borrowed from *Hua-yan* Buddhism. According to the Neo-Confucians, every object of the world has *li*. Briefly stated, *li* is the universal principle underlying all things, the cause, the form, the essence, the sufficient reason for being. Such an idea is close to *Hua-yan* doctrine of interpenetration and inter-mutuality i.e., the all in one and one in all. The *Hua–yen* theory presents a totalistic

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40 *Ibid.*, p.111.

41 *Ibid.*, p.115.

42 Jian-sheng Wen and Min Su, "The Historical Origin of the Chinese Taoist and Tai Chi", *Journal of Department of Physical Education,* (Northwestern Poly Technical University 2012).

theory which brings all things to one center- the Buddha. This is the reason for which *Hua -yen* Buddhism is favored by the Japanese emperor because it provided a sanction for their totalitarian schemes.[43]

3.6 Meditation on Things and Mind

The emphasis of mind by the Neo-Confucians leads it to an unconscious connection with Buddhist practice over one's self as religious significance. Actually, this emphasis is placed on the seriousness or the state of consciousness that corresponds to Buddhist meditation. At this point, it is important to note that Neo-Confucians are found to have interpreted the state of consciousness on the basis of Buddhist meditation such as *dhyana* and *prajna*. This is the way how the Buddhist idea of meditation slowly takes place in Neo-Confucianism. This influence makes a strong position in the school of mind. In their advocacy of concentration of mind, the Neo-Confucians also appear to have been influenced by the Buddhists. Buddhist mental discipline emphasizes mindfulness, meditation and equanimity.[44]

3.7 Explanation of Sagehood

Sagehood is a popular term for all three traditions. But a Confucian sage is different from that of the Taoist and Buddhist ones. Sagehood was an important tenet of the Neo-Confucian movement. According to them, a sage is enlightened when he gains control of his emotions such as joy, anger, sorrow, fear, love, dislike and greed. It is understood that this process of the attainment of sagehood in Neo-Confucianism probably corresponds to the process of the attainment of Bodhisattvahood in Buddhism.[45]

Conclusion

The above discussion is an attempt to clarify the idea of syncretism of three traditions in East Asian Context. In spite of their internal rivalry to catch popularity, they unconsciously create a syncretic whole. With the amalgam of three traditions, the Chinese gradually lose to think about religion separately. Every new imagination more or less is crossed by others. Buddhism, from the beginning, has been desperately attacked by Confucianism. Taoism, though at first gives a helping hand to it, gradually turns to a strong rival which is visible in the persecution of 574 and 845 AD. These instances prove that there remains no long-term friendly relation among the three. In spite of that, they borrowed elements from each other. In this Supremacy of Confucianism, it is very difficult for both Taoism and Buddhism to

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43 *Ibid.*, p.138.
44 *Ibid.*, p.138.
45 *Ibid*.

flourish with an independent identity. For this reason, they both assume a Chinese Character as a solution.[46] Basically, the three traditions present three solutions to one great problem. They see things from three different perspectives. The Buddhists look upon the universe as a "sea of waves"; the Taoists, as "a great transformation"; and Confucianists, as "a great current".[47] With the combination of these three ideas there arises a separate body which cannot be called as fully Taoist or Fully Buddhist or fully Confucian. The Tao of Taoism, the Chen Ju or "Thusness" of Buddhism and the Li (Reason, law, principle) of Confucianism are blended in a common truth.[48] However, it is important to note that the modern Chinese are mainly atheist. Religion does not play any vital role in their lives. What remains are the relics of the golden years of the medieval age. The synthesis that occurred in medieval China has its root so deep that it is reflected in the modern day in the means of film, picture, proverbs, language etc.

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46 Chan Master Sheng Yen, *Orthodox Chinese Buddhism, A Contemporary Chan Master's Answers to Common Questions*, Trns: Douglas Gildow and Otto Chang, (North Atlantic Books 2007).

47 Moor, *Op.cit*., p.134.

48 Smith, *Op.cit.*, p.180.

Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh **(Hum.), Vol. 68(2), 2023, pp. 219-240**
DOI: https://doi.org/10.3329/jasbh.v68i2.70365

The 'Firangi Mahal': Family of the Learned and their Contribution to the Development of Islamic Educational Curriculum

Abdul Momen*

Abstract

The Firangi Mahal Family have consistently produced Islamic scholars, authors, mystics, politicians, and philanthropists for hundreds of years, making them the only family in the world to have done so. They stressed *maqulat* (rational science) rather than *manqulat* (transmitted science), and through this educational system, administrators, business people, poets, and writers were all adequately prepared for their relevant positions. Their most excellent intellectual outcome was the systemization of a new curriculum which, with improvements, has overtaken religious teaching in South Asia to the 21st century. This article will explain the Firangi Mahal family's contribution to knowledge advancement and their educational curriculum system. Data were obtained and examined from secondary sources, direct observation, and earlier research such as articles and journal publications. The results of this study show how committed this family is to serving humanity and how accepting they are of people. Furthermore, this study will assist in creating a comprehensive understanding of the evolution of Islamic curricula in the 18th and 19th centuries and the impact of the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum developed by Mullah Nizam Uddin Firangi Mahal in South Asia.

Key words: Firangi Mahal, Islamic Education, Curriculum, Development.

Introduction

The "Firangi" is the Persian word for "Franks" or "Europeans". The Farang in concern was a wealthy French merchant who was granted a license to work for the business of horses in Lucknow during Mughal Emperor Akbar (1542-1605). 'Mahal' means palace.[1] The learned men, Ulama of Firangi Mahal, consolidated the rationalist Islamic academic tradition from Persia to India. They stood for a stable and malleable interpretation of Islam.[2] Their topmost priority was teaching. They

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[1] Now, this Mahal remained government property until the time of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb who presented it as a gift to the learned Mullah Nizamuddin Sahalvi. This surname is itself from Sihali, a town in the Bara Banki District of UP, India. The family shifted from Sahali to the Firangi Mahal around 1695.

[2] Francis Robinson, *The Ulama of Firangi Mahal and Islamic Culture in South Asia*, (Orient Longman Private Ltd., New Delhi India 2001), p. 69.

turned the Firangi Mahal into a hub of learning that drew intellectuals from all over India and as far away as Arabia, Central Asia, and China. It must have been one of India's most prominent centres of study in the early 18th century.[3] Firangi Mahal established popularity and distinction as an institute, leading to a reputation outside the region. It considers itself the world's first "University" of oriental studies.[4] Lucknow had blossomed into a very sophisticated hub of trade and commerce by the reign of Emperor Akbar. A French trader moved to the city then and was allowed to do so by the Mughal government. He was an expert in the horse trade and lived at Firangi Mahal, where some French traders visited and lived during the reign of Aurangzeb (1658-1707). They later moved away because their residency permission could not be extended. Mullah Nizam Uddin established a prominent Madrasah here while under the supervision of Aurangzeb. One of the most well-known Firangi Mahal thinkers is Maulana Abdul Bari (1878-1926), a prolific author of 111 books, and was active both in religious groups like *Jamiat al-ulama-e-Hind* and the Khilafat movement. Altaf Hussain Hali, a poet of the Aligarh Movement, Mohammad Moinuddin Ansari, the Chief Judge of the Supreme Court of the State of Rampur, and M.A. Ansari, the President of the All-India Muslim League, are three other well-known figures connected to the Firangi Mahal.[5]

This location, known as the "Cambridge of India" (*Hamaarey Hindostan ka Cambridge yehi hai*),[6] offered knowledge for which not only India but also Bukhara, Khwarazam, Herat, and Kabul bowed their heads. The Islamic world gained satisfaction in learning here and at their universities using Mullah Nizamuddin's course curriculum.[7] He produced the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum that was incomparable and unrivalled for years to come. It included mathematics, hadith, fiqh (Islamic law), logic, philosophy, and a variety of other fields of study.[8] The existing

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[3] Francis Robinson, *Problems in the History of the Firangi Mahal: Family of Learned and Holy Men,* (Oxford University Papers on India, Vol. 1, pt. 2, Delhi, 1987)

[4] Nadeem Hasnain, *Firangi Mahal Made Lucknow an Intellectual Capital,* Volume: 10, No: 12; December-2016. Retrieved From: https://www.tornosindia.com/firangi-mahal-made-lucknow-an-intellectual-capital/#.Y-0PenZBy3B

[5] Sir Cam, "Lucknow's Firangi Mahal", *Daily Times,* (Cambridge 2012), Retrieved from *https://web.archive.org/web/20121022013259/http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/print.asp?page=2003%5C01%5C08%5Cstory_8-1-2003_pg3_6*

[6] Quoted in "*Arabia: The Islamic World Review*", Issue, 17-24, (Islamic Press Agency, Indiana University 1983), p. 73. Retrieved from: https://books.google.com.bd/books?id=-NoMAQAAMAAJ&q=Hamaarey+Hindostaan+ka+Cambridge+yehi+hai&dq=Hamaarey+Hindostaan+ ka+Cambridge+yehi+hai&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwi2s7zI6539AhWs5HMBHTGZAPwQ6AF6BAgHEAI

[7] Abdul Haleem Sharar, "*Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture"* (translated and edited by ES Harcourt and Fakhir Hussain, 1989).

[8] Nadeem Hasnain, *Op. cit.*

store of family history's social knowledge is studied with various goals. Still, most academic researchers in this field want to know how families shape the historical events and activities that are taking place in their larger socio-economic, cultural, and political environments.[9] This approach is known as "collective biography". It aims to recreate how ordinary people experienced more significant structural changes in society.[10] This study examines the Firangi Mahal family's contributions to the growth and development of Islamic knowledge and curriculum.

Historical Roots of the Family of Firangi Mahal

Throughout the past 300 years, the Ulamas of the Firangi Mahal have actively performed as instructors, Hanafite academics, and mystics. The family claims genealogy through the well-known Persian Hanbalite scholar and Sufi poet Abdullah Ansari Heravi, from Abu Ayyub Ansari (d. 672), the host of the Prophet Mohammad (SAWS) at Madinah.[11] Robinson asserts that "it too was connected to a learned family, the offspring of 'the learned man and mystic, Khwaja' Abdullah Ansari of Herat," Persia, who in turn subsequently tracked down his ancestry back to the family in Medina which had offered to host the Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) after his migration (hijra) from Makkah in 622 C.E.[12] Ala Uddin Heravi, an Abdullah descendant in the 19th generation, travelled to India during the Timurid attack of Persia and Afghanistan. He resided with relatives in Barnwa, which is now part of the Meerut district of Uttar Pradesh, India, where he also passed away.[13] One of the latter, Qutub Uddin Sahalvi, was among the most illustrious thinkers of the 17th century and the author of numerous volumes; he was killed in a conflict in April 1692, and his library was destroyed. The Mughal emperor Aurangzeb (1658-1707) gave his sons Mohammad Asad, and Mohammad Said a building in Lucknow as compensation, and they gathered the family there.[14] Another son Nizam Uddin Sahalvi (1678-1748), had a reputation for being professors, scholars, and saints.[15]

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[9] Sylvia Vatuk, "The Cultural Construction of Shared Identity: A South Indian family history", *The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice*, No. 28, (Person, Myth and Society in South Asian Islam July 1990), pp. 114-131.

[10] C. Tilly, "Family History, Social History, and Social Change", *journal of Family History,* Vol. 12, 1987, p.332.

[11] "FARANGĪ MAḤALL", *Encyclopædia Iranica*, Encyclopædia Iranica Foundation, Inc., (New York 1999), Retrieved from https://iranicaonline.org/articles/Firangi-Mahal

[12] F. Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Firangi Mahal and their Adab*. In: B. D. Metcalf (Ed.), "Moral conduct and authority: The place of Adab in South Asian Islam", (Berkeley: University of California Press 1984), p. 153.

[13] Wali ul Haque Ansari, *Ansari's of Firangi Mahal,* (Lakhnaw 2012), pp. 3-6. Retrieved from https://issuu.com/abdulkidwai/docs/ansarisoffirnagimahal

[14] *Ibid,* p. 38.

[15] *Ibid,* p. 43.

Once home to a European trader, the structure was known as *Firangi ka Mahal* (House of the European), and the family later adopted the name Firangi Mahal.[16]

The Establishment of Firangi Mahal

In the period of Emperor Aurangzeb (1658-1707), the Firangi Mahal was constructed. During his reign, a French trader named Neal bought the house. Nevertheless, the government took every asset, including the Firangi Mahal, under the royal proclamation, which indicated that at that time, the government had access to foreigners' private possessions and things.[17] A family of men known for their religious fervour, which had long received backing from the Mughal court, relocated to Lucknow around the start of the 18th century. Mullah Qutb Uddin, the community's founder, took part in the accumulation of the *Fatwa-i-Alamgiri* with his sons. Two of Qutb Uddin's sons, who had accompanied him on his campaign to the Deccan, were generously compensated when their father was killed in a land dispute with a family of rival shaikhs. The emperor punished his opponents. His prize included land in the Bahraich area of Oudh, awarded as a jagir, and a revenue-free tenure in the Lucknow neighbourhood where a French explorer constructed the Firangi mahal.[18] Later on, the family would come to be known as Firangi Mahal. Mullah Asad and Mullah Said, the sons of Qutb Uddin Shaheed, established the comprehensive Madrasah at the Firangi Mahal. In addition to Islamic studies, the centre also offered math, science, astrology, philosophy, and sociology courses.[19] In the eighteenth century, the Firangi Mahal was regarded as a significant Islamic institution. The legacy of this institution conserved traditional Islamic culture through its carefully crafted curriculum while serving students' intellectual interests. Students used to go to Lucknow from such distant lands as Saudi Arabia, South East Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and China to further their education at this prestigious institution.[20]

In 1693, Darul Uloom Firangi Mahal was founded. The curriculum of the academic institution was introduced by Mullah Nizam Uddin Sahalvi, who was the third son of Qutb Uddin Shaheed and regarded as the forerunner of structured Islamic curricula in this territory. Consequently, the curriculum of academics was designated after him

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16 F. Robinson, *Op. cit.* pp. 52-83; *Encyclopædia Iranica*, *Op. cit.*

17 '*Firangi Mahal's Role in India's Freedom Struggle against the British'*, (October 20, 2015). Retrieved from http://lucknowpulse.com/firangi-mahal-in-lucknow-and-indias-freedom-struggle/

18 F. Robinson, *Op. cit.* pp. 52-83.

19 *Firangi Mahal's Role in India's Freedom Struggle against the British*, *Op. cit.*

20 *Ibid.*

and is known as Dars-e-Nizami.[21] Almost all Muslim religious institutions in the Indian Subcontinent and other Muslim-majority regions adopted this curriculum. Firangi Mahal was renowned for providing the qadis (judges), muftis (those qualified to offer legal opinions), and other legal personnel with the instruction that Muslim courts occasionally needed. As a result, this family was able to fill the gap in Islamic knowledge left by the relocation of Delhi's religious centres.[22] Shah Wali Ullah (1703-1762), with the ulama played a significant role like the ulama of the Firangi Mahal. He took over from his father, Mawlana Abdur Rahim (1644-1718), who spent his entire life learning about and preaching Islam as the head of Delhi's Madrasah al-Rahimiyyah.[23] Certain changes were made to the religious curriculum by Mawlana Abdur Rahim, and further modifications to the Dars-e-Nizami Curriculum were made possible by Shah Wali Ullah and the Firangi Mahal ulama.[24]

Expansion of Knowledge by the Firangi Mahal Family

Qutb Uddin, the father of Mullah Nizam Uddin Sahalvi, participated in Emperor Aurangzeb Alamgir's endeavour, which attempted to create a compendium of the *fatwa.* Scholars still consult the summary, known as *Fatwa-e-Alamgiri*, today.[25] When Mullah Nizam Uddin was 14 or 15 years old in 1696, his father was assassinated in a political coup. After that, with his brother Maulana Muhammad Said Sahalvi, he travelled to Mughal court where Emperor Aurangzeb gave them the famed Firangi Mahal in Lucknow. Then, the brothers built the framework for the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum which is currently expected as madrasahs curriculum in the Indian subcontinent. During this time, this curriculum also began to gain popularity.[26]

The Firangi Mahal 'ulama's most significant intellectual achievement was the systematization of this new curriculum, which has since characterized religious instruction in South Asia with specific revisions.[27] Under Mullah Nizam Uddin's guidance, the Firangi Mahal added several books on the *maqulat* disciplines-Arabic

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[21] Ziyaud-din A. Desai, *Centres of Islamic Learning in India.* (Simla, Government Press 1978), p. 27.
[22] *Ibid.*
[23] Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband. 1860-1900.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 36.
[24] *Ibid*. p. 36.
[25] Burton Stein, *A History of India*, (John Wiley & Sons 2010), pp. 177-178.
[26] Sabrina al-Faarsiyyah, *The Nizami Curriculum a Historical Glimpse & Critical Proposals*, (Birmingham, UK 2020), pp.8-9. Retrieved from: file:///C:/Users/Dell/Desktop/ Asiatic% 20Journal/ dars%20e% 20nijami%20info/dar-2%20The-Nizami-Curriculum.pdf
[27] Barbara Daly Metcalf, *op. cit.* pp. 16-45.

grammar, logic, philosophy, mathematics, rhetoric, fiqh, and theology-to the existing corpus of texts generally taught. Just a little research was done on the Quran and hadith, the former through two commentaries and the latter by abridgment.[28] During political unrest, the Firangi Mahal earned respect for their efforts to preserve and advance the intellectual tradition. The extent to which the new curriculum, Dars-e-Nizami, was embraced shows how extensively the ulama shared this viewpoint. Students from around the world came to Firangi Mahal and took this curriculum home with them. Nizam Uddin (1678-1748), possessed a thorough understanding of all fields of knowledge grouped under the titles of *maqulat* (rational) and *manqulat* (traditional).[29] Like his father, he was knowledgeable in both Arabic and Persian. He wrote much, primarily scholia and commentary on classic religious and philosophical writings. His primary accomplishments, however, were to establish the Firangi Mahal as a significant centre of spiritual learning and to create a curriculum which balanced the two areas of knowledge and is now used in the majority of Madrasahs in the subcontinent.[30]

The logician Mohammad Hasan, nephew of Nizam Uddin, and his son Abdul Ali (1729-1810) were more interested in rational topics. They responded to a taunt directed at rationalists by the Delhi scholar Abdul Aziz. On jurisprudence, *Risala al-arkan al-arbaa* was written by Abdul Aziz. He was so impressed by the erudition it conveyed that he called the author *Bahrul Uloom (*Sea of Knowledges*)*, the nickname by which he became well-known to humankind. In Arabic and Persian, he wrote on all aspects of *maqulat* and *manqulat*; his writings reached more than 100, with some spanning multiple volumes.[31] He was a master of classical Arabic and Persian script. According to the scholar's assessment, his publications are "according to the custom of his time, commentaries, glosses, and super-glosses on most of the regular textbooks." He was also referred to as the "chief of the 'ulama" or "*mail-ul-Ulama,"* and his contributions were valued highly.[32] He practised mysticism through Ibn Arabi's (1165-1240) philosophy of *wahdat-al-wujud* (lit., unity of being). From this viewpoint, he produced a noteworthy commentary on the Persian poet Jalal Uddin Rumi's (1207-1273) great work *Mathnawi-e-Manawi*. He died in Madras after having taught in numerous cities.[33]

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[28] Muhammad Mujeeb, *The Indian Muslims* (London 1967), pp. 406-408.
[29] *Encyclopædia Iranica*, *Op. cit.*
[30] *Ibid.*
[31] *Ibid.*
[32] F. Robinson, *Op. cit.,* pp. 52-83.
[33] Wali ul Haque Ansari, *Op. cit.,* pp. 38-42.

Most of Firangi Mahal Mohammad Hasan's publications are scholia and comments on philosophical texts by Muheb Ullah Behari's *Sollam-al-Uloom*, Mahmud Jawnpuri's *Sams al-Bazigah* and those of Mullah Sadra Shirazi.[34] Ahmad Anwarul Haq (1742-1821), a member of the same and the next generations of Firangi Mahal, had a stronger urge for mysticism. Another Firangi Mahal's most prolific writer was Mohammad Mobin (1744-1810), a grandson of Ahmad Abdul Haq. His body of work consisted primarily of commentaries and scholia on classic literature and was second only to that of Bahrul Uloom.[35] Nurul Haq (d. 1822), a Bahrul Uloom's student and Anwarul Haq's son, excelled in all areas of knowledge and was a renowned educator, much like his brother Mohammad Wali.[36] The writer Wali Ullah (1769-1853) and Abdul Halim (1824-1868), the scholar-saints Abdul Wali (1775-1863), Borhanul Haq (1799-1878), and Abdur Razzaq (1821-1889), as well as the brothers Neamat Ullah (d.1873) and Rahmat Ullah (d.1873), were among the notable Firangi Mahal scholars of the 19th century. The latter established the prominent educational institution, the Casma-ye-Rahmat Madrasah, at Ghazipur, Uttar Pradesh. Mohammad Abdul Hai, the son of Abdul Halim (1848-1886), was the most notable member of the Firangi Mahal family at this time.[37] Despite having only lived for thirty-nine years, he left behind more than 100 books and is still revered for his intelligence.[38] *Al-Taliq al-Mumajjad*, an introduction to Imam Muhammad's *Muatta*-a text on hadith in the light of Abu Hanifa's jurisprudence and Zafar al-Amani, his commentary on Sayyid Shirif Jurjani's text on the basics of hadith, all by Mawlana Abdul Hai, established him as these publications, along with his collection of the fatwa, have helped to make Lucknow recognized as the "city of Abdul Hai" among Muslims both inside and outside of India.[39]

One of the most prominent literary figures of the Firangi Mahal and the entire Islamic World was Allama Abdul Hai Firangi Mahal (d. 1886). After Allama Bahrul Uloom, he was the person with the highest intelligence. Before he could exceed the foremost Islamic scholars of all time, he passed away at 39. He wrote 120 volumes in only a short span of time.[40] By the time of Asaf-ud-Daula, the Firangi Mahal's educators had

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[34] *Ibid.*
[35] *Encyclopædia Iranica*, *op. cit.*
[36] Wali ul Haque Ansari, *op. cit.* 37-38.
[37] *Ibid.* pp. 38-42.
[38] Carl Brockelmann, "History of the Arabic Written Tradition", Vol. 2, *Handbook of Oriental Studies.* Section 1 The Near and Middle East, Volume: 117/2, 2017, pp. 857-858.
[39] Francis Robinson, *The Ulama of Firangi Mahal and Islamic Culture in South Asia,* (Orient Longman Private Ltd., New Delhi, India, 2001), p. 69.
[40] "A Brief History About Firangi Mahal", *Islamic Centre of India,* (Darul Uloom Firangi Mahal, Lucknow), Retrieved from: https://www.Firangimahal.in/about.html

already attained a high standing in several Muslim lands. Its pupils had dispersed widely throughout the whole subcontinent. Despite belonging to the Shia faith, Nawabs of Awadh had a high regard for Firangi Mahal and nominated many of its Ulama to the prestigious positions of Qazi and Mufti. Many Shia youngsters were also turning to the Ulama of Firangi Mahal for instruction since they had a broad perspective and were free from strict sectarian views.[41]

The Firangi Mahal has continued to follow its traditions in the twenty-first century. In addition to being a renowned scholar and prolific author, Abdul Baki (b.1869) spent most of his time in Madinah. His disciple Qiam Uddin Abdul Bari (1878-1926) was also one of the most influential figures in the campaign against British authority in the subcontinent. Abdul Majid and Abdul Hamid, two of his contemporaries, were learned academics and instructors. Famous Urdu poets from the Firangi Mahal family include Abdul Ahad Samsad, Barakat Ullah Reza, Mohammad Hussain Motin, Amanul Haq Anwar, and Enam Ullah Enam. Maulana Abdul Bari was considered to be a passionate campaigner by many historians and academics.[42] He felt an urgent requirement for a formal learning system in addition to promoting Islamic education, Quranic lessons, and hadith. He aimed to enhance the method of teaching and studying religious disciplines. Mawlana Abdul Bari's personal goals at Firangi Mahal included revising the curriculum, teaching methods, and developing a consistent organizational framework.[43] Because he came from a family famous for India's lengthiest continuous familial heritage of Islamic scholarship, Bari was also a brilliant teacher and spiritual leader. The nawabs of Rampur, Jahangirabad, and Hyderabad, as well as learned figures like Mohammad Ali Jauhar, Shukat Ali Jauhar, well-known poet Akbar Allahabadi, and others, were much impressed by him and grew close to him. After making the third Hajj (pilgrimage) to Makkah and visits to Cairo and Baghdad in 1912, Mawlana Firangi Mahal created the *Anjuman-i-Khuddam-i-Kaaba*. His inventiveness and intellect can be evaluated by the fact that he wrote around 110 volumes on a variety of topics, including Tafseer, Hadith, Fiqh, Usool-e-Fiqh, Faraiz, Tasawwuf, Adab, Kalaam, Mantiq, Hikmat, Ilm-e-Nahu, and Ilm-e-Sarf, despite his engagement in social movements and political issues. So much happened during his brief 44-year life, which ended on January 17, 1926, at that age.[44]

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[41] Nadeem Hasnain*, Op. cit.*
[42] *Encyclopædia Iranica*, *Op. cit.*
[43] *Firangi Mahal's Role in India's Freedom Struggle against the British*, *Op. cit.*
[44] "A Brief History About Firangi Mahal", *Islamic Centre of India,* (Darul Uloom Firangi Mahal, Lucknow), Retrieved from https://www.Firangimahal.in/about.html

The Firangi Mahal family focused on Sunni princely states as Mughal dominance collapsed in the 18th century, including Rohilkhand, Rampur, Arcot, and Hyderabad, the most prominent and influential Muslim state under British administration. Hence, in quest of princely support, teachers and pupils travelled far and wide throughout South Asia.[45] The Firangi Mahal also sought to exclude themselves from political engagement by the 19th century, when Lucknow had mainly converted to Shi'ism under the Nawabs' authority and had then come under British rule.[46]

The Firangi Mahal 'ulama did not actively pursue a more autonomous position for themselves by speaking to a more diverse audience, even though there was a declining demand for their expertise and a decreasing amount of princely patronage available. Instead, they kept concentrating on obscure and technical types of research, just like the ulama of the Mughal era. They did not share certain other ulama's enthusiasm for widespread reformation. They maintained a strong focus on *maqulat* and instructed Shi'i and Sunni learners, partnering with the Oudh court, which made this clear. Hence, the Firangi Mahal served as a scaled-back representation of the thriving form of religious authority.[47]

According to Robinson, during its heyday, in Firangi Mahal, the madrasa "had several hundred students and over two hundred residents, paid no charges and did its best to compensate for the living costs of poorer children."[48] Firangi Mahal also didn't make an effort to raise money for the madrasah. They acquiesced to whatever the community offered them "of its own free will."[49] However, some educators took delight in "forgoing their wages to support the madrasah overcome financial difficulties."[50] The Firangi Mahal 'ulama demonstrated that learning was their highest holy mission, which could not be gauged in monetary terms in these ways and others. They were fervent Sufis despite the Dars-e-Nizami curricula emphasizing the rationalist sciences and excluding the study of Sufism. Mullah Nizam Uddin was a student of Sayyid Shah Abdur Razzaq, a Qadiri Sufi saint from Bansa, a tiny town close to Lucknow, who passed away in 1724.[51] Since that time, Firangi Mahal have

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[45] F. Robinson, *Op. cit.* p. 173.
[46] *Ibid.,* pp. 173-175.
[47] G. N. Jalbani, *Teachings of Shah Waliyullah of Delhi*, 2nd ed., (Lahore 1973); S.A.A. Rizvi, "The Breakdown of Traditional Society", in *The Cambridge History of Islam* (Cambridge 1970), 11, pp. 67-96.
[48] *Ibid.,* p. 164.
[49] *Ibid*., p. 164.
[50] *Ibid.,* p. 162.
[51] F. Robinson, 2001, *Op. cit.,* pp. 58-66.

maintained a tight bond with the saint and his progeny, regularly participating in his *'urs'* (death anniversary) traditions. They were also connected to the renowned Muin Uddin Chishti (1142-1236) of Ajmer and other Sufi Mashaikh through a network of pupils known as the Silsila. Hence, their commitment to learning and Sufi mysticism went hand in hand. These elements of the teaching style of Firangi Mahal bring us to a key aspect of Firangi Mahal madrasah, which is also true of other madrasahs in South Asia as well as elsewhere, namely, that personal instruction and permission to teach others (through ijaza) transferred more than mere knowledge of a text or subject. It was considered crucial for the development of ethics. The Firangi Mahal had its own code of ethics (*adab*), which was characterized by, among other things, achieving a balance between the mystic path and rationalism, relying on Allah instead of asking for favours from political patrons, seeking the British company of the learned but not that of government officials, and promoting the advantages of the Muslim community and their religious aspects.[52] These principles would also be represented in the innovators of Darul Uloom Deoband, and other renowned Muslim universities in the 19th century.

Khilafat Movement, Independence, and Firangi Mahal Family

The Muslim population of British India initiated the pan-Islamic Khilafat Movement, and Lucknow and Firangi Mahal played a crucial role in it.[53] After World War I, it was established in opposition to the British authority in India and the defence of the Ottoman Empire.[54] Islamic nations and their Muslim populations expanded during the period, and the Western and European powers occupied them forcibly.[55] During the same period, the British administration in India adopted an anti-Muslim stance and executed several Muslims.[56] Due to this unfavourable strategy, some Ulama declared a *fatwa* (religious decree) announcing a holy war (*jihad*) against British oppression.

The political impact of Firangi Mahal Mawlana Abdul Bari, particularly in 1919 and 1920, was notable. Also, he started the publication *"Akhuwat"* to cover Islamic topics. His ability to persuade Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) to engage in the

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[52] F. Robinson, 1984, *Op. cit*., pp. 170-77; Moosa, *what is a madrasa?* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

[53] M. Naeem Qureshi, "Pan-Islam in British Indian Politics: A Study of the Khilafat Movement, 1918-1924", *Volume 66 of Social, economic, and political studies of the Middle East and Asia* , (BRILL 1999), pp. 301-307.

[54] Burton Stein, *A History of India*, (John Wiley & Sons 2010). p. 300.

[55] J. Hutchinson and A. D. Smith, *Nationalism: Critical Concepts in Political Science*. Nationalism: Critical Concepts in Political Science. (Routledge 2000), p. 926. Retrieved from https://books.google.com. bd/books?id=NN0m_c8p6fgC&pg=PA926&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false

[56] *Firangi Mahal's Role in India's Freedom Struggle against the British*, *Op. cit.*

Khilafat Movement during his stay at Firangi Mahal in March 1919 is evidence of his increasing influence. He hosted an All-India Conference in Lucknow in September 1919, and as a result, the All India Central Khilafat Committee was established.[57]

Mawlana Abdul Bari emphasized the immediate necessity for Hindu-Muslim unity in the battle against the British in 1920. He declared that Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) should guide the Hindu-Muslim community in uniting to depose the British. According to Mawlana Abdul Bari, Swaraj and Khilafat should be linked to foster Muslim-Hindu unity in opposition to the British.[58] Hence, Firangi Mahal and Lucknow provided the Indian independence movement with a constructive aim. Mawlana Abdul Bari solicited monetary contributions from Muslims nationwide for the independence movement and even extended numerous invitations to Mahatma Gandhi to travel to Lucknow and the Firangi Mahal.[59] Mahatma Gandhi's trips to Firangi Mahal and Lucknow were crucial in reducing hostility between the two populations because there were often Hindu-Muslim conflicts. When Mahatma Gandhi toured the Firangi Mahal, people used to refrain from cooking meat as a symbol of respect and veneration. Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964), Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949), and Abul Kalam Azad (1888-1958) all attended this historic institute to discuss the various facets of the independence movement.[60]

Mawlana drafted the constitution with the assistance of renowned attorney Chaudhari Khaliq-uz-Zaman. At the Khilafat Conference in Delhi in November, he made the first move toward launching non-cooperation against the British as a policy and started reaching an open agreement with Mahatma Gandhi. In addition, Mawlana Abdul Bari founded the *Jamiat-ul-Ulama-e-Hind* and chaired its first meeting in Amritsar.[61] Persian and Arabic as a language, and the educational institutions founded on them, dwindled through time in India. Firangi Mahal is no exception and currently occupies a place in Lucknow's rich intellectual background. Firangi Mahal is part of *Tornos'* History Walk, and the current occupant is occasionally delighted to exhibit the archive of old letters and photographs here.[62]

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[57] Sir Cam, *Op. cit.*
[58] Francis Robinson, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims*, (Delhi 1975), p. 339.
[59] Ishtiaq Ahmed, "The Legacy of Gandhi: A 21st Century Perspective", *The Gandhian Legacy of Hindu-Muslim Relations,* The Institute of South Asian Studies, (Singapore 2007). Retrieved from: https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/media/isas_papers/ISAS%20Insights%2025%20-%20Email%20-%20The%20Legacy%20of%20Gandhi.pdf
[60] *Firangi Mahal's Role in India's Freedom Struggle against the British*, *Op. cit.*
[61] Ishtiaq Ahmed, *Op. cit.*
[62] Nadeem Hasnain, *Op. cit.*

Firangi Mahal Family and Their Contribution to the Development of Islamic Curriculum

The Firangi Mahal family contributed significantly to the creation of the Islamic curriculum. The syllabus and Nizamia Madrasah in Baghdad are regarded as the forerunners of the official educational system in the Muslim world. Seljuq wazir, Nizam al-Mulk (1018-1092) founded a series of Madrasahs in Muslim-majority territories in the 11th century as a particular institution of Muslim education, among which the Madrasah in Baghdad gained a considerable reputation.[63] The Madrasah was the preeminent institution for learning and instruction in the Muslim world.[64] These institutions provided a variety of subjects. The main focus of the curriculum was the Quran and hadith, followed by the Quranic sciences of tafsir (exegesis) and tajweed (variant reading of the Quran) and the science of hadith (traditions of the Prophet (SAWS)), which included the study of the biographies of the hadith transmitters, and then two usuls (principles): usul ud-din, principles of religion (theology), and usul al Fiqh.[65] But, as Madrasahs took on the role of educating judges and magistrates to administer imperial offices, the study of the *madhhab,* the law of school to which one belongs (fiqh), started to garner more attention. Many rational sciences, including grammar, poetry, philosophy, medicine, mathematics, and astronomy, were also emphasized at medieval madrasahs. The imparting of education was free for everyone.[66]

Muslims in other parts of the world were greatly impacted by the Muslim educational system and the numerous "rational" and "transmitted" sciences that were formulated during the Middle Ages. With the establishment of the Muslim sultanate (1206-1526) in India and progress from the beginning of the thirteenth century, the Islamic academic legacy and the Madrasah system were firmly established in this region. With the founding of numerous significant Madrasahs, many of which were supported by Muslim rulers and aristocracy, India quickly became a key centre of Islamic education.[67]

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[63] Nizam al-Mulk, Darke, Hubert (ed.), *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings,* New York: Persian Heritage Foundation 2002), pp. ix-x.

[64] George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West,* (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 1981), p. 27.

[65] *Ibid,* p. 84.

[66] Muhammad Farooq, Political Change and Madrasa Curriculum: A Historical Analysis of Dars-i-Nizami, *Journal of Research* (Faculty of Languages & Islamic Studies), 2007, Vol. 12, pp. 59-81. Retrieved from: file:///C:/Users/Dell/Desktop/Asiatic%20Journal/dars%20e%20nijami% 20info/dar-25.pdf

[67] *Ibid*, pp. 59-81.

The diffusion of knowledge and royal sponsorship throughout the reigns of the Mughal Emperors (1526-1857) are two significant events in the history of medieval education. One of the most notable times in Islamic history, the Great Mughal era (1526-1858) in India, was known for its wisdom and talent.[68] The first time that secular courses were incorporated into the Islamic curriculum was under Akbar's (1542-1605) administration, an influential innovation indeed.[69] Citizenship, Economics, Astronomy, Science, Mathematics, and Medicine were covered in the curriculum.[70]

To encourage the study of rational sciences, Emperor Aurangzeb (1658-1707) founded Firangi Mahal in Lucknow. It quickly became India's most extensive educational facility in the 18th century. Mullah Qutb Uddin Sahalvi made the initiation of the Firangi Mahal. His third son Mullah Nizam Uddin provided the well-known Madrasah education curriculum known as Dars-e-Nizami. It offered both conventional and cutting-edge courses. The curriculum had the extraordinary potential to help pupils develop their ability to think critically, which is the modern idea of a successful educational goal.[71] The curriculum was carefully formulated to help pupils become critical thinkers and well-read individuals.[72] Due to its distinctive characteristics, Dars-e-Nizami eventually became the norm for Madrassah education in the Subcontinent.[73]

Mullah Nizam Uddin served the remainder of his life at Firangi Mahal, where he taught, wrote, preached, and helped to lead the locals after completing their study. It was here that he developed his curriculum. Because of the wide reputation of his course, his students started to gather from all across India. The blessings of Firangi

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[68] M. Hamiuddin Khan, *History of Muslim Education (712 to 1750),* Vol. 1, All Pakistan Educational Conference, (Karachi 1967), pp. 135-136.

[69] Abdul Momen and Mobarak Hossain, Features of Medieval Muslim Education System under the Mughals: An Analysis. *Jagannath University Journal of Arts,* Vol. 12, No. 1, January-June 2022, pp. 241-257. Retrieved from https://jnu.ac.bd/journal/portal/archives/arts/12/1.jsp

[70] Abdul Hai Madni, Naseem Akhter and Muhammad Asif Nadeem, "Curriculum of Islamic Institutes in Sub- Continent (a Critical Analysis)." *The Scholar-Islamic Academic Research Journal,* Vol. 6, No. 1, May 31, 2020, pp. 135-62. Retrieved from file:///C:/Users/Dell/Desktop/Asiatic%20Journal/dars%20e%20nijami% 20info/dar-6.pdf

[71] A. Momen, M. Ebrahimi and A.M. Hassan, *Importance and Implications of Theory of Bloom's Taxonomy in Different Fields of Education.* In: M.A. Al-Sharafi, M. Al-Emran, M.N. Al-Kabi, K. Shaalan (eds.), Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Emerging Technologies and Intelligent Systems, ICETIS 2022. Lecture Notes in Networks and Systems, Vol. 573, pp. 515-525. (Springer Cham, 2023). Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-20429-6_47

[72] F. Robinson, *Op. cit.*

[73] Ali Riaz, "Madrassah Education in Pre-colonial and Colonial South Asia", *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 2010, pp. 69-86.

Mahal spread throughout most of South Asia owing to his endeavours and those of his numerous students. Hence, by creating the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum, Firangi Mahal Lucknow laid the groundwork for contemporary madrasah curricula. Its emphasis on both religious and modern topics made it the most well-received and coveted curriculum in the Subcontinent at the time.[74] He turned Firangi Mahal into a centre of learning, and as an obvious outcome, hundreds of teachers, academics, researchers, and preachers emerged. The top academics and educators in Bangladesh, Pakistan and India today view it as a privilege to be in the line of Mullah Nizam Uddin's pupils and ancestors.[75]

This "Nizami curriculum" was the first "organized curriculum" in the Indian Subcontinent and was focused on the Urdu and Farsi languages.[76] The Indian subcontinent produced thousands of religious scholars and intellectuals who were experts in numerous sciences because of this educational system. Most Muslims of the subcontinent were educated according to the same learning system from its birth until the Mughal Empire's closing years (1858). Its curriculum strongly emphasized the "rational sciences" and ensured significant advancements in these fields and transmitted sciences in India since the 17th century.[77]

In religious education and Muslim academia in South Asia, the expression "Dars-e-Nizami" is frequently utilized. The term refers to a course of study practiced for centuries in the subcontinent to teach Muslim scholars. This curriculum, a highly demanded Arabic and advanced Islamic studies program as it is, has produced thousands of intellectuals over 350 years.[78]

The core curriculum and syllabus have withstood the test of time. They are still imparted in the thousands of seminaries throughout South Asia, albeit having

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[74] S. Ramzan and A. Rabab, *Madrassa Education in the Sub-Continent - Myths and Realities,* (Al-Idah 2013), Vol. 27, No. 2, 2013, pp. 33- 49.

[75] Haamid Siraaj Attari Madani, *Faizan E Madina*, Wasim Abbas Attari (eds.), (Karachi, Pakistan, dec. 2022), pp. 13-14. Retrieved from file:///C:/Users/Dell/Desktop/Asiatic% 20Journal/dars% 20e% 20nijami%20info/dar-3.pdf

[76] M. Qasmi, *Hanafi Fiqh in India During Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526),* In: 2dn National Seminar of Research Scholars Jamia Hamdard (Hamdard University), (New Delhi, Date: 5-6 November 2013), pp. 1-13. Retrieved from http://ijtihadnet.com/wp-content/uploads/Hanafi_Fiqh_in_India_ During_Delhi_ Sultan.pdf

[77] Mohammed Umar, *Classical Foundations of Islamic Educational Thought,* Markfield Institution of Higher Education, (United Kingdom 2020), pp. 1-26. Retrieved from: file:///C:/Users/Dell/ Downloads/ClassicalFoundationsofIslamicEducationalThought2.pdf

[78] Haamid Siraaj Attari Madani, *Faizan E Madina*, Wasim Abbas Attari (edit.), (Karachi Pakistan, Dec. 2022), pp. 13-14. Retrieved from file:///C:/Users/Dell/Desktop/Asiatic% 20Journal/ dars% 20e%20nijami%20info/dar-3.pdf

undergone a few minor revisions. Several outstanding academics who became luminaries of knowledge in various fields over these 350 years were initially nurtured through this program. Dars-e-Nizami is a unique academic course where students learn from multiple books in many sciences that serve as an introduction and lay the groundwork for those sciences. Many of the books were authored by the students of the originator of Dars-e-Nizami, either after him or under his direct touch. This curriculum's unique feature is that graduates as a rule have access to a wide range of works in the leading academic branches of Islam, including Arabic, rhetoric, jurisprudence, logic, and legal theory.[79]

There are books by Mullah Nizam Uddin that cover eleven different sciences. Here learning Arabic is obligatory because the Quran and Sunnah are the cornerstones of Islam. These disciplines were also studied because Persian was the official language, and *"anaf"* jurisprudence was the dominant legal system at the period. The curriculum also included mathematics, logic, dialectics, and philosophy. It was a thorough strategy that catered to the time's societal and religious concerns. Forty-three books covered eleven diverse topics. The rational sciences were covered by Twenty works, including Five books on mathematics and Euclidean geometry, Three books on philosophy, four on dialectics, and eight on logic. The field of linguistics was covered in Fourteen books: Seven on morphology, five on syntax, and two on rhetoric. Nine volumes were solely devoted to religious topics: Two dealt with law, four with legal theory, two with tafsir, and one with hadith. The specific books used for teaching these subjects have changed over time, across regions, and between institutions. Some institutions offered books on a particular science, while others provided books on a different science.[80]

This curriculum was implemented by the majority of Sunni Madrasahs of the Subcontinent and is now considered as a turning point in the history of Muslim education in India.[81] A few changes were made, especially following the second half of the 19th century. The Dars-e-Nizami was so designed as to train administrators and meet the demands of India's "increasingly sophisticated and complex bureaucratic structure." Although it kept the century-old practice of oral communication and text memorising, the Dars itself did not require active memorisation. The curriculum fostered the habit of self-thinking despite being biased

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[79] *Ibid,* pp. 13-14.
[80] *Ibid*, pp. 13-14.
[81] Zubair Zafar Khan, "How far Dars-e-Nizami is Attuned to the Modern Era: Some Observation", *Islam and Muslim Societies-a Social Science Journal,* Vol. 4, No. 1, 2012. Aligarh, India. Retrieved from https://archive.org/details/islam-and-muslim-socities-darse-nizami/page/n3/mode/2up

in favour of *maqulat*.[82] More books were written on the sciences, which further improved the capacity for thought, than about any other field of knowledge, including Tafsir (interpretations of the Quran), Hadith (tradition of Prophet Muhammad (SAWS)), and Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence). This was a structured learning process instead of a list of books assigned to the students.[83]

Its focus on broadening the mind and cultivating the habit of reading, research, and analytical abilities rather than actual memorisation to gain mastery of two rather challenging books on a field was the core component of this curriculum. But, before starting that process with them, their mental capacity was examined. With the same intent, American educational psychologist Benjamin Bloom (1913-1999) created Bloom's Taxonomy theory in the middle of the 20th century to characterise the cognitive domain for educational goals.[84] After finishing the study, students could also understand other books on that subject. This curriculum was heavily congested with grammar and syntax books to improve linguistic proficiency in Arabic, the language of the textbooks and a medium for the transmission of the heritage of the Islamic tradition, in addition to religious sciences, in the Madrasahs. These topics covered logic, philosophy, grammar, and syntax and were regarded as *"Ulum-e-aliya,"* or practical sciences.[85]

There was a time when the curriculum of traditional education model proved successful under the reign of the later Mughals. Since there was little distinction between religious and secular education at the time, the traditional curriculum created not only theologians and divines but also academics, business people, and administrators to run the government's machinery of the day. It undoubtedly benefited Muslim society's educational goals. But it was no longer as beneficial as it once was after the establishment of British authority, and it needed to be adjusted to satisfy the evolving society's changing needs.[86] Nonetheless, these establishments steadfastly adhered to their outdated practices and refused to acknowledge the demands of the new organisation.

The designer of this revised curriculum made the book selections based on the following principles: 1. From Simple to Hard: An effort was made to select books that were harder rather than easier, so that they have more guidelines and rules and 2. From Shorter to Longer: To convey many things in a chapter in a few words, it was

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[82] Shibli Nomani, *Maqalat e shibli,* (Azamgarh 1932, 3:94), quoted by Zubair Zafar Khan, *Ibid.*
[83] *Ibid.*
[84] Momen *et al., Op. cit.,* pp. 515-525.
[85] Ziaul Hasan Faruqi, Some aspects of Muslim education and culture, (Islam and the modem age, Vol. 10, No. 2, May 1979, pp. 50-52.
[86] Zubair Zafar Khan, *Op. cit.*

tried to select comprehensive books but shorter rather than lengthier.[87] In Dars-e-Nizami, the most challenging books in each subject were typically picked up. The reasoning behind this belief was that reading these texts would require more effort, which would foster intellect and, in turn, deepen in sight and develop power. Shorter books can also meet the exact needs as the longer, and more challenging ones do. As a result, the curriculum was updated to incorporate the most concise texts. Intense reading exercises strengthen the mind, and the more rigorous the activity, the more significant the improvement in comprehension. Hence, Dars-e-Nizami was designed with the following two objectives in mind: After reading such challenging texts, the students were to be able to read at a higher level when they graduate, and no book was to prove challenging for them to read and comprehend. Also, the student could develop this quality further after graduating, enabling him to work hard and achieve a level of completion.[88] Students must study harder and put more cognitive effort into understanding such a curriculum. The deeper the comprehension and the sharper the thought, the more challenging the practice. The conceptual underpinning of the program was chosen for this purpose.

Even though the ulama of Firangi Mahal adhered to the Hanafi school of legal thinking, this curriculum chose even such works as did not belong to it. Also, books selected by this system were not written by Sunni intellectuals. *Tasawwuf* [89] Tasawwuf was a crucial component of the Islamic curriculum in Islamic institutions before Dars-e-Nizami. But this curriculum eliminated it.[90]

The fundamental feature of this curriculum was that it was created to broaden students' mental horizons and cultivate reading and research habits and analytical skills rather than rote learning. The students were required to learn one or two rather challenging books on a field to build masterly talent; this was done after the student's mental capacity had been evaluated. Once they finished studying, they could understand other books in the area. Nizam did not care to incorporate the works of his contemporaries because the curriculum' strategy was planned to introduce the students to the old tradition in a systematic manner. Nizam Uddin made various adjustments that offered the curriculum an extensive and formalised format in

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[87] Abdul Hai Madani *et. al., Op. cit.* pp. 135–162.
[88] *Ibid.* pp. 135-162.
[89] Tasawwuf, which literally translates to "becoming a Sufi," is an Arabic phrase for the process of fulfilling moral and spiritual objectives. Sufism is the common translation of tasawwuf. This knowledge enables one to understand the states of the human soul, whether they are admirable or condemnable, as well as how to detoxify it from the latter and elevate it by gaining the aforementioned. It also enables one to travel to Allah (swt) Most High by escaping to Him along the spiritual path known as tarqah.
[90] Abdul Hai Madni, *Op. cit.,* pp. 135-162.

addition to a conventional one. So, his curriculum was a systematic learning process rather than a list of texts the pupils were instructed to read.[91] Along with religious sciences, logic and philosophy were promoted in madrasahs, and the curriculum was deeply integrated with grammar and syntax texts that were necessary for the development of language skills in classical Arabic, the language of textbooks, as well as for the transmission of the tradition and heritage of Islam. Nonetheless, all of these subjects- logic, philosophy, grammar, and syntax- alone did not constitute the completion of Dars-e-Nizami.[92] The curriculum placed more emphasis on the meaning of classical works and study during the learning process than on the actual substance of books. The main driver of the curricular modifications over the past three centuries has been the belief that books should be used as a tool for teaching rather than an end in and of themselves.[93]

Table 1: Latest Version of Dars-e-Nizami Curriculum[94]

No.	Name of Subjects	
1.	Tafsir (exegesis)	Tafsir al-Jalalain
		Anwar al-Tanzil
		Al-Kashshafan Haqaiq al-Tanzil
2.	Usul al-tafsir (Methods of exegesis)	Fauz al-kabir fi usul al-Tafsir
3.	Hadith (Prophetic traditions)	Al-Bukhari
		Muslim
		Al-Muwatta
		Al-Tirmidhi
		Abu Daud
		Al-Nasai
		Ibn Majah
		Mishkat Al-Masabih
4.	Usul al-Hadith (Methods of Prophetic traditions)	Sharh Nukhbat al-Fikr
5.	Fiqh (Islamic law)	Sharh Wiqaya
		Al-Hidaya
		Khulasa Kaidani

[91] Muhammad Farooq, *Op. cit.* pp. 59-81.
[92] Muhammad Raza Ansari Firangi Mahal, Bani-e-Dars-i-Nizami, (Nakhas Pres Lukhnow 1973, p. 259), quoted in: Muhammad Farooq, *Ibid.* pp. 59-81.
[93] *Ibid.*
[94] Zubair Zafar Khan, How far Dars-e-Nizami is Attuned to the Modern Era: Some Observation, *Islam and Muslim Societies- a Social Science Journal,* Vol. 4, No. 1, 2012. Aligarh, India. Available: https://archive.org/details/islam-and-muslim-socities-darse-nizami/page/n3/mode/2up

		Kitab Muniyat al-Musalli wa Ghuniyat
		Al-Mubtadi
		Nural-idah
		Mukhtasar al-Quduri
		Kanz al-Daqaiq
		Al-Faraid al-Sirajiya
6.	Usul al-fiqh (Basis of Islamic law)	Nural-anwar
		Al-Tawdih fi hall jawamid al-Tanqih
		Al-Talwih ila kashf haqaiq al-Tanqih
		Musallam Musallam al-Thubut
		Husami al-Muntakhab fi Usui al-Madhahib
		Usul al-Shashi
7.	Sarf (Grammarr)	Mizan al-Sarf and Munshaib
		Sarf-e Mir and Panganj
		Dastur al-Mubtadi and Ilm al-Sigha
		Fusul-e Akbari and Zarawi or Uthmaniya
		Al-Tasrif al-Zanjani or al-Tasrif al-izzi
		Sarf Bahai and Marah al-Arwah
8.	Nahw (Syntax)	Nahw-e Mir and Kitab al-Awamil al-Miat or Miat amil
		Sharh Miat amil and Hidayat al-Nahw
		Al-Kafiya fil Nahw and Al-Fawaid al-diyaiya or Sharh Jami
		Tashil al-Kafiya and Hashiya Sharh Jami
9.	Adab (Literature)	Nafahat al-yaman and Saba Muallaqat
		Diwan al-Mutanabbi and Maqamat al-Hariri
		Al-Hamasa and Mufid al-Talibin
		Nafahat al-Arab
10.	Mantiq (Logic)	Al-Risala al Sughra fil Mantiq and Al-Risala al Kubra fil Mantiq
		Kitab al-Lsaghuji and Mirqat
		Mizan al-Mantiq and Tahdhib fi ilm al-mantiq
		Sharh al-Risala al-Shamsiya or Qutbi and Mir Qutbi
		Sharh Sullam al-Ulum or Mullah Hasan and Sharh Sullam Hamid Ullah
		Sharh Sullam Qadi Mubarak or al-Munhiya and Al-Hashiya al-Zahidiya al-Qutbiya or Risala Mir Zahid
11.	Philosophy	Sharh Hidayat al-Hikmat or Maybudhi and Sadra
		Shams al Bazigha and Al-Hidaya al Saidiya
12.	Theology	Sharh Aqaid al-Nasafi and Al-Hashiya ala Sharh al-Aqaid or Khayali
		Mir Zahid and Sharh Mawaqif or Sharh al-lzzi
13.	Mathematical sciences	Tahrir usul al-handasa li Uqlidis and Khulasat al-Hisab
14.	Astronomy	Tasrih fi Tashrih al-Aflak and Sharh Chaghmini
15.	Metrics	Arud al-Miftah
16.	Rhetoric	Mukhtasar al-Maani and Mutawwal
		Talkhis al-Miftah
17.	Debate	Al-Adab al-Rashidiya fi ilm al-Munazara

There was not a single book authored by an Indian scholar that was delivered in the madrasahs before Dars-e-Nizami. Mullah Nizam Uddin incorporated the works of Indian authors for the first time in the history of the madrasah. Often, ulamas do not acknowledge their peers as superior scholars to themselves. The inclusion of books by contemporaries is a testament to Nizam's generosity and a sign of acknowledgement and appreciation for contemporaries.[95] This was so designed as a typical student could finish it by the time, he was 18 or 19. Nizam once more made an effort to make the tone of the curriculum impartial to prevent the students from developing sectarian prejudices. In addition to emphasizing logic and philosophy, he kept works on fiqh that were logically written and provided fiqhi (related to law) discussions based on inferential reasoning.

The Dars-e-Nizami was a revolutionary teaching approach at the time that sought to improve pupils' mental faculties through a curriculum built around thought-provoking literature on various subjects and requiring rigorous mental exercises. According to Mawlana Shibli, Dars-e-Nizami unquestionably resulted in a qualitative shift. This system is characterized by following three guiding principles:

i. 'Conciseness' which means that only one or two brief books on each discipline were contained in the curriculum.
ii. Many books were learnt incompletely as per the principle of conciseness, which means that only those portions of the books were preserved that were deemed essential for learning the discipline.
iii. For each science, only the book that was thought to be the most challenging on the subject was included.[96]

This was done to develop the pupils' mental ability and allow them to comprehend any book on the subject they come across in the future. Nearly all Arabic texts were more accessible for this curriculum-based graduates to understand. Religious education was not entirely disregarded either. Mullah Nizam Uddin did not build the curriculum on the religious and secular division, maintaining the holistic approach to education. Initially, this was more oriented toward rational sciences, but it could not be described as secular. Later, revisions in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries rendered it more religious, but the fundamental structure for learning articulation remained the same. Several madrasahs have made numerous alterations to the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum during the previous three centuries. This system is not static and

[95] Maulana Abdul Qayyum Haqqani, "Nisab Madaris Arbia ki Tashkil-e-Jadid ka Mas'lah," Mujla Ilm-o-Aghi, Government National College, Karachi, 1984-86. p. 490) Quated by quoted in Muhammad Farooq, *Ibid.,* pp. 32-33.
[96] Shibli Maumani, Maqaat-e-Shibli, quoted in Muhammad Farooq, *Ibid*., pp. 59-81.

restricted, as is commonly believed. Due to its malleability and adaptability to change, this curriculum was modified to suit the demands of other Indian Muslim *maslaks* while maintaining the same teaching methodology.[97]

To create a refined model of education, the curriculum adopted in the madrasahs of the subcontinent passed through numerous stages and reform procedures.[98] The crucial factor was that Darul Uloom Deoband, the first Qawmi Madrasah in the Indian Subcontinent, provided additional books in many subjects while adhering to the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum. This madrasah completed its goals and generated a large number of scholars.[99] Other madrasah education systems now extant in Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, and other parts of the world still adhere to the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum.[100] Mathematics, traditional medicine, logic, philosophy, rhetoric, dialectic reasoning, Persian and Arabic grammar, and literature are suitably combined to wake up the madrasah curriculum. At the initial levels of these madrasahs, the Quran was studied, and at the advanced levels, the entire curriculum taken from the Dars-e-Nizami syllabus was learned.[101] The current generation of the Firangi Mahal family has switched to modern careers and is engaged in journalism, academia, surgery, and engineering. The family's women are involved in contemporary education.[102]

Conclusion

Firangi Mahal has thus made a noteworthy contribution to Islamic scholarship, mysticism, and politics. The Firangi Mahal family contributed massively by creating educational institutions, producing priceless intellectual texts, and acting as speakers, instructors, and philanthropists. The systematisation of a creative curriculum, which has since dominated religious instruction in South Asia with certain variations, was

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97 Muhammad Farooq, *Op. cit*., pp. 59-81.

98 S. Ramzan and A. Rabab, *Op. cit.,* pp. 33- 49.

99 *Ibid*, pp. 33- 49.

100 Abu Bakr Rafique, *Towards an Integrated Islamic Curriculum for Bangladesh in line with the Recommendations of OIC Conference'77,* (IIUC STUDIES 2012) Vol. 9, December, 2012, pp. 17-38. Retrieved from file:///C:/Users/Dell/Desktop/Asiatic%20Journal/dars%20e%20nijami%20info/dar-23.pdf; Mohammad Saiful Islam, *Modernization of Madrasah Education in Bangladesh: a New Approach for Future Development,* Regional Seminar on Islamic Higher Educational Institutions 2012 (SeIPTI 2012), pp. 850-858; Retrieved from file:///C:/Users/Dell/Desktop/Asiatic% 20Journal/dars%20e%20nijami%20info/ dar-29.pdf; Reifeld Helmut and Peter Hartung Jan, Islamic Education, Diversity and National Identity, (New Delhi, Sage Publications, 2006), 45-6; Narendra Nath, Promotion of Learning in India during Muhammadan Rule (by Muhammadans), (New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers and Distributors, 2005), p.188.

101 A. J. Coulson, "Education and Indoctrination in the Muslim World: Is There a Problem"? What Can We Do About It? *Policy Analysis Paper,* Vol. 511, pp. 1-36.

102 *Encyclopædia Iranica*, *Op. cit.*

the Firangi Mahal 'ulama's most outstanding intellectual achievement.[103] Moreover, the Firangi Mahal family promoted fusing academic and mystical study.[104] They progressively advanced in multiple mystic orders and prioritised mystic perception, similar to other religious persons in this period. Madrasah curriculum was rejuvenated with an emphasis on rational sciences as Mughals Indianized themselves, and the empire, particularly under Emperor Akbar, had become secular. Early in the 18th century, the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum included instructional techniques, and a simple list of literature which students in madrasahs should read. When Dars-e-Nizami was first released, it was in line with the times and fully satiated the needs of the time. Yet, there was no separation between secular and spiritual schooling at that time. Under this educational system, administrators, business people, poets, and authors were all well-prepared for their respective areas.

Their Mahal was one of the most significant centers of learning and the birthplace of some of the greatest Muslim intellectuals. The Firangi Mahal is still a magnificent example of Islamic principles and a popular tourist destination today. Throughout the 17th to 20th centuries, the Firangi Mahal's members significantly impacted the evolution of Muslim religious thought in this region. The world was transforming at that time, and the Indian people were subjected to the burgeoning colonial powers of Europe. The European colonial powers were extending their sphere of influence through their maritime prowess, trade, and exploration. Later, due to the Industrial Revolution, they expanded their economic and military supremacy. The enormous Mughal Empire (1526-1858) collapsed and broke apart during this time, and India eventually came under British influence and, later, under direct political authority. Particularly in India, Muslims experienced the anguish of witnessing their influence and power dwindle, as well as the hardships of a new period that profoundly impacted their culture and way of life. The Muslims of India received assistance from the Ulama of Firangi Mahal in understanding the nature of this issue, maintaining their culture and way of life, and coping with the profound changes occurring in their surroundings. New political and governmental structures introduced by the British were incomprehensible to Muslims. The Madrasah and ulama acquired responsibilities for maintaining and defending Muslim identity in the light of the altered political circumstances. Consequently, Dars-e-Nizami had a strong bias toward *manqulat,* or religious sciences. The Firangi Mahal's *maqulat* (Rational Science) and *manqulat* (Transmitted Science)-based curriculum is still regarded as the forerunner of the Madrasah educational system in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India.

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[103] Muhammad Mujeeb, *The Indian Muslims,* (London 1967), pp. 406-408.
[104] Syed Altar Ali Barelvi, *Life of Hafiz Rahmat Khan* (Karachi 1966), p. 268.

Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh **(Hum.), Vol. 68(2), 2023, pp. 241-261**
DOI: https://doi.org/10.3329/jasbh.v68i2.70366

Portrayal of the Matuas in the Christian Missionary Writings

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Abstract

The paper exposes the socio-economic condition of the early 20th-century Matua community of Bangladesh. It unfolds how the Matuas strived for elevation to the mainstream of national life. They desired for upliftment by securing their rightful and logical position in the broader arena dismantling untouchability and social exclusion imposed on them. They took education as the most suitable medium to make them worthy for every sphere of life. It tells the Australian Baptist missionaries' outlook on the Matuas and their remarks on the Matuas' uplifting activities as well as the Matuas' gradually changing views on life and society. It reflects why the missionaries came to Orakandi. Every single issue of the community has been presented on the basis of the experiences of four missionaries who worked among the Matuas and/or collected a vast knowledge on this once despised backward class of people. Among the four missionaries, three are from the 20th century, and the rest one is from the 21st century and their four relevant books have been selected for this study.

Key words: Matua, Untouchables, Backward class, Namasudra, Orakandi, Missionary, Upliftment.

1. Introduction

The socio-economic condition of the early 20th century Matua community of Bangladesh (the then Eastern Bengal) has been presented in the writings of the missionaries of the Australian Baptist Missionary Society. After a minute survey, the missionaries could know that the largest number of the Matuas lived in the rice-swampy beels of Faridpur district. And Orakandi, the southern part of the district, was regarded as the heart of the Matuas. Again, they knew that Guruchand Thakur (Guru Charan Biswas), the most revered and undisputed leader of the Matua community lived in Orakandi village. As the missionaries found Orakandi as the heart of all activities of the community, they took Faridpur and particularly Orakandi as strategically important and the most appropriate working station for materializing their vision of expansion of Christianity through the mass conversion of the Matuas. The missionaries reached, and, facing much odds, began to dwell among the Matuas first at Faridpur in 1882 and then at Orakandi in 1907, respectively. Experiencing the

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overall miserable condition of the community, the missionaries felt the pressing need to assist the community to earn recognition from the government.[1] What the missionaries experienced and felt about the typical life of the Matuas who struggled hard to get uplifted in society and desired for rightful and logical elevation to the mainstream of national life is really an invaluable record to know the Matuas as a whole. Thus, the relevant missionary writings present a vivid and picturesque account of the Matua community of Bangladesh.

2. The Matuas and the Missionaries

The term Matua, in this paper, collectively refers to those socio-economically backward classes of people of Bangladesh who were scripturally considered untouchable in and excluded from the Hindu society. Matua community generally consists of the Namasudras, the Paundrakshatrias and the Rajbanshis who were the largest backward classes of Bangladesh. However, the majority Matuas who are primarily farmers belong to the lowest and much despised Namasudra caste. In the first census of India in 1872, the Namasudras were enlisted in the Hindu fold under the 'Semi-Hinduised Aborigines' category with the hated 'Chandal' title which was officially abolished in 1911. In the missionary writings, the term 'Namasudra' has been written as 'Nama Sudra'. Those who were termed early as Chandals and Namasudras are usually now called Matuas. As both the terms 'Matua' and 'Namasudra' almost stand for equal meaning with tremendous socio-economic backwardness, oppression and degradation of people, they are often used synonymously. Again, Matua is also synonymous to the *Tapashili* people —the Scheduled Castes and Schedule Tribes of Hindu society. Nowadays, to refer to the backward classes of the OBC, and the Dalits, the term 'Matua' is used with equal meaning and magnitude.

In1865, the Australian Missionary Committee could know first through the speech of Reverend J.C. Page, a missionary from Australia worked at Barisal in 1865, that there were 'no Christian workers were located' in the Indian Eastern Bengal districts of Faridpur, Pubna, Mymensingh and Comilla.[2] The committee thought to send Christian evangelists in those Eastern Bengal districts. Then the South Australian Missionary Committee raised fund to support the Indian Christian evangelists at

1 Elva Schroeder, *Doctor Sahib: The Story of Dr Cecil Silas Mead*, 2nd ed. (Capalaba, Queensland: Even Before Publishing, 2013), p. 76. [2006].

2 Walter Barry, *There Was A Man*: *The Life of Cecil Silas Mead: Missionary-Doctor* (Melbourne: Australian Baptist Foreign Mission, 1952), pp. 32-33.

Faridpur, Bangladesh.[3] It is to note that the South Australian Baptist Missionary Society was founded in 1863.[4]

In 1882, two young school teachers Miss Ellen Arnold and Miss Marie Gilbert were the first two Australian Christian Missionaries reached Faridpur, Bangladesh. Then another 4 young women missionaries including Alice Pappin who was a teacher came to Faridpur and the town was gradually turning into the centre of South Australian Baptist Missionary works.[5] For doing missionary works wholeheartedly, Reverend Arthur Summers, the first male missionary from Australia, along with his wife came to Faridpur in 1887 and took charge of the Mission House. Arthur Summers was a good friend to Dr. C.S. Mead who did almost everything for the upliftment of the Matuas. As a missionary from Australia, on 08 November 1893, Dr Cecil Silas Mead reached Faridpur. To the Matuas - the untouchable Namasudras of Orakandi, Faridpur, Dr Mead is an unsurmountable blessing and a great friend to them forever. The first contact through correspondence between Mead and the Namasudra representatives of Orakandi took place during the last days of 1906.[6] Mead replied the Matuas in January in 1907. Mead realized that the Matuas were not as illiterate as he thought them to be first. He along with his missionary wife Alice Pappin and two daughters reached and began to dwell in Orakandi from 1907.

On the distance of Orakandi from Faridpur Mission House, Elva Schroeder writes, 'Orakandi was only twenty-five miles southwest of Faridpur as the crow flies.'[7] On Orakandi, Elfrida Hill writes, 'It is just a small group of islands artificially built up by excavating a spot in the boggy fertile land of the rice swamps (or beels, as they are called) of the Faridpur District, Eastern Bengal.'[8] The collected soil heap up on the early higher portion and year after year the heaps became much lofty. Actually, Orakandi was made up of fifty or so such of artificial islands which were randomly scattered in the beels.[9] To present a graphic account of Orakandi, Hill adds that the 'dotted little islands, which are built up high above the water line and crowded with small brown mat houses. These are the homes of the farmers, whose land is almost always under water.'[10] Caste segregation kept Orakandi far off from the rest of the civilized world for centuries. The remoteness and unacquaintance of the village was

3 Ibid., p. 33.
4 Ibid., p. 32.
5 Schroeder, *Doctor Sahib*, p. 14.
6 Ibid., p. 66.
7 Ibid., p. 71.
8 Elfrida Hill, *Gathered Leaves* (Melbourne: The Australian Baptist Foreign Mission (Incorp.), 1934), p. 9.
9 Schroeder, *Doctor Sahib*, p. 72.
10 Hill, *Gathered Leaves*, p. 10.

so huge that even at the beginning of the 20th century, Orakandi was only known to the local Post Office and Police Station.[11] However, the former unknowingness of Orakandi vanishes quickly. At the beginning of the recognition of the Matuas, Orakandi gradually got known beyond the district boundary of Faridpur. And, Orakandi got acquainted 'throughout Bengal and in many countries beyond the sea.'[12]

3. Why Did the Missionaries Come to Orakandi

When the missionaries in India found the caste Hindus unwilling to receive Christianity, they, in the hope of mass conversion, changed their policy and turned to the poor multitudes, the outcastes and the untouchables all over India. Actually, the mission authority found the 'highest strategic value' in the millions of socio-economically degraded masses. They sketched and turned 'to capture the masses' through a flanking movement.[13] The missionary hopefulness for huge conversion of the masses is evident when Mead writes, 'The richest promise lies before us in the lower classes, and the most urgent call to service is the cry that arises from their many-millioned mouth (sic).'[14] The South Australian Baptist Missionary Society found Faridpur as one of the ideal locations for dealing with its missionary activities with the Matuas. To make its dream true, the Australian missionaries wanted to preach the Gospels and the sublimity of Jesus Christ and God among the Matuas. The missionaries, then, found Orakandi a remote and unacquainted village. However, Orakandi was the heart and hub of the Matua community. It is because Guruchand Thakur (Guru Charan Babu), the head man, the undisputable leader of the Matuas and a man of 'very great and far-reaching influence,' lived at Orakandi.[15] His authority, wisdom, acceptance and reverence to the Matua community is perceived when Mead writes, 'Humanly speaking, almost everything depends on what this man does. All eyes are upon him. Pray for him.'[16] To expose the importance of Orakandi and Guruchand, Barry writes, 'What was said and done in Orakandi was said and done by all Nama Sudras.'[17] To the missionaries, thus, Orakandi 'was the heart of things', the true 'strategic centre' which must be occupied without fail.[18]

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11 Ibid., p. 9.
12 Ibid., p. 12.
13 C.S. Mead, *The Namasudras: And Other Addresses* (Melbourne: South Australian Baptist Furreedpore Mission, Incorporated., 1911), p. 31.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., p. 9.
16 Ibid.
17 Barry, *There Was A Man*, p. 136.
18 Mead, *The Namasudras: And Other Addresses*, p. 8.

The purpose of Orakandi Mission House is exposed when Mead explicitly says, 'My subject is Mass Movements, or God's way of winning India, and our way of winning the Nama Sudras.'[19] When a deputation from Orakandi met Mead at his Faridpur Mission House and sought help for uplift, Mead as well other missionaries felt overwhelmed and got an immense opportunity to preach Christ's message among the unlettered Matuas of Orakandi. Mead says, 'This was the beginning of a contact which has caused us to see visions and to dream dreams.'[20] A more valid and strong proof of the missionary will becomes evident when, at the welcome note on their (Mr Mead and Mrs Mead) settling at Orakandi, Mead says, "I came to you with the Book in my hand; this is the reason for my coming amongst you. It has a message for you from the One who sent me."[21] When it is expressed that 'education was not the chief instrument of the Holy Spirit in the field of mission,' the truth of the missionary purpose is exposed aptly.[22] They wanted 'to set the name of Jesus on the lips of every Nama Sudra child,' and to cover the whole green rice-grown beel with His name.[23] Actually, they realized that such a suitable place was a tremendous blessing and the greatest opportunity to preach Jesus's message among the Matuas. As a result, the missionaries of the South Australian Baptist Missionary Society, Faridpur took Orakandi as the most suitable and significant locale for doing missionary activities for materialising their missionary purposes in Bangladesh through preaching gospels.[24]

4. On Caste and Identity

The missionaries experienced that caste matters everything to the Hindus. Due to caste, the missionaries found fifty million men in all over India were 'sitting abject on the outskirts of Hinduism.'[25] They could realize that only caste determines one's social position in Hindu fold ensuring and securing learning, recognition, dignity, employment, acceptance, status, income, etc. which are the primary aspects of one's social identity. Along with its adjoining areas of Orakandi village and Faridpur, the missionaries could realize the lashing role of caste on Matua community from time immemorial. In that caste-gripped society, they found the Matuas socio-economically excluded and on the verge of extinction. Thus, the identity of the Matua community

19 Ibid., p. 27.
20 Ibid., p. 7.
21 Barry, *There Was A Man*, p. 143.
22 Ibid., p. 140.
23 Mead, *The Namasudras: And Other Addresses*, p. 46.
24 Barry, *There Was A Man*, p. 130.
25 Mead, *The Namasudras: And Other Addresses,* p. 27.

was wrapped in tremendous humiliation, negligence, indignity and fabricated and imposed untouchability.

In Hindu society, caste plays the determinant role to locate people of various occupations. It is also true to the Matuas. It is caste that forced them to congregate and live in that inhospitable beels of Faridpur district. When Hill writes that "Originally, the Namasudras were driven into these way-back swamp lands by the Higher castes, who themselves did not desire to live at close quarters with those of such low caste'[26], it becomes easy to read that caste controls everyone and everything. To expose their social position and general attitude on them, Hill again writes, 'people who lived in this district are particularly all farmers, and belong to the downtrodden and much despised Nama Sudra caste. Sudra means "foot" and because these farmer folk are of the lowest Hindu caste, the name applies.'[27] Thus, the missionaries found the Matuas in the most ignoble existence.

Through a close discussion held between the Matua representatives from Orakandi and Mead at Faridpur Mission House in 1907, the general acceptance of and social treatment on the Matuas is perceived well. Mead, then, came to know the form of misery which the Matua community faced for generations. To unfold the Matuas' entanglement and wretchedness, according to the deputation's handwritten document, Barry writes what the deputation delivered, 'We come as representatives of a great, sad class—hated, despised, downtrodden, treated for centuries like dogs. We have at last wakened to the fact that we too are men; that the same great God Who made the proud Brahmin, made us, too.'[28]

When Mead asked the deputation, 'what do you see as the main problems confronting your people?'[29], Bhisma Deb Das, one of the representatives, replied that about two thousand years they had been deprived of receiving education and employment. What is the cause of their deprivation? The missionaries knew that it was because of caste segregation. In Schroeder's words, Bhisma Deb adds, 'The Brahmins have kept all learning confined to the higher castes and have treated our people like animals with no rights or standing.'[30] It was customary then that only the caste Hindus, from Bhisma Deb's reply, especially the Brahmins enjoyed the sole authority over education and the rest privileges available in society. How their social exclusion means untouchability impeded them from receiving higher education in

26 Hill, *Gathered Leaves,* p. 9.
27 Ibid.
28 Barry, *There Was A Man*, pp. 136-137.
29 Schroeder, *Doctor Sahib*, p. 69.
30 Ibid.

Kolkata, Bhisma Deb Das discloses in Schroeder's words. To express the feeling of Bhisma Deb and Sasi Babu (Shashibhushan Thakur), Schroeder writes, 'Our fathers … made great sacrifices to send us to school in Calcutta. Sasi Babu matriculated successfully and I passed the entrance examination (sic) to allow me to study law. Then our caste was discovered and we were barred from proceeding any further. We returned Orakandi feeling completely crushed.'[31] This bitter tale, really, coated with harsh reality, brought much humiliation on their community as a whole. Becoming a teacher and again a Headmaster to the Matuas were quite problematic.[32] When the government allocated grants for their English High School, no qualified B.A. degree holder from the caste Hindus wanted to become a (Head) teacher for the Matuas. Truly speaking, caste prejudice debarred the Caste Hindus even to educate a community. In this regard, Schroeder writes, 'The first head-master sent to them had soon decided he could not let go of his prejudices to become a friend to the despised Nama Sudras.'[33] It exemplifies that though they wanted and tried hard to receive higher education, they were denied and ill-treated on the very basis of caste system. No educated caste Hindu wanted to work and become sympathetic rather than friend to render education to the Matuas let alone provide respectable employment.

During their Orakandi days, the missionaries knew that the severity done to the outcastes and the untouchables through caste practices cost much to the Hindus and it moved and made repentant some caste Hindus. Mead notes that getting known the huge decrease of the Hindus through mass conversion, one article writes, "The wages of sin is death," … "We Hindus have sinned deeply and damnably against the laws of God and nature, and we are paying the penalty."[34] Their repentance, actually, validates the huge ill-treatment done to the untouchables like the Matuas. They admitted that their deeds were much responsible for decreasing their number and increasing the number of Christians. Again, when the missionaries write that 'Abundant evidence was manifest on every hand that the impenetrable jungle of superstition, suspicion, caste custom and tradition was being torn away'[35], it exposes that unfathomable disgrace and degradation occurred to the millions of Matuas solely for caste. Moreover, the severity and magnitude of caste is also realized when, to expose Mead's feeling on the issue, Barry writes, 'Caste segregation among Hindus presents a problem of inconceivable magnitude…endless restrictions, incongruous

31 Ibid., p. 68.
32 Ibid., p. 90.
33 Ibid.
34 Mead, *The Namasudras: And Other Addresses*, p. 41.
35 Barry, *There Was A Man*, p. 132.

scruples and social distinctions.'[36] The missionaries experienced that 'a low-caste man, no matter how well educated, or clean, or self-respecting, remains an outcaste, whose touch to a Brahmin is pollution.'[37] Thus, like millions of outcastes and untouchables of India, the Matuas of Bangladesh, being segregated on the basis of caste, were treated as pollution. The missionaries found people of the low castes untouchables were titled variously – *Chandal*, untouchable, outcaste, excluded, sin, criminal, waste, sheet, etc. Actually, people like the Matuas were also known as 'the human debris of India', 'the despair and scorn of civilisation', 'men of low degree', and 'bruised and broken'.[38]

As it was believed that the Matuas can defile anyone, they were taken as untouchable and named as Chandal. Being untouchable, they were ineligible for everything which is given to and done for a civilized community. They were kept away from enjoying social rights and privileges of employment, health facilities, etc. Caste segregation threw them off in the farthest line of uncongenial location for human habitation. They were made captive and crippled in their own land. From these ignoble and humiliating titles used to identify the untouchables, the wretched social status of the Matuas of Bangladesh can be perceived at least to some extent.

Caste is so powerful that it could make those Christian missionaries unfit who once met let alone dined with the Matuas. To the caste Hindus, the missionaries were also despised and untouchable. During scarcity of food, for survival the missionaries sometimes took food with the untouchable Matuas. But, this act of taking food with the Matuas was taken as a violation of the caste code. Thus, the missionaries along with the Matuas were similarly treated as untouchables.

5. On Economy and Occupation

The missionaries found the Matuas extremely poor and needy. They passed days in tremendous necessity, ignorance, poverty, etc. They had to pass their days in utter hopelessness and meaninglessness. Truly speaking, the Matuas had to struggle hard to cope with abound natural hazards. For survival, they had no alternative but to toil in the inherited swamps, fish, and ply boats from dawn to dusk. Again, they had to do every other menial work for an insignificant survival.

Unlike the missionaries and the few wealthy ones, the poverty-stricken Matuas could not afford themselves to shelter in well-protected houses. They used to live in brown-

36 Ibid., p. 35.
37 Mead, *The Namasudras: And Other Addresses*, p. 35.
38 Ibid., pp. 27, 32, 35.

mat houses with earthen floors and thatched roofs with little grass and weeds. Regarding their dwelling, Schroeder writes, 'When Mrs Mead visited them in small bamboo and grass huts, she was amazed at how poor and sparsely furnished they were. Some had a wooden bed or a battered chair, but little else. Their clothing was hung over a cord stretched across the hut.'[39] Their huts/houses were built on man-made islands which were made higher every year with the hope of keeping them safe from the flood. But flood water did never pay heed to their effort and made them always helpless.[40] Their shabby huts were incapable to save them from the frequent natural hazards. Again, they used to face life risks both in houses and also in cultivable areas which were almost drowned under water for more than six months a year.

The Matuas were and still are primarily farmers. Rice is their staple food. As a result, rice cultivation was very common to the inhabitants of this region. However, a few knew and ran small business and trades. Though the land which they inherited was mostly swampy and inundated every year, it meant everything to them. On the type of land, details are known from the conversion between Dr Mead and the Orakandi representatives. Regarding the type of land, Bhisma Deb Das says and Schroeder writes, 'The swamps are formed by the numerous small streams that spread over the land from the Ganges River. When the monsoons come, the streams overflow and for six months of the year most of the area is flooded under ten to fifteen feet of water.'[41] However, the missionaries found that wetland is suitable for rice cultivation and the ancestors of the community were compelled and used to do farming, fishing and boating for their living. Having swampy land, they could cultivate rice with a great ease. At the beginning of the monsoon, they started rice cultivation on the low land. However, getting a good harvest was totally uncertain as water rose gradually and limitlessly. If the rice could grow faster than water rose, they got success and could earn a good harvest. 'If it doesn't, the whole crop can be drowned and the people are left without rice for the coming year.'[42] Rice production, actually, was continually impeded by flood, monsoonal rain and consecutive water logging. For this, very often their life became unbearable in want of sufficient food. As alternative and supplementary food items, they used to grow vegetables on the islands' slopes and on the floating bamboo rafts using a layer of straw and soil, and marrows on the

39 Schroeder, *Doctor Sahib*, p. 74.
40 Ibid., p. 69.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid., p. 70.

thatched roofs of the houses. 'But without rice, they barely manage to survive to the next season.'[43]

The delegation's account is a fine proof of the community's poverty and starvation which cost their life heavily. The missionaries found that 'The swampy land they inherit from generation to generation is barely able to supply their own needs, with very little over to sell.'[44] Frequent flood brought frequent scarcity of food by drowning and destroying crops. As a result, they regularly found the Matuas in extreme want of food. The height of food crisis is also perceived through the missionaries' own experiences. During their first days, they also experienced the shortage of food at Orakandi, and were bound to pass days in want of food. Getting no other way, they sometimes had to dine with the Matuas.[45] It proves that the Matuas had to fight against starvation which frequently visited them. Moreover, lack of balanced food let them live in perpetual sickness and malnutrition. Actually, the shortage of food compelled them to starve. As a result, famine occurred frequently and caused massive death in the area.

The practice of marriage reflects the socio-economic condition of the poverty-stricken Matuas. Due to extreme poverty, feeding the family members was a huge challenge to the aged male members of their typical large families. A father with young daughters generally fell in great problem of feeding. For solving the problem, a father used to marry off his little daughters in their tender and immature days. Sometimes infants and babies were married off to save other family members. As a result, the practice of early marriage especially of the girls was in vogue in the Matua community. But, male children had to wait a lot not to get maturity but to become solvent to support and maintain a wife. Poverty, generally, would affect the male members extensively. As most of the Matuas were in dire need of wealth, they could not get married happily. Actually, they were 'so poor that often they can't afford to marry at all.'[46]

For communication, the Matuas generally used wooden boat. Even for selling their own crops and buying various goods for daily necessaries boat was essential for the inhabitants. On the wide use of boats, Hill writes,

> Except for six months of the year, when the water in the rice fields dries up, all the work of the field, travelling and marketing, must be done by boat. From June until December each homestead on its raised piece of land becomes an island. Inhabitants of all these

43 Ibid.
44 Ibid., p. 69.
45 Ibid., p. 73.
46 Ibid., p. 70.

> island homes have no access to one another or to the fields where their green rice crops are swaying in the breeze, except by boat.[47]

Natural calamities (flood, cyclone, heavy rainfall, tornado, tidal bore, extreme heat, vapour, drought, cyclone, and scarcity of pure drinking water) which used to hit Bangladesh so often and unnoticed every year that people like the Matuas were thrashed and got thwarted repeatedly and would find life totally meaningless. Losing their home-belongings as well the very little savings, livestock, food grains, etc., they were poorer and helpless. They almost always led life miserably. As a result, their very survival was at high risk. Moreover, the inhabitants and the missionaries in the swamp-beels of Orakandi had frequent life risks from the deadly cobras, scorpion, notorious six-inch krait snake, flying and crawling pests.[48]

6. On Education

The Matuas were accustomed to cling to their ancestral lifestyle embedded in ignorance and prejudices. But the missionaries got some of the Matuas much educated. It is because the leaders or headmen of the community got realized the role and compulsoriness of education and they started their preliminary but auspicious activities. They felt getting educated under the British rule was the key to and gateway of socio-economic upliftment. To prove their great interest on education, Mead writes, 'At Orakandi we found them eager about their school.'[49] Actually, they found that an awakening spirit, a movement for learning and upliftment, had started some decades back before their coming and settling at Orakandi.

In an old house, a lower primary school, actually the first one, at Orakandi was started under the tutelage of Sasi Babu. About this earliest school at Orakandi, Schroeder writes, 'It was a primitive little building with matting walls and a dirt earthen floor, but it was the people's pride and joy. It seemed to represent the peak of their hopes and efforts to that time.'[50] When Mead reached Orakandi for the first time, he found the school on the highland. It was not so good but 'It truly represented the peak of their aspirations and mental efforts.'[51] Mead found the Matuas keen and enthusiastic enough to educate both their sons and daughters.

The Matuas realized that only education can lead them to get uplifted. The imposed untouchability, chains of fake authority and caste superiority on them can be

47 Hill, *Gathered Leaves,* p. 25.
48 Schroeder, *Doctor Sahib*, p. 85.
49 Mead, *The Namasudras: And Other Addresses*, p. 14.
50 Schroeder, *Doctor Sahib*, pp. 71-72.
51 Barry, *There Was A Man*, p. 140.

annihilated through being well educated. Bhisma Das says to Mead, 'To break out of this cycle, our people need to be educated and allowed to take positions in the outside community.'[52] Thus, the Matuas ardently felt for the unconditional 'need of education both for boys and girls.'[53] Through their frequent uplifting meetings (*sabha*) held in many villages and towns on various occasions, they tried to get a proper solution to ensure providing education for every one of the community. As they were under British rule, they felt the necessity of education in English. When, through their own eagerness and effort and missionary assistance, their early primary school (lower elementary School/ *Pathshala*) turned to an English High School, they got very excited.[54] Actually, the Matuas felt to rise is to get educated.

7. On Health

Through the health lens, the missionaries could unfold new stories wrapped in multidimensional sufferings of and on the Matua community. They found ill health doomed the Matuas. Due to insufficient (balanced) food and age-long poverty, they were compelled to live under malnourishment and malnutrition. As a result, the Matuas were almost always found in ill health and often remained sick. Moreover, the overall health situation got deteriorated because of impenetrable ignorance, prejudices and firmness of their customs which nearly baffled missionary medical works. The seriousness of their sufferings caused by ill health often dismayed the missionaries even who did know nothing of medicine and medical works.

The missionaries found the inhabitants unhealthy from several issues. Various diseases frequently visited the area and the Matuas suffered unspeakably. How aptly Barry writes, 'Malarial fever was the greatest offender. Skin disease came next, with eye and ear disease a close third.'[55] As most of them were ignorant and unaware of health risks, they never minded to drink polluted water even during the contagious water-borne pandemic like cholera which was widely known as *Olaotha*. Again, they were in the habit of abusing the same 'water for washing clothes, bathing, watering their cattle and boating in, besides using it for cooking and drinking. The result was a continuous round of sickness and disease.'[56] To share a detailed account of their health, Schroeder writes,

> Having repeatedly suffered the ravages of cholera, smallpox, influenza and other epidemics, as well as the continual rounds of dysentery and malaria, the people had very

52 Schroeder, *Doctor Sahib*, p. 69.
53 Mead, *The Namasudras: And Other Addresses,* p. 12.
54 Schroeder, *Doctor Sahib*, pp. 90, 92.
55 Barry, *There Was A Man*, p. 40.
56 Schroeder, *Doctor Sahib*, p. 85.

> little resistance to infection or disease. So along with straight medical treatment, Cecil tried to give the people a basic understanding of personal hygiene as well as the need to boil all drinking water. But he soon realized that it was going to take time to lift the standard of living in the area after centuries of the same lifestyle.[57]

Dispensary run by the missionary doctors and nurses among the Matuas were called *House of Healing*. To reach doctors and get medicine from the government hospital beyond availing the missionary-run medical services was almost unthinkable to the Matuas. Thus, the dispensary at Orakandi was kept busy and crowded by the Matua patients who could get healing both in body and soul from the missionaries.[58] To do some medical works for the broken health Matuas was a tremendous blessing to the missionaries. Every day around 150 to 200 sick people used to receive medical assistance from Mead who regularly visited the sick and despairing ones at their homes. To note Mead's feeling in this regard, Barry writes, 'There was an unspeakable satisfaction in being able to relieve distress, and to see sufferers' radiant with an unwonted smile of gratitude was great compensation.'[59] The gravity of their health misery is perceived well at the 'health meetings' organised by the missionaries at Orakandi Mission House where the Matuas, with the hope of getting life back, flocked to the meeting by boat fleet. It is to note that the missionaries became very pleased with women patients who came with their little babies and sought mission help. Likewise, the missionaries were pleased seeing particularly the women in sincere gratitude towards the missionaries.[60] Their feeling of gratitude was treated invaluable rewards to the missionaries. Actually, through missionary medical services, they found a slice of healthy life.

8. On Matua Women

The depiction of the Matua women undoubtedly adds a new dimension on the community's misery. In a tradition-bound community, Matua women were insecure, deserted and meaningless both from economic and social grounds. Mrs Mead found them perpetually hopeless, joyless, loveless, and uncared indeed.[61] Again, they were ignorant, weak, unhealthy, helpless, nameless, and even casteless. They were propelled on the sweet will of the male members of the community. It is noticeable that their miseries and ill-treatment did never to wane because of some existing social and community-based ill-practices.

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57 Ibid., p. 87.
58 Hill, *Gathered Leaves*, p. 57.
59 Barry, *There Was A Man*, p. 49.
60 Mead, *The Namasudras: And Other Addresses*, p. 22.
61 Schroeder, *Doctor Sahib*, p. 74.

The Matua women generally were unrecognised and had no individuality in the community. Early marriage was in vogue among the Matuas. Without educating his daughter, a father only remained concerned for his daughter's marriage with a suitable bridegroom.[62] Again, daughters' consent to marriage and the selection of suitable bridegrooms were always neglected. In the in-law's house, the Matua women had to do all household chores without recognition. During harvest time, they had very little time to spare. In family, the eldest wife entitled a special authority over the wives of the younger brothers-in-law. However, the women were not allowed to smoke *hookah*. Again, they were not generally allowed to be seen by the outsiders let alone a stranger from Muslim or Christian community or people of other castes/ races. Even at the death bed, they were not allowed to be seen even by the missionary doctors. It is because to see a woman's face was treated as shameful to her husband, family and society. If a male doctor treats a woman in her morbidity, he would not be allowed to see her face least he might meet and recognize her later. Community's customs, ignorance and prejudices let the women live in perpetual bondage and they were turned to be considered themselves 'as merely the possessions of their husbands.'[63]

A girl after her marriage generally was not permitted to enjoy individual recognition by her family name but by her child's name. Again, like the Bengali Hindu mothers, if a male member (husband or child) died premature, a Matua woman was also severely scolded, humiliated and often driven out from family. It is because that the sons are usually taken as auspicious and heavenly blessings to society. It is practised in Hindu tradition that the soul/ spirit of the departed male is helped and assured an entrance into Heaven only by son's lawful sole right to light the funeral pyre of the deceased parents in funeral rites.[64] Again, the misery aggregated if a woman failed to give birth to a male child. Without a son and on the premature death of her husband, a woman was never allowed to enjoy her deceased husband's land and property right. Often she had to live on the bounty and pity of the brothers-in law. But, she was ill-treated and very soon was turned unwelcoming in her in-law's and even in her own father's house. She often experienced social boycott and could not participate in religious festivals and any auspicious, sacramental and ritualistic activities.

The missionaries, at first, found the older men much reserved and unwilling to their women's outside movement and education. Though the aged ones thought women's

62 Hill, *Gathered Leaves*, p. 24.
63 Schroeder, *Doctor Sahib*, p. 74.
64 Hill, *Gathered Leaves*, p. 23.

education was only a wastage of time and money, the missionaries made them convinced by arguing that girls' education is a must for their desired uplift. When missionaries said the aged ones that 'the first responsibility of training your sons'[65] depends on their women folk, they agreed to send their girls to the newly established Orakandi Girls' school by separate boats.

The social condition of the Orakandi Matua widows presents a fine testimony of the Matua community. The nature and intensity of the Matua widows' grievances are varied and claim minute attention. Untold cruelty, violence, sufferings and wrongs were done to the widows on various grounds. It seems a girl of no certain age could become a widow because sometimes mere babes were married to much older men and tasted the reality of infant widowhood. They could not even name their family name and remember and realize what happened to them being widows. As a result, the Matuas, especially the leaders, were burdened with their widows who were taken as 'the plague-spot' of their community.[66] They were of no use like the pieces of earthen broken pots, they were treated as slaves and burdens to the family and society. The terms *domestic chattels* and *earthen broken pots* were used to indicate the Matua widows of Orakandi areas.[67] To expose their condition, Hill writes, 'A widow is despised, ill-used and spurned, wronged, cheated of her rights—a Broken Pot, as the widow is called in the Nama Sudra community. An earthenware water pot, once cracked, is useless, can never be mended: fit only to be thrown on the rubbish heap.'[68] The misery of the Orakandi widows has also been portrayed in Dr Mead's words:

> Look! Can you see how the hands are quivering?
> Hands hell-hurt, hands heaven-seeking, hands hopeless.
> They are Orakandi Widows' hands.
> The curse has fallen.
> The hurt hands tremble, the seeking hands reach out and implore.
> In vain are they clasped. There is none to help, nor any to
> hear the wailing of wounded women. —C.S. Mead [69]

To expose the extremely disgraced condition of the widows, Hill writes, 'There was in that land, … a "sore" – a terrible, festering sore. …The sore was the life of the widows of the Hindu Nama Sudra community.'[70] To the missionaries, the Matua

65 Schroeder, *Doctor Sahib*, p. 77.
66 Mead, *The Namasudras: And Other Addresses,* p. 22.
67 Barry, *There Was A Man*, p. 130.
68 Hill, *Gathered Leaves*, p. 27.
69 Ibid., p. 57.
70 Ibid., p. 12.

widows were known as the “Life’s littered floor”, “crushed crowns”, and “broken wings”.[71] They found their lives twisted in peril and danger. Actually, the Matuas took the widows 'as a thorn in their own sides and as a blot on the community life.' For the widows, the whole community life was stained. They were, hence, called infectious sore. The situation sored up for practicing of early marriage and not for practicing of widow remarriage. Everywhere they became the victim and treated as the obstacle to the community uplift. Their grievance made the older people of the community concerned most. Actually, the condition was so serious that the leaders truly realized that before lessening the widows' plight, no real uplift of their community would materialize.

The widows were generally bound to perform all sorts of household chores with the hardest and heaviest tasks but were allowed to have only one meal a day or the least amount of food. They were not allowed to put on any jewelry, colorful sari and blouse and vermillion on the forehead. They were bound to wear white borderless (or with no red-bordered) *shari*. In the tradition-bound community, they were taken as a symbol of bad omens and misfortune bearer. As a result, they were kept absent from every sort of religious, holy, auspicious, and festive and joyous occasions and activities.[72] In fear of social boycott, and being driven away from community, a father or husband of a widow did not allow her to live or stay with him. Thus, a widow was often turned unwanted in both in-law’s and or father’s family, and soon driven away (along with the little child/ren). As nobody did any responsibility towards the widows, she was free from community rules and regulations. Likewise, nobody held any legal authority and right on her actions. As a result, she could choose her shelter and dwelling except the caste and community arena.

The practice known as *Ranr* which allows keeping widow, and even unmarried woman as wife or concubine, made widows' existence more perilous. A man, even the priest, with affluence and riches, could sportively keep young and mature woman in his family except his wife/ wives. Being widows, they were prey to the wealthy ones. The missionaries found that the practice even among the priests.

Widows’ returning to or entering into the community hardly happened. For this, the widows had to undergo various cleansing processes. On the one hand, the widows who had babies needed to face much more harsh community reality. They were not allowed to return to their husband’s family along with their child/ children. Then the widows were forced to leave their children to someone/ orphanage/mission to enter

71 Ibid., p. 60.
72 Ibid., p. 78.

the caste community. Hill writes, 'A Hindu widow may get back into caste after wrongdoing if she gives up her child, but never with it.'[73]

When widows were driven out from the family, they were handed over to and taken shelter under the care of a Holy Man (*Fakir/ Sannyasi*, the wandering mendicants, *guru* or religious advisor, also known as *Baba*). The widows did accomplish every single chore (begging, cooking, cleaning, caring, etc.) for the Holy Man, and were bond to follow the man widely according to his sweet will and wishes. Actually, a widow was used as a wife of the Holy Man, but never was titled as a wife. Besides, if a Holy Man got tired of any particular widow, 'he may cast the girl off anywhere or at any time. The misery of a young widow is almost unspeakable.

Getting known the widows' distress, the Orakandi missionaries, to reduce their and the community pains, built a separate residence at Orakandi. It was named the Light House/ 'The House of Light'/ the Home of Light /Orakandi Widows' Home/ Widows' Home. It was also known as *Dipti Bhaban* (House of Light) of Orakandi. It started working on 10th August 1909.[74] It was dedicated for the destitute—widow, orphan or parentless child, uncared ones, who were treated as a burden to the nearest and dearest ones of their families and relatives.[75] Miss Bertha Tuck and Miss Grace Thomson had an immense effect at least to have a shelter to the abandoned and suffered women of the community. Hill aptly writes, 'So often the little, unloved ones brought to the missionary are weak and sickly, suffering from neglect and even from attempts to poison, and thus get rid of the unwanted life.'[76] Thus, a separate shelter, a cottage, for the children named 'The House of Joy' was also built. All these efforts were done to reduce the grievances experienced the Matuas. Actually, the 'Light House', and 'The House of Joy' both present the never-ending tales of the sufferings of the Orakandi widows.

9. The Way to Upliftment

The Matuas strived for a rightful and logical position amongst the people so that they could get sitting and identity in society. Through Mead's devotion, perseverance, grace and constructive efforts, the closed doors gradually began to open and widen. At the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the Matuas began to lift their heads. Through missionary and government assistance, their long-cherished rightful demands began to be fulfilled. Actually, they realised the necessity of breaking out of

73 Ibid., p. 16.
74 Schroeder, *Doctor Sahib*, p. 82.
75 Hill, *Gathered Leaves*, p. 26.
76 Ibid., p. 17.

the cycle of their traditional life. By arranging regular uplifting meetings knows as 'Sava' for community awakening, the Matuas got known about their progress, problems, weakness, failure and necessities. Thus, it helped them a lot to sketch and define their road to uplift by preparing directives and initiatives, and implementing and monitoring them regularly. Due to spread of education and missionary efforts, the century-long rigidity on ancestral occupations, caste customs, prejudices and some other practices began to be abolished positively among them. [77]

Regarding changes in various grounds of Matua's life, Barry writes that Mead 'changed the face of things, gave the people a new outlook on life, and made for new opportunities, new avenues of self-expression'.[78] They could realize that they have equally been created by the same God who made men of the rest castes. Changes of the Matuas are also evident in the report of Rev. Hedley Sutton who visited Orakandi after Mead's departure for Australia from Orakandi. Sutton satisfactorily found them with a changed belief. The Matua widows were no longer treated as a burden to their people. And, the light of education began to enlighten both the boys and girls. On the Matuas, he reported that 'I marked a new order of life. The old order changeth.' and 'There is education where formerly there was ignorance.'[79]

Visible changes took place in education rendered for the Matuas. In 1908, Sasi Babu's elementary school turned to the first English High School for the Matuas. 'The work in the boys' schools had progressed remarkably.' The government recognition of the Orakandi Mead English High School from the Calcutta University brought huge inspiration for the Matuas. Schroeder writes, **'**What a day of rejoicing it had been when the school finally received official recognition, …towards the end of 1911, the Nama Sudra people had finally seen the fulfillment of one of their main goals.'[80] The aged ones agreed to send their girls to newly established school for being learned, healthy and noble inheritance-making ideal mothers. During his visit to the Orakandi Mission House in 1911, Mr Nathan, the District Commissioner, was pleased with the noticeable progress of the Orakandi girls' school established in 1908 and assured to assist in missionary activities for uplifting the community. Actually, this episode made the Matuas optimistic about receiving higher education abroad. As a result, from the next decade, they secured opportunities to 'studying in Europe to become barristers, engineers and artists.'[81]

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77 Barry, *There Was A Man*, p. 35.
78 Ibid., p. 143.
79 Ibid., p. 149.
80 Schroeder, *Doctor Sahib*, p. 90.
81 Ibid., p. 106.

Along with their ancestral agricultural works, the Matuas, to add their income, started running some unconventional economic services which were forbidden early. Schroeder writes, 'Outside markets had been opened up for the people to sell the goods they now produced, and this in turn had led to a rise in the overall standard of living.'[82] Getting educated and in light of Christian messages and values, many widows, receiving new skills and understanding, became self-reliant. Thus, they secured their position in society and let the traditional outlook on them get changed tremendously. They earned their own identity. And for this, they began treated worthwhile members of the community.[83]

They could realize and identified that both early marriage and absence of widow remarriage are the roots of all sufferings of their widows, especially the child widows. Thus, they compulsorily decided to ban early marriage at any cost among them and their vicinity. Again, after much calculation and discussion over the traditional outlook, widow remarriage began in them. The practice of widow remarriage opened a new horizon over their way of traditional life. As they began to maintain hygiene strictly, the health condition of the Matuas improved significantly. As a result, malnutrition and sickness decreased among them. Thus, their living standard began to change gradually. They repeatedly thought about their solvency, and the wellbeing of their children.

For the rehabilitation of the Matua widows, Guruchand Thakur laid the foundation stone by enrolling the first widows at the Orakandi Widows' Home. On the 10th August 1909, along with Bindu Bala, a widow, he brought one of his own nieces to the home and inaugurated the mission work. Schroeder writes, 'Here, he said to Miss Tuck, 'are the foundation members of the home. Unless I take the first step and bring my own relatives, no-one will have the courage to act.'[84] That initiative of Guruchand made other widows assured and other widows began to live by ones and twos. The Widows' Home flourished and was running noticeably. For this, Mr Nathan promised and assured the then Orakandi Mission authority Miss Tuck and Nurse Thomson that he (Mr Nathan) would 'try and secure a government grant to help them in their work with the widows.'[85] At the Light House, the widows did sewing and weaving. They got skilled and showed path for earning and meaningful living. Their tales of becoming self-reliant and self-respectful inspired not only the widows and women folk but also the whole community. Actually, their spirit brought

82 Ibid., p. 100.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid., p. 83.
85 Ibid., p. 82.

tremendous hope for the Matuas who gradually began to change their outlook positively on the widows.

They could know well of their well-wishers and friends who were none but the Christian missionaries and the government. Thus, they did not pay heed to the frequent warnings and opposition made by the caste Hindus against Mead and other missionaries. During the 'Swadeshi Movement' began in India in 1905, the Matuas like some other backward classes of Bengal came to know that they were not completely meaningless to the caste Hindus and the British rule. This helped them envision a new horizon and they became hopeful for securing a parliamentary recognition.

When Sasi Babu became sub-registrar of the school department, this position with dignity, government acceptance and recognition of an untouchable Namasudra brought tremendous effect to the whole community as well to the people of the surrounding areas. Schroeder writes that this position of a sub-registrar 'gave him considerable importance and standing in the community.'[86] On their gradual attainment of securing posts and positions in public affairs, Schroeder adds again, 'Among the Nama Sudra boys who were early students in the school, many had gone through college successfully and now held positions of importance as police inspectors, school inspectors, deputy magistrates, headmasters of minor schools and other government positions.'[87] Besides, the overall condition of the women changed noticeably. Schroeder writes, 'Many of those formerly despised girls had gone on to become fine nurses in various hospitals. Others had become teachers in established girls' schools, while still others had been able to establish loving Christian homes because of the training they had received at Orakandi.'[88] It is worth mentioning that Bhisma Deb Das from Orakandi became one of the first members 'to represent the depressed people of India on the Legislative Council of Bengal.'[89]

10. On Rituals

The Matuas were found to observe some cultural activities. Baruni Snan or Barani Festival or Bathing Festival used to be celebrated even in the early days of the missionary activities at Orakandi. When Mead came to Orakandi in 1907, having been invited, he visited this annual gathering of the *Baruni Snan* and experienced some other activities performed. Schroeder writes,

86 Ibid., p. 91.
87 Ibid., p. 106.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.

> Early in April Cecil was invited by Guru Charan Biswas to come down to Orakandi for the Barani Festival and then to chair a large "Uplift" gathering afterwards. During this festival, several thousand people gathered at Orakandi each year on the thirteenth day of the waning moon in April. Braving the possibility of snapping crocodile jaws and poisonous water snakes, they would take a ritual bathe in the tributary of the Ganges River nearby to wash away their sins for another year.[90]

During processions and cultural gatherings, the Matuas are found bearing flags, drums and wind instruments playing and dancing unitedly.

11. Conclusion

The Matuas, to some noticeable extent, are on the move. Facing harsh realities from various grounds, they are stepping forward aiming at securing their long-cherished upliftment. For achieving and ensuring a standard way of living, they left no stone unturned. From the very beginning of the 20th century, the missionaries found the Matuas motivated to materialize their community upliftment. Under the supervision of Dr Cecil Silas Mead, huge uplifting activities for the Matuas began. After doing missionary activities at Orakandi, Faridpur for nearly a half-century, the missionaries found the Matuas in gradual upliftment to some noticeable height. However, Mead could realize very well that the demands of Orakandi were unlimited and tremendous collective efforts were needed to elevate the Matuas to the mainstream of national life. But Mead felt rewarded for his sincere and earnest efforts done to the Matuas. To express his expression on the rise of the Matua community, Schroeder writes, 'There had certainly been problems and disappointments through the years, but the great gains in the lives of these formerly despised and hopeless people had been very rewarding.'[91] Thus, it is found that the tradition-bound Matua community began to move slowly but surely with a changed and broad outlook.

90 Ibid., p. 73.
91 Ibid., p. 99.

Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh **(Hum.), Vol. 68(2), 2023, pp. 263-286**
DOI: https://doi.org/10.3329/jasbh.v68i2.70367

Rent Seeking in the Power and Energy Sector of Bangladesh

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Abstract

As the power and energy sector of Bangladesh has become increasingly susceptible to external shocks like Ukraine war and dollar crisis, the growing dependency on imported energy is being questioned from the energy security point of view. While the technology and policy actors hold depletion of gas resources and the need for diversification as the reasons to justify increasing import dependency, the proponents for energy security using indigenous resources point out at the negligence in exploring potential indigenous gas reserve and the inability to deploy renewable energy. Why in last one-decade Bangladesh adopted new energies like coal, nuclear, and LNG, rather than exploring natural gas and incentivizing solar and wind, has still remained a puzzle. This paper uses the rent seeking framework to identify how rent seeking structures differ across energy technologies and whether the differences had any implications for incentivizing some energy use while not incentivizing others.

Key words: Rent Seeking, Political Economy, Energy Sector, Regulatory Capture, Electricity Crisis, Learning Rent, Resistance Capture

1.Introduction

The concept of rent seeking was developed from the need of explaining why policymakers repeatedly prefer economically inefficient policies to efficient ones creating high social cost, even when economists have been warning them about their problems. Bangladesh is currently going through a transition from indigenous gas dependency to imported coal, LNG and nuclear. The foreign currency reserve is depleting fast, putting immense pressure on the energy sector to sustain energy security. Despite the cost decline of solar, why Bangladesh adopted expensive nuclear, coal, and LNG remained unexplained. From the existing socio-technical perspective, diversification of energy and scale of technology are shown as the reason of adopting these expensive technologies. However, this explanation is not sufficient for understanding why solar has been so neglected while a very expensive technology like nuclear, despite being complex, risky, and requiring longer implementation time, was prioritized. The existing explanation also underscores the depleting indigenous resources to justify alternatives like coal, LNG and nuclear.

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This explanation is not sufficient to explain why solar has been undermined as an alternative energy source to diversify energy resources and reduce import dependency.

Since 2010, Bangladesh has been implementing a power systems master plan that targeted to import coal and import nuclear technology. As a result, Bangladesh became gradually import dependent. The Ukraine war and dollar crisis made it difficult for Bangladesh to pay for the expensive imported. Besides, the high subsidies given to the rental and quick rental power plants, that were being built since 2009, have also increased the burden of capacity charge, the social cost of which have been imposed on the consumers and businesses. As a result, the economy is facing electricity crisis and paying high social cost not only from high fuel and electricity price, but also from high inflation.

This paper intends to explore the existing rent seeking mechanisms in five sectors: gas, coal, LNG, solar, and nuclear and investigates the relationship between structure of rent seeking and regime formation of these technologies. The central questions are: what types of rent seeking exist, what are the process of rent seeking, and who are the rent seekers? Although the concept of rent seeking originated from public choice theory, the mechanism of rent seeking has been useful tool in other disciplines too. Rent seeking is widely used concept in political science, economics, political economy, and public policy but this concept has been less commonly used in environmental and energy research.

First, this paper will introduce the literature over the past five decades and discuss how the rent seeking concept was extended by different scholars. Second, the paper will analyze some evidences of different types of rent seeking in five energy technologies, gas, coal, nuclear, LNG, and solar. Here, the paper will try to find the commonalities and differences in the rent seeking structure of the technologies using the existing evidences. The result and conclusion section will summarize the pattern of rent seeking for each technology. The paper will conclude with discussing why the differences in rent seeking nature of energy technologies matter in policy of focusing more on some energies and less on the others.

2.Theoretical Framework: Literature Review

The concept of rent seeking is the process leading to creating social cost by giving effort (i.e., monetary spending or any other nonmonetary means of expending resources) to capture transfer of resources as a result of monopolization and regulation. Prior to Tullock[1], the transfer of resources was considered to be costless

[1] G. Tullock, The welfare costs of tariffs, monopolies, and theft, *Western Economic Journal*, Vol. 5, 1967, pp. 224-232.

redistribution among market actors. After Tullock introduced the idea that expenditures made to capture a transfer are a form of social cost, scholars started to apply the idea of rent seeking in conceptualizing social cost of various types of rent seeking efforts. Khan[2] pointed out that the value and variations of rent produced by rent seeking activities and the diversity of rent seekers need to be understood as a process where the effect of rent seeking on society depends on the social cost of spending resources on rent seeking and the social benefit or cost of rent outcome. Rent seeking theories shifted the focus from conventional idea of identifying social cost to the understanding diversity in the process of rent seeking and the value and efficiency of rent seeking from government intervention (i.e., subsidy, tax, quota etc.), other selective facilities (i.e., licensing, occupational permit), and regulatory capture limiting competition (i.e., industrial regulation, environmental regulation, special act etc.). The economic analysis did not remain limited within competition, efficiency, monopolization, and regulation, rather the analysis recognized the political and institutional variables in determining the input cost of rent seeking and the output as a result of rent seeking.

According to neoclassic economics, institutions and rights protecting rents should be removed to achieve efficiency and good economic performance. The way to do that is by regulating markets to secure free and fair competition. However, Schumpeter[3] introduced the term "entrepreneurial rent" (a.k.a. Schumpeterian rent). According to Schumpeter, businesses make certain profit as a result of development of new processes that disturb economic equilibrium by temporarily raising revenue above resource costs. Innovators may earn entrepreneurial rent as long as the innovation is not successfully diffused. The entrepreneurial rent is seen as an incentive towards greater economic efficiency.

There is another kind of rent called "Rent for learning", which is analytically very similar to Schumpeterian rent because both of these rents work as incentive to reduce cost overtime. While Schumpeterian rent can be earned after an innovation, rent for learning can be earned before innovation takes place. Unlike Schumpeterian rent that results from innovation, rent for learning results from policies to facilitate learning and innovation. Amsden[4] argued that learning involves substantial amount of innovation. Learning does not only involve being able to use a technology, but also

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2 M. H. Khan, *Rents, Efficiency and Growth*, in: M.H. Khan and K.S. Jomo (ed.), 'Rents, Rent-Seeking and Economic Development: Theory and Evidence in Asia', Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

3 J. A. Schumpeter. 'The Theory of Economic Development; An Inquiry into Profits, Capital, Credit, Interest, and the Business Cycle', Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, 1934

4 A. H. Amsden, 'Asia's Next Giant: South Korea and Late Industrialization, Oxford University Press', New York and Oxford, 1989

adaptation to recipient country's social, political, economic and institutional condition. For example, policy-induced conditional subsidies may accelerate technological learning and can create rent for learning. However, the main difference between rents for learning as a result of subsidy and simple transfer of subsidy is that subsidy for learning are conditional upon learning over a specified time-frame, while there might be other political and economic motivation behind simple transfer.

Regulatory capture is an economic theory that regulatory agencies introduce regulations not driven by public interest but to create rent seeking opportunities for the dominant interest groups in the society. Stigler[5]first introduced this term in the 1970s. Stigler argued that governments do not create a monopoly in industries unintentionally. Rather, they deliberately protect the interests of producers who capture the regulatory agency, and use regulations to inhibit competition. The result of such monopolies – in the name of liberalization and competition – is often a transfer of public resources to private producers through price hikes, and at the expense of exorbitantly high social costs.[6]

Economic rent differs from political rent because of the nature of benefit. Economic rent is the rents of economic nature, the rents that give material benefits. And political rents are those rents that do not directly give material benefits but meet non-existential needs of political actors. Sekowski[7] distinguished political rent and economic rent differently. Sekowski used the role of state as a distinguishing factor in differentiating between the two rents. He explained why not all the source of rents seeking opportunities are created unintentionally by natural monopoly, rather are intentionally created by rent seekers. According to Sekowski economic rents are consequences of economic phenomena, like monopolistic market structure, especially natural monopoly. Whereas Political rent requires state interference in the economy in order for rent seekers to pursue for it. Sekowski used both definition in his analysis of the pros and cons of rent seeking.

Technology characteristics literature (Grubler, Binz, Wilson)mostly focus on the scale of technology (i.e. lumpiness vs. granularity), complexity (i.e. complex vs. simple), duration of implementation (i.e. short duration and long duration),

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5 G. J. Stigler, The Theory of Economic Regulation, *The Bell Journal of Economics and Management Science,* Vol. 2, No. 1, 1971, pp. 3-21

6 M. Sultana, How the Energy Sector Shut its door to the Public, *The Daily Star*, January 26, 2023. Available at https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/how-the-energy-sector-shut-its-doors-the-public-3230816 [Accessed on September 26, 2023]

7 S. Sekowski, 2021. The pros and cons of rent-seeking: Political rent in various research paradigms, *Studia z Polityki Publicznej/Public Policy Studies,* Warsaw School of Economics, Vol. 8(2), July 2021, pp. 1-17

availability (readily available vs. globally sticky), innovation system (standardized vs. customized)[8]. The technology characteristics study previously did not focus on the character of technology based on the beneficiaries of technology adoption. Although Innovation System literature differentiated technologies by conceptually differentiating global, regional, and national actors and developing the idea of regional, global, and national subsystems, the literature did not characterize the technology based on the interactions of those actors and how they benefit from the technology adoption. This paper will contribute to the existing literature by introducing the concept of rent seeking and how the energy technologies can be characterized based on the rent seeking opportunities.[9]

Tollison and Wagner[10] argued that monopolists and transfer recipients will spend resources to resist any economic reform that threatens rent seeking in order to protect their transfers. This is similar to rent-protecting expenditures. And these expenditures may not defeat reform initiatives politically; rather, such expenditures defeat the utilitarian rationale for reform. The rent seeker in this case does not have to secure monopoly power, rather it needs to protect its already acquired monopoly power. For an incumbent monopolist it is worthwhile to defeat a utilitarian reformer by spending enough of its monopoly rents to make a reform socially unprofitable. Scholars have defined the cost of lobbying, bribe, commission as the cost of rent seeking but they have not so far distinguished the cost of managing people's resistance from other rent seeking cost. I introduce a term "resistance management cost" as one of the rent-protecting expenditures. Although it is not possible to estimate such cost of resistance management but it is possible to theoretically define this as social cost. The social cost of not meeting community's demand can be defined as the resistance management expenditure that doesn't contribute to any productive activity but facilitate access to resources for certain interest group. Suppressing social movements and manipulating community to create consent using various means can be termed as "resistance capture".

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8 A. Grubler, C. Wilson, and G. Nemet, Apples, oranges, and consistent comparisons of the temporal dynamics of energytransitions,*Energy Research and Social Science*, Vol. 22, 2016, pp.18-25; 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; C. Wilson *et al.,*Apples, oranges, and consistent comparisons of the temporal dynamics of energy transitions,*Energy Research and Social Science*, Vol. 368, 2020, pp.36-39

9 I. Jankovic, The Eco-Industrial Complex in USA-Global Warming and Rent-Seeking Coalitions, *Energy and Environment*, Vol. 19, No. 7, 2008, pp. 941-58, *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/44397315. [Accessed 29 July 2023]

10 R. D. Tollison and R. E. Wagner, 1991. Romance, realism, and economic reform. *Kyklos*, Vol. 44, pp. 57-70.

In this research I use all different types of terminologies associated with rent seeking framework and introduce typology of rent seeking for main five energy technologies: natural gas, LNG, coal, nuclear, and solar. I will incorporate the concept of rent seeking in the technology characteristics and show how lumpy and granular technologies differ because of the inherent character of the rent seeking opportunities they create.

3. Method

This research intends to construct a typology based on qualitative data analysis. It uses cross case comparison method to compare and contrast cases to gain an insight into the variations in evidences of rent seeking. Here, the cases are five main energy technologies: natural gas, LNG, coal, nuclear, and solar. The cases are selected in the context of Bangladesh. While natural gas has been an incumbent technology that has a well-established regime, the other four technologies are still gradually transitioning towards a planned outcome. While natural gas and solar technology are indigenous, LNG, coal, and nuclear technology are mostly imported or require high investment.

The research first identified five rent seeking tools: (i) regulatory capture, (ii) lobby, (iii) license or contracts, (iv) learning rent, and (v) resistance capture. Then it analyzed the qualitative evidence of rent seeking for each energy technology to explore how adoption of these technologies create scopes for involved actors to use the already identified five rent seeking tools. Based on the comparative analysis the research shows how some technologies use some rent seeking tools extensively, while others use those tools in limited scale. The purpose of the cross comparison is to explore how some tools are used for certain technologies while others are not used at all for other types of technologies. The cross-case comparison of the energy technologies within a single case of Bangladesh will develop a conceptual framework which can be tested in other countries in the future. The method is not only replicable in other contexts, but also applicable for other energy technologies as well.

The research will mostly use news published in credible newspapers, government documents including policy documents, annual reports, Acts, master plans, and roadmaps. The secondary data and other secondary literatures will provide evidence for and against any observation. The analysis of the data obtained from the sources will form the basis of typology. Finally, the observations from the cases will be compared to fit into the typology for explaining the causal linkages to energy outcome.

4. Analysis: Rent Seeking in Power and Energy Sector

Each energy technology has its own characteristics that create a network of actors in resource formation and shape the regime in different socio-economic context. The gradual development of institutions, various combinations of technology, policy, and

social actors together create rent seeking network in which rent seekers take the opportunity of either natural monopoly or create their own opportunities with the help of government intervention. Often the energy outcomes blur the difference between the types of rent created in the process of adoption. The ultimate beneficiaries are hardly identified when it is seen through the general welfare point of view. The socio-technical and techno-economic perspectives often dominate and do not reveal that rent seeking also defines technology characters. For example, lumpy technology like nuclear, coal, gas, and LNG have more diverse actors involved in the technology diffusion process than technology like solar and wind that do not require huge investment in extracting energy, physical infrastructure, and interactions of various subsystems in innovation network. More complicated technologies may often create larger beneficiary groups who compete for rent and collude with other actors to obtain rent from that technology adoption. On the other hand, simpler and readily available technology may not create the network in rent seekers for whom ensuring rent seeking and sustaining it for longer period may be undesirable.

4.1Gas

The gas market structure in Bangladesh is characterized by a single-buyer model. Petrobangla (the state-owned single buyer company) acquires indigenous natural gas from IOCs (International Oil Company) at the price set by the production sharing contract(PSC) and import LNG at both contract prices and spot market prices from abroad. Then the two sources are mixed to supply to the common pipeline. The government allocates gas to consumers and administers a bundled gas price set by BERC (Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission). According to the Gas Act 2010, the BERC regulates the downstream gas sector including the transmission, distribution, marketing, supply and storage of natural gas. BERC[11] applies the provisions of the Gas Act to issue, renew, amend and cancel licenses for pipeline construction and gas transmission, distribution, supply and storage, and sets prices. The Act also determines penalties for operating without a license or not following the license agreement.

4.1.1Regulatory Capture

4.1.1.1 Special Provision to Deter Competition

The government enacted the Quick Enhancement of Electricity and Energy Supply (Special Provision2010).[12]This Act was intended to facilitate urgent measures to

[11] BERC, Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission Website, 2023, Available at: http://www.berc.org.bd/site/page/36c5ee50-6ddc-4439-b66f-32445a1b7378/- [Accessed on July 25, 2023]

[12] GOB, "Quick Enhancement of Power and Energy Supply (Special Provision) Act 2010", Ministry of Power, Energy, and Mineral Resources, 2010.

enhance the generation, transmission, transportation and marketing of electricity and energy and ensure uninterrupted supply of electricity and energy. The government justified the Act by claiming that it would immediately meet the demand for electricity for agricultural, industrial, commercial and domestic activities and quickly import electricity and energy from abroad. It has also allowed implementation of the decisions on urgent extraction and utilization of minerals related to energy. However, While the Act 2010 gave the government sweeping powers to implement any projects related to the generation, distribution and marketing, it has also created the scopes of uncompetitive bidding. In the name of fast-tracking, the government made contracts on the basis of unsolicited negotiation and awarded contracts without any tendering process. The provisions of the Act provided indemnity to actions of the actors involved and their actions cannot be questioned in any court.

The Act was highly criticized by non-governmental anti-corruption groups including Transparency International Bangladesh (TI Bangladesh), as it undermines the government's pledge to improve transparency and accountability. The Act overrides all other laws including anything contained in the Public Procurement Act, 2006 (Act No. XXIV of 2006) or any other law in force. As the act empowers the government to avoid compliance with the Public Procurement Act 2006, which was introduced to ensure transparency in government procurement, the scopes of rent seeking were created for only pre-selected bidders, not based on competency, efficiency, or least cost pricing, but based on their political affiliation. The effectiveness of the Act was first extended in 2012, then in 2018 once, and in 2019 for another five years. Now, the Act is effective till 2024. This Act allows contract without bidding, lobby of interest groups, and suppression of resistance but does not allow any question to the relevant authority even when social cost is too high.

4.1.1.2 Absence of Independent Regulatory Body

There have been 5 bidding rounds under production sharing contract since 1974 (1974, 1993, 1997, 2008, 2012, and 2016) through which 20 PSCs have been signed. In the last round in 2016, there was no bidding. The companies submitted expression of interests based on which the PSCs were signed. Among these Chevron supplies around 50% of the natural gas produced in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has an independent downstream regulation known as BERC. The Gas Act 2010 regulates the downstream gas sector which includes the transmission, distribution, marketing, supply and storage. However, there is no independent regulatory body for upstream regulation. Petrobangla plays the role of an upstream regulator, supervises and monitors the PSCs. At the same time, Petrobangla is the counterpart to the contracts. It also self-regulates its own operations, including all the subsidiaries. The lack of independent regulator always creates scopes for potential

conflicts of interest. Besides, self-regulation may result in lack of accountability and transparency in auditing, decision making, and planning. For example, now there is no transparency in auditing cost gas and profit gas. This creates scope for over estimation of cost and under estimation of profit.[13]

4.1.1.3 Ineffective Regulatory Body

The Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC) is an autonomous body. It was established based on the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Act 2003. The objective of the body was to improve power and energy infrastructure and hold public hearing for new price setting. The law was amended thrice in the past, including the recent amendment in December 2022. This amendment empowered the government to set power and energy tariffs on its own under "special circumstances", without a public hearing by the BERC. Before the amendment, BERC used to consider any price hike proposals after a public hearing, in which consumer associations, businesspeople, bureaucrats, experts, civil society and rights-based organizations could raise their concerns.[14] Through the amendment the mechanism of all kinds of public engagement in decision making was completely eliminated. Right after the amendment the Energy and Mineral Resource Division raised electricity price by 5 percent and gas price by 78.2 percent in the beginning 2023. This has imposed social cost on the consumers and businessmen in a time when the economic crisis has already been exacerbated by high inflation and electricity crisis. Making the regulatory body ineffective is a way of imposing social cost on the citizens without ensuring any accountability.

4.1.2Contract Without Bidding

In 2010, a few days after the Act was passed, the government announced that it would soon sign deals with 25 foreign and local firms to buy 3,000 MW of electricity to add to national grid in the next six months. Although the Processing committee was supposed to communicate, consult, and bargain with organizations and recommend for best public interest on the basis of competency, experience, and financial capability, in reality, controversial decisions were made. One such example is signing contract with Gazprom, Russia's state-owned energy company. The first Alexey Miller, Chairman of the Management Committee of Gazprom met Syed Abdus Samad, then Cabinet Minister and Executive Chairman of the Board of

[13] Ramboll, Gas Sector Master Plan Bangladesh- 2017, 2018. Available at https://policy.asiapacificenergy.org/sites/default/files/Gas%20Sector%20Master%20Plan%20Bangladesh%202017.pdf [Accessed on July 29, 2023]

[14] M. Sultana, How the Energy Sector Shut its door to the Public, *The Daily Star*, January 26, 2023. Available at https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/how-the-energy-sector-shut-its-doors-the-public-3230816 [Accessed on July 26, 2023]

Investment of Bangladesh in April 2010. The parties prepared an MOU to get it signed by Petrobangla and develop possible cooperation projects.[15]

In 2012, Bangladesh awarded the job of drilling 10 onshore gas wells to Gazprom as a fast-track solution[16] to the gas crisis. Gazprom got the contract at a higher cost than what Bapex would require. It was possible as the Quick Enhancement of Electricity and Energy Supply (Special Provisions) Act 2010 indemnified the officials concerned against prosecution for making such decisions. The authorities justified it by claiming that Bapex did not have the capacity to work on several wells at a time. Since then Gazprom has drilled a total of 20 wells. In 2023, they used the same excuse of lack of capacity to allow Gazprom to drill 5 more gas wells without tender.[17]

Gazprom's previous track record does not justify contracting Gazprom again. First, while Bapex can drill a well at maximum of Tk. 80 crore, Gazprom charged more than Tk. 180 crore.[18] Second, because of technical flaws five of the 10 wells drilled by Gazprom in the first phase stopped producing gas shortly afterwards.[19] Bapex later had to spend additional Tk. 52 for each well to drill those five wells again to resume gas production. Third, Gazprom hire third parties to perform drilling. Gazprom engaged Eriell Oilfield Services for drilling at a lower cost and took the commission from the total earning.[20] Bapex could save the money by contracting to other firms in lower cost and could save the public money lost in the process of rent seeking.

4.1.3 Lobby

In Bangladesh the single buyer purchases gas and cross subsidizes the expensive imported LNG. It is difficult to introduce dual market for LNG and natural gas

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15 Star Business Report, Gazprom agrees to explore areas of cooperation with Bangladesh, The Daily Star, April 8, 2010, Available at https://www.thedailystar.net/news-detail-133431 [Accessed on November 19, 2023]

16 S. Khan, Govt. Relies on False Hope, *The Daily Star*, June 9, 2013. Available at https://www.thedailystar.net/news/govt-relies-on-false-gas-hope [Accessed: July 26, 2023]

17 Mohiuddin 2023. Russia's Gazprom to get more work without tender, *Prothom Alo,* July 13, 2023. Available at https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/feunngrz7s [Accessed on July 26, 2023]

18 M. Arifuzzaman, Gazprom given work at high cost, BAPEX deprived, *ProthomAlo*, September 2020. Available at https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/gazprom-given-work-at-high-cost-bapex-deprived [Accessed on July 26, 2023]

19 M. Ahsan, Five Gazprom-drilled gas wells require more investments. *New Age*, October 1, 2016. Available at https://www.newagebd.net/article/ 51/five-gazprom-drilled-gas-wells-require-more-investments[Accessed onJuly 26, 2023]

20 Arifuzzaman, Gazprom to drill Bhola gas wells for additional Tk. 1.32b. *Prothom Alo*, November 2020, Available at https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/gazprom-to-drill-bhola-gas-wells-for-additional-tk-132b [Accessed on July 28, 2023]

because businesses get privileged access to cheaper gas. Bangladesh currently practices a cross subsidy system that benefits handful of private power and energy producers (both foreign and local) at the expense of government owned producers. This subsidy indicates the presence of a special interest groups who have lobbied or managed to develop their businesses and got access to resources using their influence to ensure rent.

Previously when there was resistance against gas price increase, the government justified the price increase by committing to use the extra revenue to create a gas development fund. According to the BERC regulation, that fund was supposed to be spent on gas exploration, production, development and distribution of gas. However, as the Ukraine war started Petrobangla spent Tk. 2,000 crore from the Gas Development Fund (GDF)to import LNG without the permission of Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission.[21]This shows how the fund meant to explore gas was used for importing expensive LNG. The social cost increased as public fund was used to buy more expensive fuel.

Bangladesh is building a special economic zone in Mirsarai, where Indian companies will get privileged access to gas. Petrobangla used the gas development fund to construct a pipeline to deliver gas to the economic zone. Instead of investing the public fund in gas exploration this pipeline will be used to supply gas and LNG. This misallocation of gas fund created the scope of transferring public fund generated from high price given by the citizens to private companies.

During the electricity crisis in 1990s, Bangladesh started to use natural gas based captive power to solve the immediate crisis of some industries. Since 1996, when the industrialists lobbied to ensure gas supply for captive power, the use of captive power grew very fast and by the end of 2000, captive electricity generation consumed around 15 percent of the total gas consumption. According to the Policy Guidelines for Power Purchase from Captive Power Plant captive power plants are required to acquire license to distribute electricity.[22] As Gas has become a cheaper source of power generation than the grid electricity and it became lucrative, the demand for gas

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[21] Staff Correspondent, Tk. 2,000cr meant for gas exploration but Petrobangla spent on import, *The Daily Star*, August 3, 2022 Available at https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/meant-gas-exploration-spent-import-3086291 [Accessed on July 27, 2023]

[22] Power Division, "Policy Guidelines for Power Purchase from Captive Power Plant", Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2007. Available at https://berc.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/berc.portal.gov.bd/policies/37a75205_8c94_434e_b8e8_0dd643b2a00d/Policy%20Guidelines%20for%20Power%20Purchase%20from%20Captive%20Power%20Plant,%202007.pdf[Accessed on July 27, 2023]

for captive generation increased. However, captive power is not an efficient source of power. According to Islam (2008) captive power failed to achieve economic scale and inflated energy demand.[23]The increasing dependency on captive power has distorted the gas market and now it has become difficult to reverse the option.

Lobbying is a common strategy used by multinational companies to sign production sharing contracts with host countries from where resources need to be extracted. Bangladesh is not an exception in case of signing PSCs. Muhammad[24] pointed out that "US involvement in lobbying, conspiring, pressurizing peripheral governments for ensuring corporate interest especially in energy sector has been well known." Behind every PSCs signed since 1990s there were lobbies of either the direct lobbies of IOCs or indirect lobbies through diplomatic channel and the World Bank. Wikileaks occasionally leaked some evidence of US lobbying in support of PSC signings.

4.1.4 Resistance Capture

Since late1990s when the losses and gains from signing production sharing contracts were gradually being revealed, in Bangladesh conscious citizens from different backgrounds and platforms organized resistances to protect national interest. Although in the beginning there was no significant attempt from the governments to resist the movements against gas export option in PSCs, violent attack on the protests were observed mostly in 2009 and 2011 when Model PSCs had options to export gas. The government business nexus also indirectly used consultants, media, and experts to influence public opinion for gas export. Although the evidence of monetary rewards offered to the consultants by the lobbyists were not directly visible, the professional connections of the consultants with the companies made it obvious that there was tacit understanding between those consultants and the companies.

Although in the face of the movement Bangladesh ultimately cancelled the option to export, later in the following PSCs the export option was included. The effort given to resistance management has gradually declined as there was no significant interest from the IOCs to explore gas in deep sea water. However, since the Ukraine war has started in early 2020s and the energy crisis started to cripple the economy, the interests of IOCs and government in signing new PSCs are growing again.

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[23] M. N. Islam, Energy Security in the Ganges, Bramhaputra and the Meghna (GBM) Basins: Bangladesh Perspective. In *Situation Analysis on Energy Security: Ecosystems for Life – a Bangladesh-India Initiative*. Gland, Switzerland: International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), 2014.

[24] A. Muhammad, 'State, Natural Resources, and Energy Security' in Development Re-examined. University Press Limited, Dhaka, 2021.

4.2 Coal

In 2023, the installed capacity of coal-based power plants stood at 4188 MW, which is about 16.8% of the total capacity.[25]Five years ago, the capacity was only 2.76%. Currently Chinese, Indian, and Japanese companies are partnering with state-owned enterprise and private companies to operate the power plants. Compared to other new energy technologies coal grew faster than all other technologies in last one decade. Coal as a technology involves many different kinds of actors including coal mining companies, workers association, logistic companies, distributors, power plants, and a big network of beneficiaries from coal technology expansion. Because of the diverse network of stakeholder coal lobby is usually stronger across countries, hence have greater influence on the decision makers. Development of coal technology use regulatory capture, license, lobby, and resistance management more extensively than other technologies as tools to form a regime.

4.2.1 Regulatory Capture

Under the Quick Enhancement of Electricity and Energy Supply (Special Provisions) in 2010, four power plants, Rampal, Bashkhali, Barisal, and Matarbari power plants were constructed in partnership with India, China, Japan. More are under construction. There were protest against all of these power plants. According to the Bangladesh Environment Conservation (Amendment) Act (2010) "Ecologically critical Areas" (ECA) are areas rich in unique biodiversity and in need of protection or conservation of cultural and natural heritage threatened by destructive activities. In 1999 the Government of Bangladesh has declared Rampal coal power plant location close to Sundarban as ECAs. Undermining the potential environmental and social cost in Bangladesh, the coal power plants were built to create opportunities for the rent seekers. In the name of ensuring quick supply Bangladesh signed a contract with an Indian private company Adani to import electricity from a coal-based power plants at a high cost. IEEFA has called this too expensive, too late, and too risky project.[26]

4.2.2 Resistance Management/Resistance Capture

Initially in 1994, Bangladesh government awarded a coal exploration license to BHP Minerals, an Australian company for mining. Because of multiple environmental and engineering complexities the company decided not to run coal mining operation and

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[25] Bangladesh Power Development Board, Power Generation Unit, 2023. Website Available at http://119.40.95.168/bpdb/power_generation_unit [Accessed on July 27, 2023]

[26] IEEFA "Adani Godda Power Project: Too Expensive, too Late, and too Risky for Bangladesh" 2018, Website available at https://ieefa.org/resources/adani-godda-power-project-too-expensive-too-late-and-too-risky-bangladesh [Accessed on August 15, 2023]

in 1999, BHP transferred its licenses to Asia Energy. The local community was against the project from the beginning. In August 26, 2006 in a demonstration against the open pit coal mining, law enforcers fired and three protesters were killed. The violent effort to stop resistance was backed by the coal lobby that was growing stronger with the government cooperation. Similarly, there has been a strong movement against building a coal power plant near Sundarbans. The law enforcers were instructed to attack the protestors. As a result of the violent attack on the protestors many were injured. Five workers at the Bashkhali power plant were killed in a protest by the local communities.[27] During all of these movements the consultants, media, and experts were hired to influence public opinion on behalf of the companies and government. In fact, public money was used to run campaign using the media about the positive sides of the coal power plant. These investments to manage the resistance and influence public opinion is the cost the rent seekers paid to ensure their rent seeking activities.

4.2.3 License for importing coal

When initially 29 coal powered projects were planned, 25 of the 29 proposed coal projects planned to import coal. Were those implemented they would require to import coal from Australia, India, Indonesia, and South Africa. License for importing coal is a great source of rent seeking as it excludes other competitors in the market and gives the licensee exclusive right to supply coal for long period of time. To secure the license the suppliers compete with each other. However, in 2021 Bangladesh scrapped the plan to construct ten coal-based power plants. However, rest of the coal power plants including those in Rampal, Matarbari, Banshkhali, and Payra are dependent on the foreign coal and the purchase of coal is a great source of generating rent by private companies.

4.2.5 Indirect Lobby:

A new interest group representing industrialists, who are building industries around the Sundarbans' ecologically critical area, reinforced the lobbying for the Rampal coal power plant. The government permitted license to 190 industrial and commercial units in the ecologically critical area (ECA) of the Sundarbans. According to the experts, the industries will pose serious threat to the biodiversity. According to a DoE report submitted to the High Court of the industrial units, at least 24 of the industries fall under the "red category", meaning those are extremely harmful to the fragile

[27] F.M. Rahaman and M. Yousuf, "Banshkhali Power Plant Site: 5 workers killed as cops open fire", *The Daily Star,* Updated on April 18, 2021, Available at: https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/news/banshkhali-power-plant-site-5-workers-killed-cops-open-fire-2079153 [Accessed on September 29, 2023]

biodiversity.[28] Giving permission to these industries is a way to giving benefit to a diverse interest group who for their own interest will continue to lobby on behalf of occupying the land and converting the ecologically critical area to industrial area.

4.3Nuclear:

Construction of the two units of nuclear power plants in Rooppur, each producing 1200 MW of electricity is scheduled to be completed in 2024 and 2025 respectively.The construction of more than 12-billion-dollar project started in 2017. Although the first unit was supposed to start operation in 2023, the project has been delayed. Initially this was a nuclear cooperation between Russia and Bangladesh. Later India got involved in the project for training human resource and capacity building.

4.3.1Regulation in favor of nuclear

The main regulation regarding nuclear power project is the Nuclear Power Plant Act 2015. The Act sets up the Nuclear Power Company of Bangladesh (NPCB) to operate the plant, however, Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission (BAEC) remained as an owner of the power plant. The law does not contain any provisions for the consequences of any disaster and provide indemnity protection to the operator. Bangladesh does not have any comprehensive law on nuclear power production to guide the future safe energy production to regulate nuclear safety and liability rules.

In 2019 Bangladesh signed a deal with Russia for the supply of uranium for the Nuclear Power Plant (RNPP). Under the deal, Russia will supply the nuclear fuel needed for the plant during its entire life cycle. In 2017, the two countries have also signed 'spent fuel sent back' agreement for managing the high-level nuclear waste of plant. Bangladesh government has not given sufficient attention to the technical issues associated with storage, transportation and disposal of mid-level and low-level radioactive material and the waste except forming a company to manage the waste. In case Russia does not take the nuclear waste back it could raise the risk of serious environmental damage to Bangladesh.

Large energy deals generally have a higher risk of rent-seeking. There are rent seeking risks in large projects like nuclear power plant which involves large infrastructure development, involvement of different types of vendors, licensee, and subcontractors.[29] It creates a network of actors competing with each other for vendor

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[28] Staff Correspondent, License to harm Sundarbans, *The Daily Star*, April 6, 2018, Available at https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/licence-harm-sundarbans-1558918 [Accessed on July 27, 2023]

[29] B. Martin and H. Winkler, "Procurement models applied to independent power producer programmes in South Africa", Energy Research Center, University of Cape Town, 2014.

contract, licenses, and concessions. Countries prepared to offer public support to nuclear power plant are generally given support for nuclear power projects. However, in case of large size nuclear power plant projects (between 1 GW and 1.6 GW) this support is often facilitated by rent-seeking and corruption.

The government of Bangladesh has exempted the NPP from all taxes and duties, including regulatory duty, import duty, advanced VAT, and other supplementary duty on all imported goods, parts and machinery. These monetary incentives create scope for earning both learning rent and monopoly rent. For construction of nuclear power plant, the government of Bangladesh took extremely large amount of loan. Although the project was expected to cost US$12.65 billion, the cost can escalate further because this is "cost-plus-fee" contract. The vendor may come up with any cost escalation into the contract amount. The final cost of generating power could be "at least 60 percent higher than the present retail cost" of electricity in Bangladesh. Generally, one of the reasons of this escalating cost is rent seeking by a network of rent seekers, both within public sector and private sector.

4.3.2 Rent for Learning

According to the nuclear agreement, Russia would supply all main components, build the plant and operate it until Bangladesh has the capacity to operate independently. The Russian state-owned company is training local technicians in Bangladesh, who will take over the operation of the plant 10 years after its launch. Bangladesh government has undertaken the Human Resource Development program in nuclear science and technology involving Universities.[30]

India, Bangladesh and Russia signed an agreement to allow Indian firms in construction and installation works in the "non-critical" category and cooperate in personnel training, exchange of experience and consulting support.[31] Nuclear as a priority strategic project of the government received government support to develop capacity for a specified period of time. It allowed the network of actors receive learning rent from developing capacity, which is largely missing in other energy technologies.

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[30] R. Sharma, With first nuclear power plant, Bangladesh focuses energy on training manpower, *Nuclear Asia*, December 1, 2017. Website Available at https://www.nuclearasia.com/feature/first-nuclear-power-plant-bangladesh-focuses-energy-training-manpower/1542/[Accessed on 28th July]

[31] D. Vashkaran, *Mint*, March 1, 2018. Website Available at https://www.livemint.com/Industry/QD5ex7YkwRkooAmYgWPVHK/India-Russia-Bangladesh-sign-pact-for-Rooppur-atomic-plant.htm l [Accessed on July 28, 2023]

4.3.3 Resistance Capture

There are three ways through which anti-nuclear resistance has been controlled in Bangladesh. First, from the very beginning the planned suppression of potential antinuclear movement at the local level by forcibly repelling protests and by threatening any dissenting voice reduced the risk of cancellation of the project. Second, lack of any visible protest in the media helped to manipulate the idea of public acceptability. Government sponsored campaign to disseminate partial knowledge about the risk of the projects to influence public opinion. Third, currently there is no major antinuclear resistance that can channel public opposition towards the project, especially because the environmental impact assessment was not disclosed to the public. The government paid the cost of all the campaigns and mobilized local resources to suppress the initial movement.

4.4 Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG)

Bangladesh has started to import LNG from 2018. Bangladesh used to use around 650mmcf to 800mmcf capacity from imported LNG to the national grid before global LNG spot market price increased because of Ukraine war. In 2022 and 2023 the import has come down to around half of the capacity (500-553mmcf). The LNG price increase and the unused capacity has created enormous social cost as the businesses started to shrink output, residential consumers suffered from heavy load shedding, and inflation crippled the lives of the poor and middle class.[32]

4.4.1 Regulatory Capture

When Bangladesh planned to increase its dependency on LNG, LNG was already expensive compared to the natural gas. The gas sector master plan 2017 recommended the government to explore indigenous gas rather than spending on importing costly LNG. Independent experts have also been advising the government for many years to prioritize onshore and offshore gas exploration. But, to serve the interests of the LNG lobby, the government focused on importing LNG. At that time the Quick Enhancement of Power and Energy (Special Provision) Act 2010, created a ground for taking such economically inefficient decision. As a result, in 2023, the government is paying around USD 202,500 capacity charge daily even without regasification. This is an example of both regulatory captures to create rent seeking opportunities.

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[32] M. A. Rahman, Govt. struggles to clear LNG bills, amid dollar dearth. *Financial Express*, May 29, 2023. Website Available athttps://today.thefinancialexpress.com.bd/last-page/govt-struggles-to-clear-lng-bills-amid-dollar-dearth-1685298405 [Accessed on July 15, 2023]

4.4.2 Lobby

From the experience of high import dependency on LNG and difficulty in buying expensive LNG during dwindling foreign reserve, the government has not changed its LNG dependent policy. Rather the government has been considering contracts with the private operators to build two more LNG import terminals. Recently the cabinet committee on Economic Affairs approved the third LNG terminal with capacity of 600 mmcf to be set by Summit group. (TBS Report 2023)[33]

After the gas crisis intensified in 2022, Bapex drilled nine wells and saved at least Tk 1 lakh crore on LNG import by spending only Tk 812 crore. To buy the same amount of LNG through a long-term contract, government would have to spent foreign currency equivalent to Tk 96,000 crore. To buy it from the spot market, government had to spend Tk 1,70,000 crore. From 2018-19 it spent Tk 85,000 crore on importing LNG. This sets an example of how lobby of private and international investors have influenced the decisions of the government in energy planning.

4.4.3 Rent for Learning

The two floating gas and re-gasification unit (FSRUs) at Maheshkhali of Cox's Bazar have 1000mmcf capacity to inject gas to the national gas transmission grid per day. One FSRU is run by Excelerate Energy of the United Sates with 500 million cubic feet per day capacity and another by a national company Summit Group. The government exempted VAT, duty and other supplementary duties on materials and services for construction of the terminals. This has reduced the cost for suppliers of new technology. It enabled to create rent for learning for LNG technology.[34]

4.5 Solar

In 2016, the Power System Master Plan of Bangladesh set a target to produce 10% of Bangladesh's electricity from renewable sources by 2041.[35]To achieve the target, the government was considering unsolicited proposals from the private investors to establish solar projects.

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[33] TBS Report, Summit to set up 3rd floating LNG terminal at Moheshkhali, *The Business Standard*, June 14, 2023. Website Available at https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/energy/summit-set-3rd-floating-lng-terminal-moheshkhali-649742 [Accessed: 15.7. 2023]

[34] D. A. Mala, Summit LNG project gets tax exemption, *Financial Express*, December 22, 2017, Website Available at https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/trade/summit-lng-terminal-project-gets-tax-exemption-1513917976 [Accessed on October 3, 2023]

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

4.5.1 Regulatory Capture

The 2010 Quick Enhancement of power and energy supply Act started to give government the power to bypass the open competitive bidding process and fast-track and simplify power plant approvals. It has also given development rights directly to local and foreign investors to submit unsolicited proposals. The revision of the law in 2014 ensured extension of the time needed to win approval for energy and electricity projects until October 2021. In case of renewable this particular incentive has not been successful as expected. Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) has issued letter of interest (LOI) to eighteen companies, out of which only 8 companies have been able to sign the Power Purchase Agreement (PPA), but there has not been any significant progress in implementation. One of the reasons is developers usually need to get more than 30 permits from different offices which makes the process lengthy and difficult. Although the power cell decided not to invite any unsolicited proposal from 2019 and initiated to organize auction, unsolicited proposals continued. Auction in the formative phase does not provide incentives to firms. Thus, the solar developers could not sufficiently benefit from the regulatory capture. However, recently there has been some examples of uncompetitive bidding through which some utility scale solar power plants have signed PPAs to sell to PDB at high tariff. This is creating interest among private firms to enter the market.

4.5.2 Lobby

Although there is no clear evidence of lobby for solar, the slow growth of solar, particularly for rooftop and utility scale indicates that the solar lobby is almost nonexistent. Even if it exists, it is very weak compared to other energy technologies. The solar developers who have been lobbying to market irrigation technologies are trying to supply excess electricity to the grid to reduce cost, but the government has not done anything to meet their demand. Besides, the solar manufacturers who were lobbying for government incentive to survive also lobbied to get incentive but had to shut down because of lack of incentives.

4.5.3 Rent for Learning

According to the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (Tariff for Roof Top Solar PV Electricity) Regulations, 2016 (Draft) there is option to consider incentive or subsidy while determining tariff.[36]However, Subsidies in buying at high cost is contradictory to auction and it is not clear how Bangladesh is going to manage these two contradictory approaches simultaneously. Besides, local level extortion,

[36] BangladeshEnergyRegulatoryCommission (TariffForRoof Top SolarPvt. Electricity) Regulations, 2016 (Draft), Avaialbleat: http://berc.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/berc.portal.gov.bd/page/a250b6fc_8bcf_4c96_bb20_3c3de230467a/berc_tariff_regulations_rooftof_solar%28draft%29.pdf [Accessed on July 30, 2023]

bureaucratic red tapes, availability of land, difficulty in getting license, and need for adaptation to local condition raise the risk of the projects. In a developing country like Bangladesh, where renewable investment is costly because of high risks involved in the process and the process of learning requires government support, there is a need for allowing the producers to earn learning rent either in the form of low interest, price subsidy, any other raw material subsidy, infrastructural and administrative support that reduces the cost. Rather than creating any such learning rent to reduce cost, the government imposed 1% customs duty on solar panels and 37% customs duty on inverters. This shows that there is an absence of rent for learning in the renewable energy sector. This indicates that the renewable entrepreneurs are deprived of earning rent for learning if they have to operate in the competitive environment from the very beginning.

5. Result

Rent seeking opportunities are different for five energy technologies. Bangladesh has already established a strong gas regime. The process has started since 1980s when after the oil shock, most of the countries in the world were searching indigenous energy resources. At that time Bangladesh has started to drill new wells. Bangladesh signed a number of PSCs through which foreign investors have started to extract natural gas. Slowly Petrobangla has started to develop its capacity. Towards the end of 1980s BAPEX (Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration and Production Company) was formed to explore gas in Bangladesh. Overtime, BAPEX developed its capacity. However, Bangladesh government continued to hire foreign firm like Gazprom in exploring gas. The Quick Enhancement of Electricity and Energy Supply (QEEES 2010) Act 2010 facilitated the contracts in many ways. The foreign actors lobbied to sign PSCs with the government. The World Bank directly advocated for investment of the multi-national oil companies to extract indigenous gas resources of Bangladesh.

	Regulatory capture	Lobby	License/Contract	Learning Rent	Resistance Capture
Gas	√ (QEEES 2010 active after regime formation)	√(Lobbies behind PSCs)	√(Contract)	√	(Strong resistance against gas export)
LNG	√ (QEEES 2010 active)	√ (Strong Lobby)	√ (Contract for LNG import)	√ (Infrastructure development)	None
Coal	√(QEEES 2010 active)	√(Strong Lobby)	√ (License for Coal import)	√ (Financing and Infrastructure development)	√ (Strong resistances were suppressed)

Nuclear	√(QEEES 2010 active)	Strategic Cooperation	√ (Contracts for construction)	√ (Infrastructure and human resource development	√(Suppressing movement and campaign for nuclear)
Solar	√(QEEES 2010 active at limited scale)	√ Weak lobby	N/A	None	Limited

Towards the end of 1990s and the beginning of 2000s when foreign firms were willing to sign more PSCs with the condition of export, there was strong resistance from the people of Bangladesh and at one point the government was forced to take out the condition of export from the PSC.

Although LNG is a relatively new technology in Bangladesh, its use and economic efficiency has been questioned from the very beginning because of the expense of technology. Local investor Summit Group and Excelerate Energy of the US got the license to establish the FSRU LNG terminal. Initially they obtained license with the excuse of dwindling gas reserve and meeting the demand of gas. The government supported heavily in developing the infrastructure. Developing capacity of a private company also set an example of creating learning rent in this technology.

In case of coal all types of rent seeking tools have been used to facilitate coal expansion. Regulatory capture was used for almost all coal-based power plant. The coal lobby has always been active. Almost all power plants, especially Payra Power plant, Rampal power plant, and Bashkhali Power plant faced strong resistance from the civil society. The Phulbari coal mine had to be postponed because of resistance from local people. The operation of power plants depends on the imported coal for which license needs to be issued. License as a form of rent seeking thus exists in coal sector. Besides, Bangladesh's import of coal from Indian coal power plant of Adani in Jharkhand is also an example of strong coal lobby and license.

Nuclear power plant is an exceptional establishment because it is a strategic cooperation rather than a commercial deal. Although it involves three governments, Bangladesh, Russia, and India, the cooperation is not free from rent seeking. The huge infrastructure associated with building a nuclear power plant involves multi party license, agreements, contracts etc. To stop resistance and heavily run campaign for nuclear the government has been making good investment through TV commercials, publications, and nuclear bus tour campaign.[37]

[37] TBS Report, The Second Annual Bus Campaign for Nuclear Power, The Business Standard, November 30, Website Available at https://www.businessinsiderbd.com/tech/news/31694/nuclear-bus-starts-journey-to-create-public-interest-in-science-technology [Accessed on October 3, 2023]

In case of solar, although there is no learning rent, all the other rent seeking opportunities including license, lobby, and regulatory capture exist in a very limited scale. The solar lobby is very weak compared to other technologies like coal, gas, LNG, and nuclear that have a long history of establishing regime locally and internationally.

In case of Bangladesh there have been several examples of people's resistance that have been suppressed either by using security force, threats by local goons, restricting right to rally and human chain, violent attack on protesters, manipulating information, bribing some leaders of movement, and using advertisement to form public opinion in favor of environmentally harmful projects. In case of coal and nuclear the resistance management expenditure is higher than in case of solar and LNG.

6. Conclusion

Comparison of five energy technologies reveals that all rent seeking opportunities are relatively more limited in case of solar than coal, gas, LNG, and nuclear technologies. The coal sector in Bangladesh set an example of how fast a coal regime can develop in a country that did not use almost any coal in electricity generation about a decade ago. Although Bangladesh has a strong gas regime, the negligence of indigenous gas exploration implies how other rent seeking opportunities in LNG, coal, and nuclear were so rewarding that other technologies like LNG, coal, and nuclear developed fast over the last one decade.

Among these technologies coal has the highest rent seeking opportunities involving various actors. Although coal developed very fast, the existing coal plants like Rampal, Payra, Bashkhali stopped commercial operation as the government cannot spend dollar to buy coal in 2023. These are now going through uncertainties because coal price has increased and Taka depreciated against dollar. The social cost to the consumers increased with the electricity price hike and consequent inflation. In the time of crisis of early 2020s, the coal lobby has again become active to extract coal in Bangladesh.

Although the gas reserve in Bangladesh is depleting fast, still there is a great potential of unexplored deep-sea natural gas. The rent that a monopoly firm can secure from signing a PSC is huge. Unless a suitable monopolist is found, that could share the rent through collusion, unexplored gas remains as a strategic reserve for future political negotiation. Although natural gas extraction technology is complex and has huge rent in the process of extraction, distribution, and electricity generation, the inactivity during the last one decade and recent PSC approval and attempt to sign PSC with ExxonMobil before election indicates that the untapped rent seeking

opportunities throughout the last one decade was a strategic decision of the government.

Nuclear market is very limited worldwide and this technology usually diffuses from only few core countries and it usually diffuses very slowly because of the lumpy and complex character of the technology. For example, the human resources in Bangladesh may be trained to work in the nuclear power plant, but in reality, the control over the technology will remain only on the core country Russia. Although in case of nuclear, fuel purchase is not required as frequently as in case of LNG and coal, therefore it does not have regular source of rent seeking from fuel purchase and logistics. However, the set-up of complex technology, maintenance, and operation afterwards require involvement of diverse group of actors, who for securing their rents, create a network of lobby group that further reinforces the strategic position of the core and host countries.

It was never unpredictable that the price of LNG and coal may become unstable anytime during any global crisis and the variable cost may increase. The growing import dependency is an outcome driven mostly by the rent seeking and rent protecting behavior of the suppliers. For example, Japan's policy to expand its coal technology has led JICA to develop power systems master plan in which coal technology has been given priority. The worldwide increase in LNG use has overcome the challenge of transporting gas with pipeline. The growth of LNG market as a transition fuel has become widely accepted in many countries including Bangladesh. However, undermining the gas exploration potential of Bangladesh, and over emphasizing the use of LNG has raised the question about the rent seeking incentives in LNG technology. The evidence shows that even after the experience of high LNG price, the government approved new LNG terminal despite existing capacity remains unused.

The market price based net metering pricing policy in solar does not effectively incentivize rooftop solar technology growth. Government support for land leasing, infrastructure building, grid upgradation, and other economic incentives are missing largely because rent seeking incentives are very limited in solar technology. Once the solar panels are set, the technology relies mostly on the maintenance and efficiency increase. There is no need for regular import of fuel through which rent seeking opportunities are usually created for other technologies like coal and LNG. However, after the energy crisis has started the recent purchasing power agreements signed without bidding is creating scopes for private firms to enter the market.

All energy technologies have their own characteristics, pace of diffusion, network of actors, and context specific elements that make the technologies adoptable for the countries. The rent seeking incentives associated with these energy technology

adoptions have largely been undermined in the literature when technology characteristics are defined. This research shows that not only technology's risk and complexity, role of state, market, and capital availability, but also the type of rent seeking opportunities associated with each technology plays an important role in determining why certain technologies have become more feasible than the others.