

**JOURNAL  
O F  
THE ASIATIC SOCIETY OF BANGLADESH  
(HUMANITIES)**

---

**Vol. 69**

**No. 2**

**December 2024**

---

**Editor  
Ahmed A. Jamal**

**Associate Editor  
Mohammad Abul Kawser**



**ASIATIC SOCIETY OF BANGLADESH**

## EDITORIAL BOARD

Chairperson	Professor Sajahan Miah
Editor	Professor Ahmed A. Jamal
Associate Editor	Professor Mohammad Abul Kawser
Members:	Professor Mahbuba Nasreen
	Professor Md. Fayek Uzzaman
	Professor Al Masud Hasanuzzaman

*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.

**Correspondence** : All correspondence may be addressed to- Editor, Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh (Humanities), 5 Old Secretariat Road, Nimtali, Ramna, Dhaka 1000, Bangladesh.

Telephone : (880+2) 9513783

E-mail : [asbpublication@gmail.com](mailto:asbpublication@gmail.com)

Website : [www.asiaticsociety.org.bd](http://www.asiaticsociety.org.bd)

**Published by** The Asiatic Society of Bangladesh

**Price** Tk. 200.00 (Two hundred taka)

**ISSN** 1015–6836 (Print)

## Guidelines for Contributors

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

Notes and References should be cited as follows:

1. P.J. Marshall, *Bengal: The British Bridgehead, The Cambridge History of India*, (Cambridge 1987), p. 77.
2. Willem Van Schendel, 'Economy of the Working Classes'. Sirajul Islam (ed.), *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. II, (Economic History), (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh 1992), pp. 542-99.
3. W.H. Morris-Jones, "Pakistan Post-Mortem and the Roots of Bangladesh", *Political Quarterly*, Vol. 18 (April-June), 1972, pp. 187-200.

### DECLARATION

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

The author of each paper agrees that (i) the work submitted has been written by her/him and that its similarity with any other published work/unpublished thesis does not exceed 20% (ii) s/he takes all responsibilities for the content of the paper; (iii) the content of the paper has not been published before in any referred journal or has not been submitted to any such journal for publication; and (iv) s/he accords consent to the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh to publish the paper.

### BOOK REVIEW

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

The *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh* (Humanities) is entitled to assign DOI to all individual papers starting from the June 2023 issue of the Journal. This will help scholars all over the world to easily locate the published papers. It will also increase the visibility and facilitate citation of the papers. With this, the Journal has taken another step forward in terms of academic excellence as well as international recognition.

**JOURNAL OF  
THE ASIATIC SOCIETY OF BANGLADESH  
(HUMANITIES)**

---

**Vol. 69**

**No. 2**

**December 2024**

---

**CONTENTS**

<b>Rickshaw Pullers and Their Strategies to Deal with Everyday Conflicts in Dhaka City, Bangladesh</b> Md. Touhidul Islam and Md. Saifur Rahman Babu DOI: <a href="https://doi.org/10.3329/jasbh.v69i2.78643">https://doi.org/10.3329/jasbh.v69i2.78643</a>	145
<b>Transformation of Bengal after Arrival of Muslims</b> Mohammad Bilal Hossain DOI: <a href="https://doi.org/10.3329/jasbh.v69i2.78646">https://doi.org/10.3329/jasbh.v69i2.78646</a>	175
<b>The Situation of the Dhaka University Campus during the Liberation War of Bangladesh</b> Nasir Ahmad DOI: <a href="https://doi.org/10.3329/jasbh.v69i2.78648">https://doi.org/10.3329/jasbh.v69i2.78648</a>	203
<b>Exploring the Common Ground: A Comparative Analysis of Zoroastrianism and Islam</b> Shafi Md. Mostofa DOI: <a href="https://doi.org/10.3329/jasbh.v69i2.78650">https://doi.org/10.3329/jasbh.v69i2.78650</a>	223
<b>Resistance on the Stage and Beyond: The Role of Women in the Cultural Conferences of East Pakistan, 1948-57</b> Shanta Patranobish DOI: <a href="https://doi.org/10.3329/jasbh.v69i2.78651">https://doi.org/10.3329/jasbh.v69i2.78651</a>	239
<b>Service Quality of Museums for Sustainable Tourism: An Empirical Study of Museums in Bangladesh</b> Dilruba Sharmin and Farina Haque DOI: <a href="https://doi.org/10.3329/jasbh.v69i2.78652">https://doi.org/10.3329/jasbh.v69i2.78652</a>	259

**THE ASIATIC SOCIETY OF BANGLADESH**  
**Council 2024 & 2025**

President : Professor Dr. Harun-or-Rashid

Vice-Presidents : Professor Dr. Hafiza Khatun  
Professor Dr. Sajahan Miah  
Professor Dr. Yearul Kabir

Treasurer : Dr. Muhammad Abdul Mazid

General Secretary: Professor Dr. Mohammad Siddiqur Rahman Khan

Secretary : Professor Dr. Md. Abdur Rahim

Members : Professor Dr. Syed Anwar Husain (Fellow)  
Barrister Shafique Ahmed (Fellow)  
Professor Dr. A K M Golam Rabbani  
Professor Dr. Mahbuba Nasreen  
Professor Md. Lutfur Rahaman  
Professor Dr. Sadeka Halim  
Professor Dr. Asha Islam Nayeem  
Professor Dr. Abdul Bashir  
Professor Dr. Najma Khan Majlis  
Professor Dr. Md. Abdul Karim  
Professor Dr. Shuchita Sharmin  
Professor Dr. Sabbir Ahmed

## **Rickshaw Pullers and Their Strategies to Deal with Everyday Conflicts in Dhaka City, Bangladesh**

Md. Touhidul Islam\*  
Md. Saifur Rahman Babu\*\*

### **Abstract**

The rickshaw puller community commutes passengers from one place to another, making people's busy lives easy in Dhaka city. While most studies focus on the socio-economic conditions, health hazards and survival techniques of rickshaw pullers, fewer scholarships explore different complexes and conflicts they face daily. Therefore, this paper, developed with primary data collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with some permanent and seasonal rickshaw pullers, analyses various conflicts this community faces and strategies they apply to deal with those conflicts. Drawing on Thomas-Kilmann's Conflict Management Model that operationalises five strategies for parties in a conflict situation, it argues that rickshaw pullers mostly choose pragmatic approaches that protect their ontological needs and interests in dealing with everyday conflicts. They face conflicts in four broad aspects (e.g., economic issues, shared space, entry restriction and legal space, and personal space) and engage in conflicts with different actors, including passengers, garage owners, fellow rickshaw pullers, other vehicle drivers, traffic personnel etc., mostly over financial and individual respect issues. Although they consider power dynamics to determine the extent of engagement with the other party, they apply a competitive approach that is mostly used to deal with financial issues. Depending on the power parity of the parties, they show less self-restraint and become assertive in responding to conflicts that originate from disrespect and dishonour to them. However, they preferentially avoid conflicts when the disputing other party is more powerful than them, and avoidance is considered less costly than engaging in disputes. Due to their structural weaknesses and ignorance, rickshaw pullers often accommodate others' demands and collaborate for common benefits. Although they reach an informal compromise through generous negotiation with passengers, garage owners and traffic personnel to balance their interests and needs, a group of other actors approach as third-party peacemakers to settle their violent engagements with other rickshaw pullers on the streets.

**Key words:** Rickshaw pullers, Conflict, Power dynamics, Dhaka city, Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Management Model.

### **Introduction**

The capital city of Bangladesh, Dhaka, is popularly known as a city of rickshaws. Rapid urbanisation attracts many unemployed people to migrate to this city. The

---

\* Associate Professor, Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh. E-mail: [touhid.pacs@du.ac.bd](mailto:touhid.pacs@du.ac.bd)

\*\* An independent researcher who completed both his graduation and post-graduation from the Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Dhaka, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh. E-mail: [dusairbabu@gmail.com](mailto:dusairbabu@gmail.com)

majority, if not all, of rickshaw pullers, have migrated for better economic and livelihood opportunities in the destination place as they lack fewer employment opportunities in their rural localities.<sup>1</sup> They face fewer barriers to entering into this informal job market but see more potential to generate quick income.<sup>2</sup> Rickshaw plays a vital role in the transportation system, providing affordable and convenient means of travel for many lower-income and lower-middle-income group people.<sup>3</sup> As a transportation system, it has made their lives easier than other vehicles because of its economic cost-effectiveness and has been contributing to the informal economy.<sup>4</sup> Bangladesh Institute of Labor Studies data shows that around 2.2 million rickshaw pullers live in Dhaka.<sup>5</sup> They undoubtedly face serious competition for having passengers, but they earn less money compared to their hard work and suffer from physical and mental exhaustion.<sup>6</sup> They also encounter legal challenges, leading to fines and confiscation of rickshaws.<sup>7</sup> Sometimes, disputes arise with vehicle drivers, such as bus and car drivers, who compete for road space and often engage in aggressive driving behaviours toward rickshaw pullers.<sup>8</sup> Some other academic scholarship on rickshaw pullers shows that the majority of them have dealt with their rural-to-urban migration, health issues, some basic survival techniques, etc.

<sup>1</sup> A. Prins and S. Dasgupta, 'Shifting peripheries: Dhaka's rickshaw garages and mess dormitories as spaces of work and movement', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 2023; M. N. I. Nazem, 'Rural-urban interaction in Bangladesh: a study of linkages between villages and small urban centres', 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Y. Hossain, 'Informal Sector and Economic Growth in Bangladesh', *Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied and Basic Subjects*, Vol. 1, No. 12, 2021, pp. 48-61.

<sup>3</sup> M. Hossain, et al., 'Socio-economic Survey of Rickshaw Pullers in Dhaka, Bangladesh', *International Journal of Information, Business and Management*, Vol. 11, No. 4, 2019, pp. 1-7; A.H.R. Hasan, 'Internal Migration and Employment in Bangladesh: An Economic Evaluation of Rickshaw Pulling in Dhaka City'; R. Verma, et al. (eds.), *Internal Migration, Urbanization and Poverty in Asia: Dynamics and Interrelationships*, Singapore: ADB and Springer, 2022, pp. 339-357.

<sup>4</sup> S. Begum and B. Sen, 'Pulling rickshaws in the city of Dhaka: A way out of poverty?' *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol.17, No. 2, 2005, pp. 11-25; Karim, M. R. and K. A. Salam, 'Organizing the Informal Economy Workers: A BILS Study of Rickshaw Pullers in Dhaka City,' *Labour: A BILS Journal*, 2019, pp. 9-19.

<sup>5</sup> G. Jibon, "Rickshaws crowd in Dhaka", *The Asian Age Online, Bangladesh*, (January), 2017. <https://dailyasianage.com/news/44208/rickshaws-crowd-dhaka>

<sup>6</sup> S. N. Wadood and M. Tehsum, 'Examining Vulnerabilities: The Cycle Rickshaw Pullers of Dhaka City'. *International Journal of Development Research*, 2018, pp. 8.

<sup>7</sup> S. M. Mahmud and M. Hoque, 'Management of Rickshaw in Dhaka City for Ensuing Desirable Mobility and Sustainability: The Problems and Options.' *Conference CODATU XV « The role of urban mobility in (re)shaping cities- Addis Ababa; Ethiopia*, (October), 2012. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/345472109\\_Management\\_of\\_Rickshaw\\_in\\_Dhaka\\_a\\_City\\_for\\_Ensuing\\_Desirable\\_Mobility\\_and\\_Sustainability\\_The\\_Problems\\_and\\_Options](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/345472109_Management_of_Rickshaw_in_Dhaka_a_City_for_Ensuing_Desirable_Mobility_and_Sustainability_The_Problems_and_Options)

<sup>8</sup> M. M. Rahman and M. Assadekjaman 'Rickshaw Pullers and the Cycle of Unsustainability in Dhaka City.' *Transfers*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 2013, pp. 99-118.



There is a dearth of academic scholarship on understanding conflicts rickshaw pullers face in Dhaka city and the strategies and approaches they apply to deal with those everyday conflicts. Therefore, this paper, developed with primary data collected through interviews and group discussions with rickshaw pullers, explores understanding the nature of conflicts they face and strategies they apply to manage those conflicts. Hence, it sets a research question—how do rickshaw pullers approach to deal with their everyday conflicts in Dhaka? By answering this question, it contributes to conflict management literature. Drawing on a conflict-handling model developed by Thomas and Kilmann, it argues that rickshaw pullers undertake pragmatic approaches and strategies that benefit them most in meeting their ontological needs and interests. Depending on the nature and issue of the conflicts, they decide whether to engage or avoid serious conflict processes to protect their interests. However, they consider their power and authority while engaging in a competitive or assertive mode in responding to conflict scenarios, evolved with different actors, such as passengers, fellow rickshaw pullers, and other vehicle drivers etc., when they have power parity with the other party, they engage in a competitive process. When they have power asymmetry, especially when they consider them less powerful than the other party, they tend to avoid assertive engagement as avoiding a tussle benefits them most. Under some circumstances, they collaborate when they consider collaboration is more profitable than engaging in disagreements and tussles. Compromise is not rare in their approaches. They are often considered less powerful due to their socio-economic condition and ignorance of the terms and conditions of driving rickshaws in certain areas. Nonetheless, when they compromise, they do it for the economic and other benefits that help them meet their survival needs and interests.

In the following section, this paper includes a brief literature review to identify a research gap and subsequently discusses the research methodology applied to this study. Thereafter, it sets a framework for understanding conflict and a conflict-handling model developed by Thomas and Killman, which is eloquently explained and enriched by others. The next section presents the key findings which are discussed in two relevant sub-sections. One deals with the nature and pattern of various conflicts rickshaw pullers face in everyday life with different actors. The other explores and analyses different strategies and approaches they apply to deal with those conflicts. Thereafter, it includes a brief discussion section that explains the relevance of the model in analysing the nature of conflicts and strategies rickshaw pullers apply in dealing with those conflicts in Bangladesh.

### Literature Review

Numerous studies have been conducted on rickshaw pullers who drive rickshaws in urban cities like Dhaka, Delhi and Ranchi. Many have emphasised rural-to-urban migration and investigated the impoverisher's migratory patterns, causes, and consequences of the rural-to-urban migration, including their vulnerabilities at the destination place. Rickshaw pullers are mainly migrant workers, driven by their rural socio-economic conditions, and are marginalised and economically disadvantaged in different conditions.<sup>9</sup> A semi-structured questionnaire survey identified major factors that influence an individual's decision to migrate and examined various push (e.g., loss of lands, river erosion, loan repayment, and low wages) and pull (e.g., better job facilities, better wages, and education and better future for their children) factors that play substantive roles in their decision to migrate from rural to urban areas and land in urban slums. Although economic factors dominate their decisions more than environmental and social factors, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish among them as they are all highly interconnected.<sup>10</sup> However, there are various patterns of migration, such as permanent migration, temporary migration, seasonal migration, circular migration, and commuting regularly.<sup>11</sup> Begum and Sen identified them as temporary, seasonal, and circular migrations in Dhaka, which have been on the rise and contributing to rapid urbanisation.<sup>12</sup>

De Haan, referring to Indian urbanisation, argued that inequality, not poverty, may be a driving force behind migration, which matches Kumar's findings that the 'economic adversary' of socio-economic deprived sections of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal forced them to leave a place of origin and migrate to Delhi for opting for cycle rickshaw pulling.<sup>13</sup> Both family connections and marriage also motivate urban

---

<sup>9</sup> K. M. Islam and M. A. Baten, 'Climate change induced migration: The case of Bangladesh Exploring dynamics of internal migration to slums of Dhaka city in Bangladesh: A study on drivers and factors', 2017. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312130511>.

<sup>10</sup> N. Islam, 'Urbanisation, Migration and Development in Bangladesh: Recent Trends and Emerging Issues', *UNFPA-CPD Publication Series*, Vol.1, 2018, pp. 4–20.

<sup>11</sup> K. Russell, 'Theories and Typologies of Migration: An Overview and A Primer', Willy Brandt Series of Working Papers in International Migration and Ethnic Relations', *Malmö Institute for Studies of Migration, Diversity and Welfare (MIM)*, Sweden, Vol. 3 No. 12, 2012, pp.1-43; A. Q. M. Mahbub, 'Mobility behaviour of working people in Bangladesh: rural-rural and rural-urban circulation', 1997.

<sup>12</sup> S. Begum and B. Sen, 'Unsustainable Livelihoods, Health Shocks and Urban Chronic Poverty: Rickshaw Pullers as a Case Study', *Programme for Research on Chronic Poverty in Bangladesh and Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, Dhaka*, Workingpaper No. 46, 2004.

<sup>13</sup> A. De Haan, 'Rural-urban migration and poverty: The case of India' *IDS Bulletin*, Vol. 28, No. 2, 1997, pp. 35–47; N. Kumar, 'Marginalization, Migration and Urban Informal Sector –In-Depth Analysis of Cycle Rickshaw Pullers in Delhi' in Raosaheb K. Kale and Sanghmitra S. Acharya

migration, but easy access to urban cities through better and quicker transportation systems has a role in convincing them to migrate.<sup>14</sup> Other issues like drought, river erosion and flooding also force poor people, mostly from Mymensingh, Rangpur and Barisal—which are collectively termed as ‘poor pockets’ of the nation, to migrate and join in cycle rickshaw pulling at Dhaka city.<sup>15</sup> Whether they are literate or illiterate, rural migrants carry their rural skills with them, which sometimes prove irrelevant but are most often inadequate to survive in urban cities like Dhaka.<sup>16</sup> Once they migrate to Dhaka, rickshaw pulling becomes one of the most prominent informal professions for those unskilled migrated male persons.<sup>17</sup>

The majority of rickshaw pullers are rural migrants who, when they move to the city, abandon their former rural employment to increase their income and enhance living standards.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, they end up in this labour-intensive job because of its easy entry requirements, cash compensation, and straightforward standards of behaviour.<sup>19</sup> A study that used survey data of rickshaw pullers from five chosen Dhaka neighbourhoods found that agriculturally engaged peasants migrate to Dhaka to pull rickshaws during the off-season when they do not have much to work in an agricultural field. Thus, these seasonal, temporarily migrated rickshaw pullers create a diversified income portfolio. The remaining rickshaw pullers are considered regular, full-time employees living permanently in different slum areas.<sup>20</sup>

Besides other issues like environmental issues, unemployment and lack of skills, peer networks and pressure convince those migrated persons to join the labour-intensive, informal cycle rickshaw-pulling sector.<sup>21</sup> For those migrated people, rickshaw pulling

---

(eds.) *Mapping Identity-Induced Marginalisation in India: Inclusion and Access in the Land of Unequal Opportunities*, Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd., 2022, pp. 289-300.

<sup>14</sup> N. Islam, *Op. cit.*

<sup>15</sup> S. Begum and B. Sen, *Op. cit.*, 2004, p.7.

<sup>16</sup> N. Islam, *Op. cit.*

<sup>17</sup> Siddiqui *et. al.*, ‘The Informal Sector Poor of Dhaka City’, in K. Siddiqui (Eds.), *Social Formation of the Dhaka City: A Study in Third World Urban Sociology*, University Press Ltd, Dhaka, 1990; S. Begum and B. Sen. ‘Pulling Rickshaws in the City of Dhaka: A Way Out of Poverty?’, *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 2005, pp. 11-26.

<sup>18</sup> S. Begum and B. Sen, *Op. cit.*, 2004, 2005; M. Tamanna and M.K. Hasan, ‘Life in a Megacity: Livelihood Strategies and Survival Mechanisms of Rickshaw Pullers in Dhaka City’, *Millennial Asia*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2015, pp. 44-60.

<sup>19</sup> Rahman and Assadekjaman, *Op. cit.*

<sup>20</sup> S. M. Mahmud and M. Hoque, ‘Management of Rickshaw in Dhaka City for Ensuing Desirable Mobility and Sustainability: The Problems and Options’. *Conference CODATU XV, The role of urban mobility in (re)shaping cities, Addis Ababa; Ethiopia*, (October), 2012.

<sup>21</sup> S. Begum and B. Sen, *Op. cit.*, 2005; R. Reuveny, ‘Climate Change Induced Migration and Violent Conflict’, *Political Geography*, Vol. 26, No.6, 2007, pp. 656.

has become an incentive and a means of subsistence. Nevertheless, they do not develop a habit of saving money regularly due to a lack of access to financial institutions and services, which are limited by their lack of identity-proof documents, illiteracy and mistrust, as found in a study conducted on rickshaw pullers of Ranchi city, Jharkhand, India.<sup>22</sup> Wadood and Tehsum considered rickshaw pullers' social, financial, and physical constraints, shocks and vulnerabilities.<sup>23</sup> As they lack the education and skills necessary to obtain jobs or generate income to survive in urban settings, many continue to stay in difficult situations in metropolitan areas.<sup>24</sup> Referring to cycle rickshaws in Delhi, Taparia argued that although rickshaw pullers rely more on 'social capital for entry and operations' in a rickshaw renting industry than other factors, there are complexities in policy regulations that establish control of the owners over the pullers, which ultimately led to rent-seeking behaviour of the former.<sup>25</sup> Rickshaw pullers in Dhaka, however, become the victim of the deceptive nature of rickshaw stealing to which an industry of inter-connected 'thief plates' is related that maintains a relation with the rickshaw owners to recover the stolen rickshaw.<sup>26</sup>

Some studies emphasise the health and well-being conditions of rickshaw pullers in Dhaka and Ranchi and argue that as a marginalised and excluded population, they cannot pay much attention to accessing health facilities due to various structural issues including poverty, negligence, illiteracy, lack of awareness etc.,<sup>27</sup> while others examine the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on their life, mental health and livelihood patterns.<sup>28</sup> Referring to Lucknow city, a study found that the Covid-19 pandemic

<sup>22</sup> A. Kumar, 'Income and Saving Habits among Rickshaw Pullers in Ranchi', *Jharkhand Journal of Development and Management Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2017, pp. 7197-7209.

<sup>23</sup> S.N. Wadood and M. Tehsum, 'Examining Vulnerabilities: The Cycle Rickshaw Pullers of Dhaka City', *Forthcoming in: International Journal of Development Research*, Vol. 8, No. 1, (January) 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> S. Taparia, 'Institutions and Informal Livelihoods: A Case of Cycle Rickshaw Pullers in Delhi', 2012, DOI:<http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2371012>

<sup>26</sup> B. Suykens and A. Islam, 'Thief Plates: The Mediation of Extortion in the Rickshaw Business in Dhaka, Bangladesh', *Contemporary South Asia*, Vol. 30, No. 4, 2022, pp. 451-464.

<sup>27</sup> Q. M. Rahman, 'Perception regarding Health and Barriers to Seeking Healthcare Services among Rural Rickshaw Pullers in Bangladesh: A Qualitative Exploration,' *Heliyon*, 2022; M. S. Islam *et al.*, 'Socio-economic Profile and Health Status of Rickshaw Pullers in Rural Bangladesh,' *American Journal of Food Science and Health*, Vol. 2, No.4, 2016, pp. 32-38; A. Kumar *et al.*, 'Health and Social Security Needs of Rickshaw Pullers in Ranchi', *Social Work Public Health*, Vol. 31, No. 3, 2016, pp. 246-254.

<sup>28</sup> F. Ahmed and R. I. Sifat, 'The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the Mental Health of the Rickshaw-Puller in Bangladesh,' *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, Vol. 26, No. 8, 2021, pp. 782-789; M. T. Talukder *et al.*, 'The Livelihood of Rickshaw Pullers in Dhaka City during Covid-19

brought hardship for rickshaw pullers; as their earnings reduced drastically, they suffered from increased hunger, poverty and low protein intake.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, rickshaw pullers tend to use their human, social, productive and financial capital to mitigate their vulnerabilities.<sup>30</sup> Considering the above review and rickshaw pullers complex livelihood and survival patterns, it seems there has been a dearth of knowledge about how rickshaw pullers handle the conflicts they face in everyday life in Dhaka city to which this paper aims to contribute to the field of conflict management.

### **Methodology of the Study**

This study has applied exploratory qualitative methods so that one meaningfully can understand and use ‘the meaning’ people attach to events they experience.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, a convenient approach was considered to identify and engage rickshaw drivers in Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and semi-structured Individual In-depth Interviews (IIs), which helped in gathering data systematically. A conversational communication approach kept them engaged in the data collection process and assisted us in understanding interpretative aspects of the data to meet the research objectives.

The study area is located in the Dhaka South City Corporation area. Seasonally migrated and permanently living rickshaw pullers from Dhaka University campus, Shahid Minar area, Azimpur, Kamrangirchar, and Shahid Nagor of Lalbagh participated in this research. Some of these areas have rickshaw garages, and most of these participants drive rickshaws in these localities, making it easier to access them. Twenty-four one-to-one interviews were conducted; amongst them, fourteen had migrated earlier and had been living permanently in Dhaka. The rest were temporarily migrated, seasonal rickshaw pullers, who also migrated from different parts of Bangladesh for a short period (Table 1). A set of open-ended questions was used for the respondents to get their in-depth opinions and insights. They talked freely without any hesitation.

---

Pandemic: A Social Review,’ *British Journal of Healthcare and Medical Research*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 2023, pp. 24-30 ; M. I. Jowarder, ‘Covid-19 Impacts on the Livelihoods and Mental Well-being of Rickshaw Pullers in Bangladesh’, *Indonesian Journal of Innovation and Applied Sciences*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2023, pp. 38-44.

<sup>29</sup> M. Sen, ‘Post-Covid-19: A Study of Rickshaw Pullers in Lucknow City, Uttar Pradesh, India’, *Journal of Formal and Informal Sectors*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2023, pp. 11-20.

<sup>30</sup> M. Tamanna and M.K. Hasan, ‘Life in a Megacity: Livelihood Strategies and Survival Mechanisms of Rickshaw Pullers in Dhaka City,’ *Millennial Asia*, Vol. 6, No.1, 2015, pp. 44-60.

<sup>31</sup> S.B. Merriam, ‘Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education, (2nd edition)’, *Jossey-Bass Publishers*, 1998, pp. 179. <https://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/3511521>

**Table 1:** Details of Participating Rickshaw Drivers: Individual In-depth Interviews (IIs).

No.	Age	Migration type	Migration (year)	Home District	Profession at Home	Place of Interview
R-1	42	Permanent	1999	Dinajpur	Small Business	Curzon Hall
R-2	52	Permanent	1988	Sherpur	Cultivation	Curzon Hall
R-3	31	Permanent	2006	Kurigram	Small Business	Curzon Hall
R-4	35	Permanent	2015	Nator	Cultivation	Shaheed Minar Road
R-5	38	Seasonal	2022	Kishorganj	Cultivation	TSC
R-6	42	Permanent	2006	Naogaon	Day labourer	Polashi
R-7	35	Permanent	2012	Jamalpur	Garments worker	Polashi
R-8	58	Permanent	1986	Jamalpur	Fish business	Kamrangirchar
R-9	62	Seasonal	2022	Madaripur	Cultivation	Kamrangirchar
R-10	55	Seasonal	2021	Jashore	Small Business	Kamrangirchar
R-11	45	Permanent	2004	Bhola	Day labourer	Azimpur
R-12	38	Seasonal	2022	Madaripur	Cultivation	Azimpur
R-13	57	Permanent	2009	Madaripur	Cultivation	Kamrangirchar
R-14	46	Permanent	2007	Satkhira	Fish Business	Shaheed Nagor, Lalbagh
R-15	36	Seasonal	2022	Bhola	Small Grocery shop	Lalbagh
R-16	59	Permanent	1997	Barishal	Rickshaw driver	Lalbagh
R-17	63	Permanent	1985	Dinajpur	Cultivation	Kamrangirchar
R-18	54	Seasonal	2021	Barguna	Day labourer	Shaheed Nagor, Lalbagh
R-19	24	Seasonal	2022	Satkhira	Unemployed	Shaheed Nagor, Lalbagh
R-20	37	Seasonal	2022	Jamalpur	Baby-taxi Driver	Azimpur
R-21	68	Permanent	2002	Netrokona	Small Business	Kamrangirchar
R-22	73	Permanent	1986	Munshigonj	Cultivation	Kamrangirchar
R-23	21	Seasonal	2021	Patuakhali	Unemployed	Lalbagh
R-24	42	Seasonal	2022	Bhola	Mohonganj	Kamrangirchar

Source: Fieldwork, 2022.

Five FGDs were conducted in different garages in Kamrangirchar, Lalbagh, and Azimpur, where both permanent and sessional rickshaw pullers and garage owners or their associates participated (Table 2). A set of guiding themes, developed in line with the research objectives, was used for conducting FGDs wherein participants simply discussed their challenges, conflicts they encountered and approaches they applied for managing such conflicts. Their interactions and discussions were intriguing to

understand the dynamics of their everyday conflicts and strategies they rely on to overcome them.

**Table 2:** Details of Participants: Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Number	Total Participants	Category of Participants	Place of FGD	Time
FGD-1	7	Rickshaw Puller: 4 Garage Owner / Associates: 3	A Local Garage at Shahid Nagar, Lalbagh	8.15 – 9:30 pm
FGD-2	7	Rickshaw Puller: 4 Garage Owner / Associates: 3	A Local Garage at Kamrangirchar	9.00 –10:30 pm
FGD-3	7	Rickshaw Puller: 4 Garage Owner / Associates: 3	A Local Garage at Kamrangirchar	9:30 -11:00 pm
FGD-4	7	Rickshaw Puller: 4 Garage Owner / Associates: 3	A Local Garage at Azimpur	10:00 - 11:30 pm
FGD-5	7	Rickshaw Puller: 4 Garage Owner / Associates: 3	A Local Garage at Shahid Nagar, Lane 8, Lalbagh	5:00 -6:30 pm

Source: Fieldwork, 2022.

Besides the primary data collected through IIs and FGDs, this study used secondary data from various sources, including journal articles, books, and reports of different organisations, which were required to answer the research question. However, for analytical purposes, it used the basic understanding of conflicts—the ways it is understood, their core causes and distinctions between violent and non-violent conflicts. It also explored a conflict management model, popularly known as the Thomas-Kilmann model of conflict management, developed by Kenneth W. Thomas and Ralph H. Kilmann.<sup>32</sup> This model has immense significance in understanding the approaches and strategies Rickshaw puller—as an individual, who is one of the parties to their everyday conflicts, adopt and apply to deal with such situations.

### **Understanding Conflict and Approaches to Dealing with Conflicts: A Theoretical Perspective**

Conflict is an inevitable part of human life; everyday people experience conflicts of various natures. Scholarly explanations of conflicts are vital in understanding the

<sup>32</sup> K. W. Thomas and R. H. Kilmann, “Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, (1<sup>st</sup> ed.)”, *Tuxedo NY: XICOM*, 1974.

interests of the parties, which are at the core of any conflict. Such interests could be personal, political or related to resources, which could be driven by power or status of the parties. The seminal definition Wallensteen used indicates conflict as 'a social situation', wherein 'a minimum of two actors (parties) strive to acquire at the same moment in time as available set of scarce resources'.<sup>33</sup> Various tangible and intangible issues and factors contribute to creating a condition of conflict.<sup>34</sup> Yet, a conflict begins with misperception and miscommunication, which gradually engulf other socio-economic, political, cultural and identity issues.<sup>35</sup> Wallensteen put 'goal incompatibility' at the heart of any existence of a conflict, which indicates an irreconcilable position for parties, meaning they do not want to sacrifice or negotiate as long 'there is some form of scarcity'.<sup>36</sup> Putnam and Poole emphasised 'the interaction of interdependent people' who perceive opposing goals, aims or values that arise from the other party.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, conflict broadly means nothing but a clash of interests of the parties.

However, not all conflicts are violent; many conflicts remain non-violent. Conflict only becomes violent when parties see a mutually exclusive or controversial incompatibility for which they are prepared to take actions and counter-actions against each other to achieve their objectives.<sup>38</sup> There are structural and cognitive aspects that shape parties' responses to a conflict.<sup>39</sup> The structural conditions are those that determine parties' strengths, both structural and personal, based on diverse causal factors and forces that set the tone of interactions between the parties.<sup>40</sup> The cognitive perspective of the parties, however, develops through a directed 'black box', which means the way parties perceive and interpret each other, depending on their behaviours and contextual realities.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, we consider conflict as a social situation that develops on various socio-economic, structural and cognitive conditions that engage two parties with their incompatible goals, which are often related to material or immaterial, intangible values and issues and lead to their behavioural engagements in a conflict process.

---

<sup>33</sup> P. Wallensteen, *Understanding Conflict Resolution*, London, 2002, p.16.

<sup>34</sup> H. W. Jeong, *Understanding Conflict and Conflict Analysis*, London, 2008.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> P. Wallensteen, *Op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>37</sup> L. L. Putnam and M.S. Poole, 'Conflict and Negotiation', F. M. Jablin *et. al.* (eds.), "*Handbook of Organizational Communication*", Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1987, pp. 549-599.

<sup>38</sup> H. W. Jeong, *Op. cit.*

<sup>39</sup> K. W. Thomas, 'Conflict and Conflict Management: Reflections and Update', *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 1992, pp. 265-274.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267.



When a conflict develops, parties to it apply different strategies and approaches to manage or settle conflicts. These depend on the conflict management skills of the parties and their surrounding environment.<sup>42</sup> For considering the theoretical perspective of this paper, we explore a widely used conflict-handling model, popularly known as the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Management Model (T-KCMM), which provides a comprehensive understanding of the strategies conflicting parties may apply to deal with the conflict constructively if not violently, depending on their conditions.<sup>43</sup>

They studied workers and their routine conflicts in their workplace and thus developed this model to explain how parties chose and applied their methods and approaches to address their conflicts through five core modes linked with their strategies. These five modes are broadly linked to two basic 'dimensions' to measure parties' level of 'assertiveness' and 'cooperativeness'/'responsiveness' in conflict situations (Fig. 1).<sup>44</sup> The degree of assertiveness or cooperativeness can be measured based on strategies parties apply out of five main modes—competition, avoidance, accommodation, collaboration, and compromise, which reflect behavioural exposure of parties (Fig. 1).<sup>45</sup>

In this conflict handling model, parties consider their 'intentions' that Thomas termed as 'strategic intention' to satisfy their own and others' concerns.<sup>46</sup> When they attempt to satisfy their interests, they apply either avoidance or competition strategy. Measuring assertiveness depends on the extent to which they apply these strategies. When both parties apply the avoidance strategy, a conflict becomes less assertive and less violent. What makes parties to avoid conflict is not always clear. There are three conditions, such as, when the issue of contention is minor, when the parties do not have much information or strategies to deal with a conflict issue effectively and when they have effective means to convince each other, which help parties to avoid a conflict.<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> S. Altmäe *et al.*, 'Thomas-Kilmann's Conflict Management Modes and their Relationship to Fiedler's Leadership Styles (based on Estonian Organizations)', *Baltic Journal of Management*, Vol. 8, No.1, 2013, pp. 45-65.

<sup>43</sup> K. W. Thomas and R. H. Kilmann, *Op. cit.*, 1974; K. W. Thomas, *Op. cit.*, 1992, p. 266.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*; J. R. Darling and W. E. Wlaker, 'Effective Conflict Management: Use of the behavioral Style model', *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, Vol. 22, No. 5, 2001, p. 232.

<sup>45</sup> K. W. Thomas and R. H. Kilmann, *Op. cit.*, p. 11; K. W. Thomas, *Op. cit.*, 1992, p. 266.

<sup>46</sup> K. W. Thomas, *Op. cit.*, 1992.

<sup>47</sup> D. Hellriegel *et al.*, "*Organizational Behavior, (9<sup>th</sup> ed.)*", South Western College Publisher, Cincinnati, 2000; J. M. Ivancevich, *et al.*, "*Managing conflict and negotiations in Organizational behavior and management*", McGraw-Hill, New York, 2011, pp. 309-338.

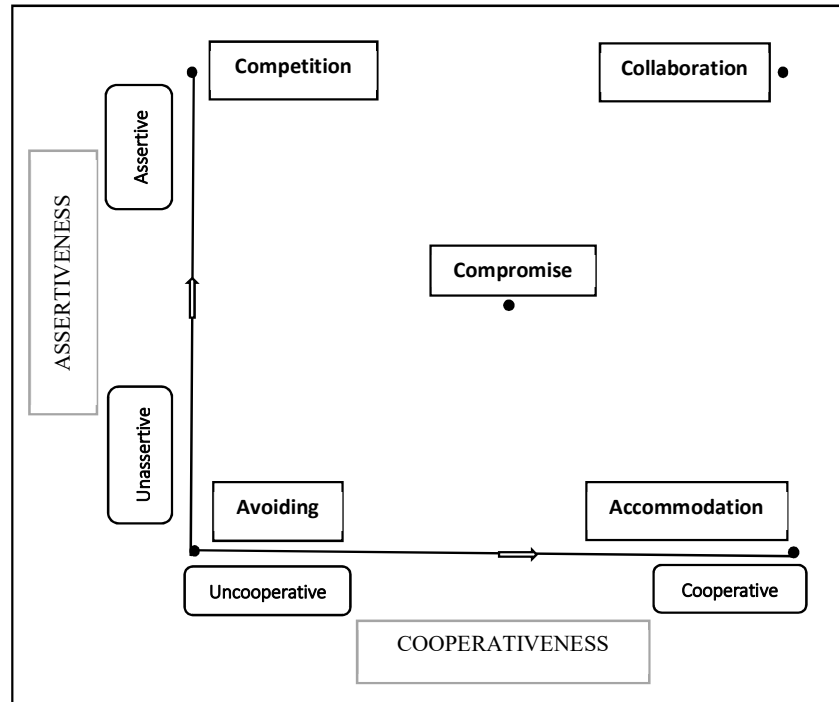


Fig. 1: Two-dimensional taxonomy of conflict-handling modes.

In addition, power asymmetry could influence parties' decisions to avoid conflict too.<sup>48</sup> Although those who avoid conflicts may be evaluated unfavourably by others, avoidance keeps a conflict low. The party that applies this strategy wants to stay away from the conflict, which helps to keep their tension and frustration low, which is more advantageous than engaging in competitive behaviour. One could consider it as an uncooperative behaviour of the parties; yet, when both parties pay attention to avoidance, they cooperate and keep the assertiveness level low, meaning they do not like to take the conflict to a violent level.

Conversely, parties enter into a competition mode when they have non-sacrificing attitudes towards their goals. Through competition, they want a win-lose outcome and apply every means, like resorting to violent means of any kind, including aggressive

<sup>48</sup> F. Luthans, "Conflict and Stress in Organizational Behavior", McGraw-Hill International Book Company, Auckland, 1981, pp. 365–385.

behaviour, verbal attacks and threats, if not physical assaults.<sup>49</sup> It is highly assertive mode, meaning the chance of cooperation is low. Parties want to establish dominance over the other and maintain a high priority on their interest at the cost of others.<sup>50</sup> Their winning attitudes invite violence to defend their rights, position and incompatible objectives for which they engage in conflict with persuasion, arguments and assertive communication.<sup>51</sup> To avoid assertiveness, the weaker party may not engage in violence, while the stronger party may want a quick outcome of the conflict through competition.

The second approach, cooperativeness or responsiveness of the parties, is more complicated than assertiveness as long as it pays attention to understanding another party's position, demand, and feelings.<sup>52</sup> Once parties believe that the other party also has its legitimate demand, it could open up a discussion channel between them. The more collaborative and accommodating they are to the needs of the other party, the easier it is to manage the conflict. However, an accommodation method opposes the competition mode but pays maximum attention to satisfying the other party's needs.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, it invites cooperative, non-assertive and generous behaviour of the parties who do not want to engage in fights. This helps to maintain a positive relationship between them, as they care for each other. Nevertheless, a collaborative mode is more reasonable than an accommodative style because the former emphasises a joint problem-solving approach and tries to find common grounds to reach an informal or formal agreement that maximises a result by striking a balance between the needs and interests of the parties, which benefits them collectively.<sup>54</sup> Although the collaborative mode seeks to agree with the adversary to reach an outcome for a collective cause, reaching that stage depends on various issues, such as appreciating the tendency of the parties and their mutual trust that protects their interests together.<sup>55</sup>

The core of this conflict management model is 'compromise', a central point of assertiveness and cooperativeness of parties. This compromise mode allows parties to make a proportional sacrifice through 'give and take', meaning both parties achieve something at the cost of giving up something.<sup>56</sup> Parties can take support of negotiation

---

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> D. Hellriegel, J. W. Slocum and R.W. Woodman, *Op. cit.*

<sup>51</sup> K. W. Thomas and R. H. Kilmann, *Op. cit.*, 1974.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> J. M. Ivancevich, J. L. Gibson and R. Konopaske, *Op. cit.*, 2011.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> D. Hellriegel, J.W. Slocum, and R.W. Woodman *Op. cit.*, 2000.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

and/or mediation services to reach a consensus that evolves through intensive discussion and bargaining.<sup>57</sup> When parties or individuals focus on compromise, they look into ‘a fair combination of gains and losses for both parties’.<sup>58</sup> Although this is a ‘win-win’ situation for parties that help them halt violent behaviour, they may have to give up more than gain to pursue cooperativeness. Since compromise does not find a distinct ‘winner or loser’; therefore, it may not be an ideal outcome for fully achieving their incompatible goal.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, Luthans considered it as a ‘lose-lose approach’ to conflict management because both parties would lose something to settle the dispute.<sup>60</sup>

This broadly defined framework provides a theoretical perspective on a conflict that is nothing but a clash of interests of involved parties, which can undertake any of the five strategies—avoidance, competition, accommodation, collaboration and compromise, as the T-KCMM depicts, to deal with such a conflict situation. They apply any of these strategies to pursue their goals and satisfy their needs. They sacrifice something to achieve a consensus that benefits both parties, which could be a ‘win-win’ or mixed victory for the parties. Although this conflict management framework was developed to study workers and their routine conflicts during the 1970s, it has helped numerous people including workers and labourers in different settings, understand and analyse their strategies in responding to conflict situations. Therefore, this attractive model of handling conflicts has been taken into account for exploring the strategies and approaches rickshaw pullers in Dhaka city consider to deal with their everyday conflicts. Nevertheless, their power dynamics and other contextual factors determine the strategies that individuals, groups, or communities apply to deal with a conflict.

#### **Research Findings: Rickshaw Pullers’ Conflicts and Strategies to Handle Them**

Rickshaw pullers, who live either permanently or arrive seasonally, help people commute from one place to another and make people’s lives easy as much as possible. Various tangible and intangible issues create conditions for evolving conflicts in their daily lives. This section presents key findings of this study, related to different patterns of conflicts rickshaw pullers experience every day and strategies they apply to handle them.

#### **Nature of Rickshaw Pullers Conflict in Dhaka City**

Although rickshaw pullers face various conflicts on tangible and intangible issues, most of their conflicts are non-violent, except for some occasional violent engagement

---

<sup>57</sup> F. Luthans, *Op. cit.*, 1981.

<sup>58</sup> D. Hellriegel, J. W. Slocum and R. W. Woodman *Op. cit.*, 2000.

<sup>59</sup> J. M. Ivancevich, J. L. Gibson and R. Konopaske, *Op. cit.*, 2011.

<sup>60</sup> F. Luthans, *Op. cit.*, 1981.

with fellow rickshaw pullers and on rare occasions with the passengers. Their patterns of conflict depend on the nature and power dynamics of different actors involved in those conflicts which evolve when their interests clash with other parties. Actors with whom rickshaw pullers clashing interests develop may come from different backgrounds, having links to diverse powerful networks and connections. We have divided the nature of their conflicts into four categories: financial aspect, shared space, legal space and personal space.

### **Financial Issues**

One of the main reasons for rickshaw pullers to come to Dhaka city is to earn money and gain some kind of financial solvency for their families. Such financial solvency is expected by them to overcome the unemployment, poverty, and debt that they carry on from their localities. Therefore, whatever rickshaw pullers earn through fares from the customers is their main income, which they want to protect. Their charges from the customers are determined by their time, distance of the trip, demand of the trip, and their mutual negotiation capabilities. Therefore, their income is a precious aspect of their daily life. They sometimes experience conflicts on financial issues with the passenger(s) and garage owners, especially when they bargain for a reasonable fare with passengers or when they are unable to pay daily rent to garage owners.

#### ***Conflict with Passenger(s)***

Conflict between passenger(s) and rickshaw pullers is not an uncommon phenomenon on Dhaka's streets. Such conflicts primarily evolve from different expectations, disagreement over fares, misunderstandings and communication barriers. Some respondents mentioned in their interviews that they often face conflicts over the fares with passengers. It is not an issue of negotiated fare; when they have a negotiated fare that does not lead to conflict. Nevertheless, fair negotiation could be a matter of conflict and could generate heated debate between them. Passengers try to bargain for lower fares, whereas rickshaw pullers resist lowering their rates. As both parties try to assert their position on fare, disagreements over it occasionally lead to heated arguments and conflicts.<sup>61</sup> Since rickshaw pullers are migrated people in the urban city and belong to a marginalised community due to their power disparity, they often face verbal abuse and sometimes experience physical assaults, when arguments develop.

Such a verbal quarrel or physical assault takes place when they fail to negotiate a fare with the passenger. While in a rush, some passengers do not give space to the rickshaw pullers to negotiate the price for a ride, but force them to drive to a directed destination

---

<sup>61</sup> Participants of FGD-1 highlighted these issues on 11 November, 2022.

place. The problem arises when the passenger pays a lower fare than the expectation of the rickshaw puller. The distance they cross may have a high fare which the passenger does not want to pay. The time and labour a rickshaw puller spends and exhausts for that ride do not compensate by a low fare. When both parties show their rigidity that develops a situation of conflict—with arguments, counter-arguments and quarrels, which sometimes lead to physical assaults. Some passengers assault the rickshaw puller physically, which the latter could not prevent due to their lack of power in the urban city.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, some young rickshaw pullers counter the passenger with counter-assault which makes the situation worse for both parties. Such acts of violence not only endanger their physical safety but also instil fear and anxiety, making their daily lives more difficult, especially when they get seriously injured.

Due to the complex road network and frequent traffic congestion in Dhaka City, passengers and Rickshaw pullers may develop misunderstandings over the route of the journey. Passengers expect rickshaw pullers to take a specific route, while the rickshaw puller opts for alternative routes to avoid traffic congestion or roadblocks. Such disagreements over the route sometimes lead to verbal abuse of the rickshaw puller as the passengers feel that they are being taken on unnecessary detours or rickshaw pullers face accusations of intentionally prolonging the journey, perhaps for extra fares.<sup>63</sup>

We found a significant portion of the respondents faced physical assault by passengers. A rickshaw puller who used to pull a rickshaw in the Mirpur area expressed how he was harassed and assaulted by a passenger. He stated:

I am forty-two years old and an illiterate Rickshaw Puller. I have been living here in Mirpur for at least 18 years .... I have been engaged in this profession with a lot of experience. One day, I was taking a passenger in the Mirpur area, and the road was traffic-jammed. The passenger told me to take the Rickshaw on the footpath. I then said that I am not like other rickshaw pullers and the footpath is not a place for pulling rickshaws. He then slapped me because of not listening to him and left without paying the fare. I immediately fell into that place. There were many people around, but they didn't respond. For a long time, I could hardly hear.<sup>64</sup>

This is not a story of a single rickshaw puller but is a saga of direct and indirect assaults on the rickshaw puller community. Nevertheless, seasonal rickshaw pullers face more assaults than those who permanently live in Dhaka city as the latter group has learnt

<sup>62</sup> N. Jahan, 'Pulling the Weight of the World: No Services in Sight for the Rickshaw Pullers of the Country', *The Daily Star*, 08 February, 2019, <https://www.thedailystar.net/star-weekend/labour-rights/news/pulling-the-weight-the-world-1698940>

<sup>63</sup> Individual Interview, no 3, 5 and 14, respectively interviewed on August 16 and September 5, 2022; FGD-5, organised at a local garage in Shahid Nagar of Lalbagh on November 17, 2022.

<sup>64</sup> Individual Interview, no 6, interviewed on August 16, 2022.

how city dwellers behave with them while the former is prone to face more challenges and conflicts as they are less accustomed to the passengers' behaviours.

### ***Conflict and Tussle with Garage Owners***

Another aspect of the conflict that rickshaw pullers face with garage owners originates from various issues related to parking, rental payments, rickshaw damage and working conditions.<sup>65</sup> The relationship between garage owners and rickshaw pullers is generally good but often is characterised by their power imbalance and unequal bargaining power.<sup>66</sup> When a rickshaw puller delays paying the daily rent due to sickness or other health issues, the owner could ask for money that a puller could not manage to pay. Besides this, when a rickshaw puller loses a rickshaw that could lead to a serious conflict between them. Data from an FGD asserted that when a rickshaw is lost or stolen, the garage owner catches the rickshaw puller and beats him up until his family members come and pay compensation.<sup>67</sup>

Rickshaw pullers are not strong enough in economic, political, or physical power; therefore, the garage owners can exploit them. No new person could rent a rickshaw from any garage, without a known guarantor. They fear losing the rickshaw if it is rented to an unknown puller. Moreover, a garage owner could be rude to a rickshaw puller, especially when a rickshaw is damaged in an accident.<sup>68</sup> Sometimes, garage owners could suppress them directly or mentally. Many seasonal rickshaw pullers take loans from the garage owners but cannot return the borrowed money in time. When they become defaulter, garage owners become harsh to them and threaten them to repay the money.<sup>69</sup> However, some respondents also opined that not all garage owners are the same; some allow them more time to repay the money.

### **Shared Space**

Rickshaw pullers shared some space with other fellow rickshaw pullers in rickshaw lanes, with other vehicles in the road and common parking spaces. In these spaces, they experience different patterns of conflicts; in some occasions, they engage in physical violence while in other cases they get into quarrels if not assaults.

### ***Conflict with Vehicle Drivers***

Conflicts between vehicle drivers and rickshaw pullers in Dhaka City are pretty common due to the coexistence of different modes of transportation that share the same

---

<sup>65</sup> FGD-3, organised at a garage in Kamraggir char area on November 14, 2022.

<sup>66</sup> FGD-4, organised at a local garage in Azimpur on November 15, 2022.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> N. Jahan, *Op. cit.*

<sup>69</sup> Individual Interview, no 9, interviewed on September 16, 2022

road space. Conflicts arise between them primarily from issues related to traffic congestion, road sharing, accidents and perceived differences in the rights and non-privileges of drivers and rickshaw pullers, respectively. The presence of rickshaws is often considered a source of severe traffic congestion in a mega city like Dhaka. Although not all roads are accessible for rickshaws, where they are allowed creates complexity as vehicles like buses, private cars, human hauliers and laguna, and rickshaws share the same roads. Conflicts arise when vehicle drivers perceive rickshaws hinder traffic flow, leading to frustration and impatient behaviour of the vehicle drivers.<sup>70</sup> Data also indicate that rickshaw pullers face conflicts when vehicle drivers exhibit aggressive behaviour or refuse to share the road space. They engage in conflicts when the vehicle drivers or rickshaw pullers attempt risky overtaking manoeuvres that endanger their safety and cause potential accidents. Such a manoeuvring brings the vehicles closer to the rickshaw or vice versa, the powerful party, mostly the vehicle (private car, bus or CNG-run auto-rickshaw) driver comes out of the driving seat and sometimes assaults the rickshaw pullers, either verbally or physically, or both. Everyone blames them for accidents and slaps for no or minimal causes.<sup>71</sup>

Respondents of an FGD stated that conflicts frequently occur at intersections, where the rights to use the road space are often disputed between vehicle drivers and rickshaw pullers.<sup>72</sup> Vehicle drivers may disregard the presence of rickshaws and try to assert their rights to use the space, leading to potential collusion, damage and conflicts. A lack of adherence to traffic rules by either of the parties and mutual disrespect for each other exacerbates the conflicts at intersections, which result in verbal abuse and occasionally physical violence. Some respondents argued that extended stay at traffic signals becomes a cause for impatience of the parties and they want to cross the intersection quickly, which leads to inter-vehicle and rickshaw collusion, culminating in heated arguments, insults, and even physical confrontations.

#### ***Conflict with Fellow Rickshaw Pullers***

Rickshaw pullers commonly engage in conflicts with other fellow rickshaw pullers due to competitive and laborious nature of their work. Primarily, they engage in competition over passenger issues. Secondly, their involvement in violent conflicts often originates from shared road space for driving rickshaws. Filed data indicate that one of the main reasons for conflict between them is the intense competition over

---

<sup>70</sup> FGD-3, *Op. cit.*

<sup>71</sup> N. Jahan, *Op. cit.*

<sup>72</sup> FGD-4, *Op. cit.*



having passengers.<sup>73</sup> Rickshaw pullers constantly wait in the streets to have passengers during busy times. A sense of conflict develops between them over who gets a particular passenger, especially when passengers have not chosen a specific rickshaw puller. In other words, who will have the passenger creates a competition among them, which could turn into a temporary unhealthy competition. In addition, when a passenger bargains for a fare with a rickshaw puller, but another rickshaw puller suddenly asks for a low fare and invites the passenger to ride on his rickshaw that creates conflicts with temporary arguments.<sup>74</sup>

Conflict also stems from violations of traffic rules and due to a lack of proper road etiquette.<sup>75</sup> When a rickshaw puller drives recklessly, cuts lanes or does not follow traffic signals, it develops a sense of frustration and anger among some other rickshaw pullers. Respondents of an FGD stated that they frequently get into arguments with other drivers when they hinder their movement, overtake each other, or encroach on their space.<sup>76</sup> Two or more rickshaw drivers get involved in a collision whilst crossing the road or passing through the circle of the road. This type of conflict starts with each other using slang, which sometimes results in physical fights and injuries. Nevertheless, their physical fights intensify when they use derogatory words and phrases that undermine their mutual respect, position and status.<sup>77</sup> Such a type of conflict creates traffic congestion on the lanes or streets.

Some respondents mentioned that territorial dispute also takes place among rickshaw drivers.<sup>78</sup> Certain areas or streets may be (un)officially designated to a particular group of rickshaw pullers, and conflicts may arise when a driver from the outside tries to operate or pick up passengers within that territory.<sup>79</sup> Mostly the seasonal rickshaw pullers face such challenges in those areas and confront with them whom they do not know. Those who are not from that area are also not aware of certain rules for operating there; therefore, issues develop leading to arguments, if not fights, which make an unhealthy environment for others who operate there.

### ***Conflict with Pedestrians***

On some rare occasions, rickshaw pullers and pedestrians get into conflicting interactions. Due to the high population density, limited infrastructure, and chaotic

---

<sup>73</sup> Individual Interview, no 8 and 17, respectively interviewed on September 16 and 24, 2022; FGD-4, *Op. cit.*

<sup>74</sup> Individual Interview, no 13, interviewed on September 16, 2022.

<sup>75</sup> FGD-2, arranged in Kamraggir char area on November 13, 2022.

<sup>76</sup> FGD-5, arranged at Shahid Nagar of Lalbagh area on November 17, 2022.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> FGD-2, *Op. cit.*

<sup>79</sup> Individual Interview, no 11, interviewed on September 16, 2022.

traffic conditions in Dhaka, one cannot rule out such a situation between them. Dhaka's streets are often crowded with pedestrians, rickshaws, cars, and other vehicle. Some respondents mentioned that in crowded areas, rickshaw pullers might unintentionally or intentionally encroach on sidewalks or pedestrian pathways due to inadequate designated spaces for parking or waiting.<sup>80</sup> This encroachment obstructs pedestrian movement and creates uncomfortable situations when pedestrians rightfully argue for their right to walk freely. Pedestrians may confront rickshaw pullers or express dissatisfaction, but rarely do they charge rickshaw pullers.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, when pedestrians want to cross a road, even from the zebra crossing which is clogged by huge rickshaw presence, another sense of dissatisfaction grows among them, which may lead them to spare some words towards the rickshaw pullers community.

#### **Entry Restriction and Legal Space**

The legal space for a rickshaw puller is connected to issues related to a license or a permit from the municipal authorities and local societies where they operate. Additionally, it is related to how traffic maintenance agencies, like Police and Ansar, treat them on the street, as they are restricted not to entering certain areas. There are claims that rickshaw pullers are often harassed and exploited by corrupt traffic police and Ansar for violating regulations or for no reason at all, as highlighted by some respondents.<sup>82</sup>

#### ***Entrance Restriction and Associated Problems***

Rickshaw pullers have restrictions to enter different areas of Dhaka city. According to some respondents, they have restricted or limited access to various areas, such as high-security zones, diplomatic areas, highway roads, and time-restricted streets. These legal obligations limit their mobility in those areas and reduce their income. However, when they try to enter those areas, either willingly or by the influence of the passengers, law enforcement people restrict them from entering those places. Their entrance to those areas is considered unpermitted, if not unlawful. Despite knowing such territorial entrance restrictions, some seasonal rickshaw pullers enter. As a consequence, they not only face entrance challenges but also experience a kind of encounter with the on-duty security person—police or member of the Ansar, who wants to stop them.<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> FGD-5, *Op. cit.*

<sup>81</sup> FGD-2, *Op. cit.*

<sup>82</sup> Individual Interview, No 2, 5, 8, 11 and 21, respectively interviewed on 13 and 16 August, 16 September and 5 October, 2022; FGD-1, arranged at a local Garage of Shahid Nagar on 11 November, 2022; FGD-5, arranged at Shahid Nagar of Lalbagh area on November 17, 2022; FGD-2, *Op. cit.*

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

When they enter into those restricted areas by the influence of passengers, it also creates a tussle with the passengers, who often leave the rickshaw pullers once they are in trouble in such a situation. However, some areas have registered rickshaw pullers, meaning without registration no pullers could ride there. When unregistered, seasonal rickshaw pullers enter that area, it could be a source of problems with permanent rickshaw pullers there, as the latter face more competition to get passengers. Moreover, the entrance of non-registered rickshaw pullers into a restricted, registered zone creates problems with local security guards who do not allow them to enter.<sup>84</sup> In some areas, they dare to enter due to a fear of punishment, such as confiscation of their rickshaws.

#### ***Facing Corrupt Traffic Personnel***

Rickshaw pullers' conflicts with some on-duty corrupt members of traffic personnel often remain invisible, but do not go unnoticed. Corrupt members may exploit them in different intersections. As a result, rickshaw pullers may quickly bribe a tiny amount to enter a road or area where they do not have access.<sup>85</sup> For example, when they enter into the main roads during the busy hours. Most of the FGD and interview respondents highlighted that the traffic police harass rickshaw drivers by puncturing rickshaw tyres and confiscating rickshaws. Why they puncture or confiscate rickshaws is a relevant question too. As mentioned before, this sort of conflicting situation evolves when they access roads which are not authorised for rickshaws or when they violate traffic signals and rules.

Some respondents argued that on some occasions traffic police charge them for not having proper licenses, permits, or documentation, even when the rickshaw pullers operate within legal boundaries.<sup>86</sup> Due to the callousness of some regulatory authorities and the traffic police, rickshaw pullers often find themselves in technically unlawful circumstances as they struggle to earn a livelihood, without knowing appropriate rules for driving rickshaws on busy roads of Dhaka. Some interviewees claimed that corrupt traffic personnel impound rickshaws for no apparent reason and dismantle them if the owner or puller fails to pay the mandatory fine.<sup>87</sup>

Some others mentioned that some corrupt traffic personnel might resort to verbal abuse, intimidation, or physical violence against rickshaw pullers.<sup>88</sup> It creates a hostile

---

<sup>84</sup> Individual Interview, no 8, interviewed on September 16, 2022

<sup>85</sup> Individual Interview, no 2, 5, 8, 11 and 21, *Op. cit.*, 2022.

<sup>86</sup> FGD-5, *Op. cit.*

<sup>87</sup> Individual Interview, No. 2, 8, 9 and 15, respectively interviewed on August 13, September 16 and 24, 2022.

<sup>88</sup> FGD-4, *Op. cit.*

and unsafe working environment for them, causing physical harm and psychological trauma. Several respondents claimed that the prevalent nature of corruption limits them in seeking justice or reporting incidents of harassment and exploitation to any authority. As rickshaw pullers are not aware of their rights and do not have united unions to protect them against any such exploitation, they fear retaliation and enjoy limited access to legal assistance.<sup>89</sup> Therefore, harassment and exploitation of corrupt traffic personnel not only challenge their working conditions but also affect their financial stability and overall well-being.

### **Personal Space**

The individual space of rickshaw pullers is complex since they come from diverse backgrounds and different areas, with various localised socio-economic problems. Like other humans, they have dignity and respect which sometimes are violated by the passengers and personnel they encounter in their daily lives on residence and debt issues.

### ***Conflict over Respect and Dignity Issues***

Rickshaw pullers who migrate to improve their economic conditions constitute a marginal community in their destination place, as they do not know each other. Despite their economic unprivileged conditions and backwardness, like other human beings, they have dignity and respect. When some passengers and personnel undermine their human values and disrespect them, they encounter conflicting situations. For example, when a passenger asks a rickshaw puller in a degrading way by saying, hey rickshaw will you go? (Ei rickshaw jabi?) that creates a low feeling among them.<sup>90</sup> This feeling of disrespect becomes a serious issue of dignity when a passenger who is younger than a rickshaw puller asks this with similar tunes. Rickshaw pullers work independently to improve their conditions but do not expect such disregard from city dwellers. Having their humble socio-economic condition does not mean that deserve to be disrespected by anyone. Rickshaw pullers often do not reply to a passenger in the same tune. Had there been any counter-response in similar ways could have escalated a tense situation between them. Nevertheless, many respondents highlighted that when they receive disrespectful words, phrases of slang or sentences from another rickshaw puller during a heated argument, they response similarly which often leads to quarrels and physical fights between them.<sup>91</sup>

---

<sup>89</sup> N. Jahan, *Op. cit.*

<sup>90</sup> Individual Interview, no 4, 6 and 19, respectively interviewed on September 16 and October 5, 2022

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

### ***Conflict over Residence Issues***

Data show that many of the rickshaw pullers reside in informal settlements, including crowded accommodation facilities in the rickshaw garage and overcrowded slums, characterised by lack of basic amenities, services and uncertain tenure.<sup>92</sup> They often lack proper infrastructure, including access to clean water, sanitation facilities, mosquito nets etc., which hamper their quality of life. They cannot manage high-cost alternative, affordable accommodation due to their low income and sending money to their families back home. Nevertheless, they face constant threats of eviction and displacement, when they fail to pay the rent on time in their informal, temporary accommodation space. Nevertheless, a group of rickshaw pullers who participated in FGDs in Kamrangirchar informed that they frequently face conflicts with landowners, developers, or government authorities, who have attention to evict them from these informal dwellings, as those actors want to use those available space for big commercial or residential projects.<sup>93</sup> They lack legal contracts for their occupancy which makes them more vulnerable to forceful evictions.

### ***Burdens of Debts***

Many rickshaw pullers who come to Dhaka have debts that they incur from various sources, such as garage owners, moneylenders, cooperative societies, and friends or relatives in the native village.<sup>94</sup> They constantly undergo a conflict situation since they have pressure to repay the money to the lenders. Respondents who have borrowed money at high interest rates expressed that they may have borrowed money to meet their needs or cope with emergencies, they have to repay more than they loaned.<sup>95</sup> There are strict terms and conditions set by the lenders who exploit them.<sup>96</sup> The enormous loads of debts back home force some of them to migrate.

Seasonal rickshaw pullers experience more harassment than permanent rickshaw pullers in such a situation. The former borrows money from the village lenders and when become defaulters, they move to urban cities to earn money and repay the money. Sometimes they again borrow money from the garage owners to return money to the village lenders; thus, they are trapped into two lenders that create a psycho-social conflict for them.<sup>97</sup> However, permanent rickshaw pullers mostly borrow money from

---

<sup>92</sup> Individual Interview, No. 9, 10, 18 and 24, respectively interviewed on September 16 and 24, October 11, 2022.

<sup>93</sup> FGD-3, *Op. cit.*

<sup>94</sup> N. Jahan, *Op. cit.*

<sup>95</sup> Individual Interview, no 22, interviewed on October 5, 2022.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> Individual Interview, no 15 and 23, interviewed on September 16 and October 11, 2022.

garage owners on conditions to return quickly. Nevertheless, when a rickshaw puller fails to repay money to the garage owners, they could be barred from getting a rickshaw for pulling and their families may have to undergo harassment.<sup>98</sup> Thus, the burdens of debt induce tension, frustration, and economic vulnerability among rickshaw pullers.

### **Strategies Rickshaw Pullers Apply to Deal with Their Conflicts**

While rickshaw pullers experience different kinds of conflicts in their daily lives in Dhaka city, they apply various strategies and undertake different approaches to deal with those conflicts. The strategies and approaches they apply to address conflicts are dependent on their socio-economic conditions, and their power parity and disparity with the actors with whom they engage in conflicts. These issues are discussed in line with Thomas-Kilmann's model of handling conflicts.

### **Prioritised Competition**

While the competing mode of a conflict situation is considered a strategy to pursue one's interests at the expense of others, parties use assertive and uncooperative modes that result in a win-lose outcome. Rickshaw pullers in Dhaka city use this mode when they have to defend their rights and interests against the other actors, including the passengers, fellow rickshaw pullers or rickshaw owners. Data shows that rickshaw pullers employ these modes for two purposes: (i) to demand fair fares from the passengers, who may try to evade bargaining, and (ii) to fight, either physically or verbally, with their fellow rickshaw pullers and drivers of other vehicles.

Rickshaw pullers generally bargain peacefully for fares with passengers. However, some participants argued that they may develop a counter-response to passengers who refuse to pay fair payments and abuse them verbally or physically.<sup>99</sup> This approach applies to resisting harassment of the rough passengers. Nevertheless, rickshaw pullers do not apply this approach when they find serious power disparity with the other party. For instance, the traffic police and Ansar, and garage owners are considered more powerful to them. Therefore, they avoid engaging in aggressive behaviour with them.

Nevertheless, rickshaw pullers show less self-restraint when their dignity and honours are disrespected. When someone, who may be a fellow rickshaw puller, a driver of a vehicle or even a passenger, uses abusive, disrespectful words or phrases to him or his family, a rickshaw puller automatically counters with reactions and responses.<sup>100</sup> They cannot tolerate such dishonour. Hence, they use bad words, leading to heated debates

---

<sup>98</sup> Individual Interview, no 7, interviewed on August 16, 2022.

<sup>99</sup> FGD-2, *Op. cit.*

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*; Individual Interviews, no 2, 5, 8, 11 and 21, *Op. cit.*

and engaging in physical violence, especially with fellow rickshaw pullers where they have less disparity in their power dynamics. Both drivers try to win their arguments; therefore, they use verbally abusive words and resort to physical violence. Neither of the parties has the patience to tolerate each other. When they engage in fights on the street, someone else, like other rickshaw drivers, passengers, ordinary public, traffic personnel, hawkers, pedestrians etc., comes forward to separate them physically.<sup>101</sup>

### **Preferential Avoidance**

Under different conditions, an application of avoidance strategies is beneficial for rickshaw pullers, especially when they intend to escape from conflict situations. They utilise an avoidance approach when the other disputant party is more powerful than them. For instance, avoidance techniques they mostly used when they get involved in complex situations with the traffic police, heavy vehicles, and passengers who come from the elite class. They self-cautiously avoid conflicts with traffic police because they are aware of their power and connections which are not adequate to conflicts with police.<sup>102</sup> When encountering misbehaviour for disregarding traffic signals or for other reasons, they attempt to escape any verbal engagements with the traffic police as such engagement could be costlier than escaping from the problem.

Rickshaw pullers also avoid confrontation with garage owners due to their dependence on them to rent rickshaws.<sup>103</sup> Unless they avoid conflicts with garage owners, it would impact their earnings and put families under economic strains as renting a rickshaw is difficult for a seasonal driver, who could not hire a rickshaw without a proper guarantee.<sup>104</sup> Moreover, they have less power compared to owners which could affect outcomes of such a conflict. Therefore, non-permanent rickshaw pullers prefer avoidance to compete with any such actors.

### **Accommodating with Others' Demands**

Rickshaw pullers apply the accommodation approach when they have to yield or satisfy the interests and goals of others. For example, they have to obey the basic rules and regulations of the streets and sometimes tolerate abuse or comply with the demands and exploitation of others. The majority of the respondents highlighted that they often use accommodation techniques due to their weaknesses to protest or defend themselves. For both purposes, they accommodate others' demands. For instance, they

---

<sup>101</sup> FGD-4, *Op. cit.*

<sup>102</sup> FGD-3, *Op. cit.*

<sup>103</sup> FGD-4, *Op. cit.*

<sup>104</sup> N. Jahan, *Op. cit.*

give inducements to corrupt traffic personnel when they violate traffic rules. Under the circumstances, they just accommodate other's unsaid demands and give quick carrots to avoid any type of harassment.<sup>105</sup>

On the other hand, they comply with certain rules and legal restrictions of certain areas where there are restrictions for rickshaws to enter, particularly when they enter those areas. Either they obey those regulations or have to move away from those areas quickly to avoid fines or arrests from the streets. However, in the worst-case situation, as one respondent mentioned, accommodation mode is also considered to accept harassment or abuse from the passengers.<sup>106</sup> They often tolerate such types of abusive violence, especially when rickshaw pullers urgently need money or do not have any interests to fight back with those passengers due to power disparity. Under various circumstances, once they apply the accommodation technique, it indicates their vulnerability in urban cities where they are for earning money.

#### **Collaborating for Common Benefits**

Parties collaborate when they find a mutually beneficial position that satisfies their interests and goals. Rickshaw pullers in their daily lives collaborate with fellow drivers, garage owners, and legal bodies on the street and in other locations. For example, when two rickshaw pullers argue over a parking spot or get passengers in a congested area, they may employ the collaborative approach to understand each other's viewpoints, explore alternate choices, and agree on a fair and polite arrangement.<sup>107</sup> Thus, they avoid aggravating a situation that could lead to arguments and quarrels. When a disagreement evolves, it leads to either a win-lose or lose-lose outcome for the parties. Engaging in disagreements or fights could lead to trauma and injury that are not expected for any parties on the street. Therefore, depending on the nature and context of conflicts, they apply a collaborative approach that jointly benefits them. For example, sometimes they promptly hand over a tiny amount to a traffic Ansar person to enter a street where rickshaws are unauthorised to ply, which benefits both parties.<sup>108</sup> One gets unlawful financial benefits, while the other avoids a long route to reach the destination.

#### **Compromising for a Win-Win Outcome**

Like other actors, rickshaw pullers compromise to balance their interests and needs with others. They need to find a middle ground between competing and

---

<sup>105</sup> FGD-2, *Op. cit.*

<sup>106</sup> Individual Interview, no 20, interviewed on October 5, 2022.

<sup>107</sup> FGD-1, arranged in Shahid Nagar area of Lalbagh on 11 November, 2022.

<sup>108</sup> FGD-4, *Op. cit.*



accommodating where both parties partially, if not fully, satisfy their needs and interests. For example, rickshaw pullers primarily opt for a compromise mode in situations where they have to bargain and negotiate for fares.<sup>109</sup> When a passenger offers a cheap fare for commuting, they bargain to increase the rate. If they succeed, it brings benefits for them. When they cannot succeed in bargaining, they agree with a low fare so that earning continues. Instead of sitting idle, rickshaw pullers focus on having some earnings; they decline the trip, when it is too cheap for them.

Once a rickshaw is stolen by a thief, there are instances when rickshaw pullers get cooperation from the garage owner, who owns the rickshaws. Both parties compromise to avoid paying them an enormous amount of compensation.<sup>110</sup> When rickshaw pullers express willingness to pay compensation that convinces some garage owners. Both parties show a willingness to give up some portions of their interests that help to avoid an unwanted conflict situation.

In terms of uncomfortable relations with garage owners or house owners, seasonal rickshaw pullers who do not have any permanent residence but live in informal and cheap accommodation facilities compromise more compared to those who have permanent living arrangements in Dhaka.<sup>111</sup> They compromise their living standard to stay close to the garage and secure renting a rickshaw from the garage owner every day. Moreover, they compromise with any other actors on the streets, like traffic personnel or other vehicle drivers/owners, since seasonal rickshaw pullers are less aware of the rules and regulations of the streets than permanent rickshaw pullers of the city.

## Discussion

### *Relevance of the T-KCMM in Addressing Rickshaw Pullers' Conflicts*

The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Management Model (T-KCMM) has been used in different contexts for analysing conflicts and responses that parties apply to deal with their conflicts. Although the T-KCMM was developed to study workers and their routine conflicts during the 1970s, it has helped to analyse numerous conflicts involving labourers and individuals and understand their strategies and approaches in responding to conflicts. Therefore, it is relevant to analyse conflicts of marginalised

---

<sup>109</sup> FGD-5, *Op. cit.*; Individual Interview, no 3, 12 and 20, interviewed respectively on August 16, September 16 and October 5, 2022.

<sup>110</sup> FGD-1, *Op. cit.*; *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> Individual Interview, no 5,9,10,12, 15,20 and 24, respectively interviewed on August 16, September 05, 16 and 24, and October 5 and 11, 2022.

rickshaw pullers and the strategies they apply for handling such conflicts in urban cities like Dhaka.

While considering the nature of conflicts that rickshaw pullers experience in Dhaka city, it looks like their conflicts are mostly related to the financial and dignity issues that they face on the streets and garage areas. They usually face misconduct from passengers, including physical assault, belittling, scolding, paying unjustly, or quarrels over the fare. The financial issues are their main interests to protect, for which they not only engage in arguments and tussles but also resort to some forms of physical assaults and violence. Nevertheless, most of their conflicts are non-violent, except for a few, which largely depend on the power, influence, and evolving relationship of the actors who get into a conflict process with rickshaw pullers. They engage in violent conflicts with passengers and fellow rickshaw pullers over financial and respect issues. They want to protect their financial gains, for which they migrate to Dhaka and work hard to uphold dignity.

Based on the theoretical framework of conflict and the T-KCMM, our findings suggest that not all conflict rickshaw pullers compete; they only apply a competitive approach on those issues where their financial interests and respect issues are at stake. As mentioned before, they join in fighting with fellow rickshaw pullers and occasionally with passengers. Nevertheless, they do not apply this approach when they find serious power disparity with the other party/actors. For instance, the traffic police and Ansar, and garage owners are considered more powerful to them. Therefore, despite facing various problems and harassment, they avoid engaging in aggressive behaviour with them due to significant power differences with these actors. Avoidance of conflict is profitable for them. Avoiding arguments and conflicts with garage/rickshaw owners and police helps them to overcome unwanted stress and harm and achieve their objectives of earning money through rickshaw pulling.

On the other hand, they sometimes just accommodate the abusive behaviour of some actors for their benefit. They have to accommodate others' unlawful demands due to their weaknesses and vulnerabilities. For example, they often bribe when they violate traffic rules. This means there is a connection between vulnerability and corruption. Although this mode may help them to maintain temporary harmony, it results in a loss of self-esteem and costs money and their mental peace. On other occasions, they have to accommodate for their benefit. When they do not have a legal contract with the owners of the accommodation, it endangers their eviction from their informal living space. Therefore, accommodate the demands of the garage owners. On the other hand, they prefer collaboration to accommodation as the former serves the common interests of both parties. As a non-assertive and cooperative approach that results in a win-win

outcome. They collaborate with other rickshaw pullers in a parking space and cooperate with corrupt traffic Ansar persons for both parties' benefits, meaning common financial benefits encourage these parties to collaborate on the streets.

One of the cruxes of the T-KCMM is that parties' compromise for a win-win situation comes out of the conflict situation. Although rickshaw pullers compromise with passengers for fares, they reach a consensus point on the fare through intense bargaining, meaning bargaining and negotiations are integral parts of the rickshaw pullers and passengers' compromise pact. They may not have a written agreement but agree on a social contract for riding to a certain distance with an agreed fair. Nevertheless, they maintain another social contract with other rickshaw pullers to avoid competition for passengers in specific places at certain times. They maintain such a deal to benefit all so that they can earn money quickly without being confrontational with the passengers and fellow rickshaw pullers.

Other than their pursuit of compromised mechanisms, sometimes third parties facilitate a process to end their violent conflicts with others. For example, when they engage in fights on the street with a fellow rickshaw puller, someone else, such as other rickshaw drivers, passengers, ordinary public, traffic personnel, hawkers, pedestrians etc., comes forward to separate them physically. The involvement of third parties who come forward to separate the conflicting rickshaw pullers reduces the extent of assertiveness that could contribute to the T-KCMM. Once they separate them, they go away or focus on their own business. Given a rapidly evolving conflict situation, such actors, who help in settling the disputes in their own ways, are truly powerful stakeholders and peacemakers in addressing rickshaw pullers' conflicts on the street. Therefore, one cannot deny the contribution of the T-KCMM in exploring and analysing the approaches and strategies rickshaw pullers apply in managing their everyday conflict in the streets of Dhaka.

### **Conclusion**

Rickshaw pullers, who mostly migrate temporarily from rural areas or live permanently in Dhaka, constitute a community that makes people's busy lives easy. Although they maintain a humble subsistence through their hard labour, they face various unwelcoming events and diverse conflicts with different actors and apply pragmatic strategies and approaches to deal with those conflicts. This paper finds that rickshaw pullers broadly experience conflicts in four aspects: financial issues, shared space, entry restriction and legal space, and personal space and dignity issues. They engage in conflicting relations with different actors, including passengers, fellow rickshaw pullers, garage owners, other vehicle drivers, traffic personnel, etc., mostly over financial and individual respect issues. Despite experiencing abuse and

harassment by rowdy passengers, garage owners, and traffic authorities, most of their conflicts are non-violent, which leads to verbal exchanges in quarrels, except for some occasional violent engagement with fellow rickshaw pullers and on rare events with passengers. Nevertheless, their engagement in violent conflict is mostly determined by their power dynamics with the other actors.

While analysing their response mechanisms to those conflicts in line with the T-KCMM, we argue that they undertake pragmatic approaches that protect their interests. They apply a prioritised competitive approach mostly to deal with financial issues and consider the power dynamics of the parties to determine the extent of engagement with others. Depending on their power parity they show less self-restraint and become assertive in responding to conflicts that originate from disrespect and dishonour with fellow rickshaw pullers. Nevertheless, they preferentially avoid conflicts when the disputant party is more powerful and avoidance is less costly than engaging in quarrels and disputes with passengers and garage owners. Due to their structural weaknesses and ignorance, rickshaw pullers accommodate others' demands and collaborate for common benefits. They only compromise through generous negotiation and bargaining, culminating in informal social contracts with passengers, garage owners, and traffic personnel to balance the economic interests that help them escape from any unwanted situations in their uninterrupted earning process. Nevertheless, a range of actors, such as rickshaw drivers, passengers, traffic personnel, hawkers and pedestrians, approach as powerful third parties and peacemakers to settle their evolving violent conflicts with fellow rickshaw pullers on the streets.

### **Acknowledgements**

We have developed this manuscript from a tiny part of the second author's B.S.S. thesis, which was initially thought, suggested and supervised by the first author at the Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh, during the academic session 2020-2021. Nevertheless, we later extensively worked with the data to broaden the analysis for the purpose of this paper.

## Transformation of Bengal after Arrival of Muslims

Mohammad Bilal Hossain\*

### Abstract

The study explores the transformation of medieval Bengal with the arrival of Muslims, marking the dawn of a Golden Age. Bengali Muslims, now the second-largest Muslim ethnic group globally, integrated into the region's social fabric through immigration starting from the 8th century, accelerating after 1204. Immigrant Muslims and Muslim rulers, after 1204, connected Bengal with the benefits of the Islamic Golden Age of the medieval period. These immigrants, driven by religious, political, and economic motivations, established a substantial Muslim community and introduced Islamic principles that reshaped governance, justice, education, socio-economic conditions, trade, literature, and architecture in Bengal. The peaceful coexistence of immigrant Muslims, converted Muslims, and local Bengalis under Muslim rule fostered a multiethnic society enriched by Islamic cultural elements. The research delves into the gradual Islamization process in Bengal, characterized by the integration of Islamic customs and values into the existing social fabric. In addition, it examines the existing socio-economic condition of Bengal before the establishment of Muslim rule in Bengal. It also highlights the pivotal role of mosques and educational institutions in promoting Islamic teachings and fostering cultural exchanges. By analyzing primary and secondary sources, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of Bengal's evolution during this period, emphasizing the motivations behind Muslim territorial control and the defining characteristics of the era. Despite the scarcity of precise historical records, the findings contribute to the broader scholarship on Bengal's history, illustrating how the integration of Islamic elements led to a period of prosperity and cultural richness in medieval Bengal.

**Key words:** Muslim Bengal, Transformation, Islamization, Medieval Bengal, Golden Age, Identity, Culture, Socioeconomic Development.

### Introduction

Bengali Muslims constitute the second-largest Muslim ethnic population in the world after the Arabs.<sup>1</sup> During the medieval period, Muslims who migrated to Bengal became integrated into the existing social fabric of the Bengali nation. People from

---

\* Associate Professor, Department of History, Jagannath University, Dhaka

<sup>1</sup> Richard V. Weekes(ed.), *Muslim Peoples: A World Ethnographic Survey*, 2nd ed., Vol. 1 (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1984). p. 137.

diverse backgrounds, such as Arabs, Turks, Afghans, Mughals, Syrians, Persians, and others, flocked to Bengal with varied expectations and a strong sense of religious mission. Consequently, the activities of the immigrants were deeply influenced by their Muslim identity, where they actively worked to propagate their religion along with their other economic efforts. From 1204 onwards, over five centuries of Muslim rule significantly contributed to the formation of a substantial Muslim community in Bengal and the establishment of Islam's dominance within the public sphere. Throughout this period, Bengal experienced the rule of various Muslim rulers from different dynasties, including the rulers of the Delhi Sultanate<sup>2</sup>, the independent Bengal Sultanate, the Mughal Empire, and others. Despite fluctuations, the Muslim Bengal is intricately tied to the enduring Muslim governance of the region, marked by noteworthy advancements across governance, justice, knowledge, socio-economic development, trade and commerce, art, literature, and architecture.

In a short span of time, Prophet Mohammad (s.) succeeded in establishing a society that revered and believed in Allah, upheld moral values, prioritized justice and equity, emphasized education and learning, and was marked by compassion, love, brotherhood, solidarity, and cooperation.<sup>3</sup> This exemplary role of the model of Prophet Mohammad (s.) provided all the essential components for the subsequent nations of the world who accepted the principles of the Prophet, which was the foundation of the Golden Age of the Muslims in the world. Muslims are religiously encouraged to exert their utmost effort to improve living conditions and resolve any challenge they face.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the degree of success is intrinsically tied to the value placed on human beings, a pivotal factor in every decision-making. The principles were employed to foster an honorable and inclusive social existence that welcomed valuable contributions regardless of era and situation in the world. It is widely acknowledged that the period spanning from 750 AD to the late 16<sup>th</sup> century represents the Golden Age of the Muslim Empire. As the Muslim rulers conquered Bengal and began implementing Islamic principles in the region from the thirteenth century onward, it is evident that their presence and rule became a significant link connecting Bengal to the Muslim Empire's prosperity, ushering in the benefits of this Golden Age to the land.

---

<sup>2</sup> Delhi Sultanate was a principal Muslim sultanate in north India from the 13th to the 16th century, Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, "Delhi sultanate", Encyclopedia Britannica, March 28, 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Mansouri Abdelhak, "The Muslim Society During the Life of the Prophet Mohammed and After His Death", in *The State of Social Progress of Islamic Societies*, Ed. Habib Tiliouine and Richard J. Estes (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2016), pp. 3-23.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Different authors offer varying interpretations to illustrate the concept of a 'Golden Age'. According to the Britannica Dictionary, it denotes a period marked by significant happiness, success, and accomplishments.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, the Cambridge Dictionary defines it as a period in the past, sometimes imaginary, of great happiness and success.<sup>6</sup> The era commonly referred to as the “golden age” of Islam spanned from the 9th to the 10th century, marked by the assimilation of the Greek scientific heritage; this period extended through the 13th to the 14th century, witnessing the full blossoming of genuine Islamic science.<sup>7</sup> The period is notably associated with the reign of the Abbasid caliphs until 1258 and the subsequent Timurid Renaissance, which were essential within the context of the Muslim Golden Age. Modern historians have extended this period's boundaries to the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, coinciding with the expansion of Muslim territories through the use of gunpowder.<sup>8</sup> The term 'Golden Age' often encompasses various dynasties and empires, primarily referring to the Abbasid Caliphs, the Ottoman Empire, the Safavid Empire of Iran, and the Mughal Empire of South Asia. Muslim Golden Age has been marked as a source of significant pride for Muslims globally. Even today, Muslims anticipate the revival of this Golden Age with the hope that it will bring about a resurgence of Islam, re-establishing it as a prominent cultural and religious force in the world.<sup>9</sup>

It is important to note that the transformation of Bengal to the process of Islamization was gradual and complex, and it involved interactions and coexistence between different religious and cultural groups. The spiritual status of Bengal before the advent of Islam was marked by the rich tapestry of indigenous beliefs, Hinduism, and remnants of Buddhism with a diverse array of practices and traditions. The arrival of Muslims in Bengal introduced a new dimension to the existing religious landscape and culture. The eastward expansion of Islam from Arabia was facilitated by the prevailing perception of Arab Muslims regarding India as the land of dreams, legends, and forsaken deities mentioned by the Greek Traveler and Geographer

---

<sup>5</sup> “Golden Age,” in *The Britannica Dictionary*, August 30, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/golden-age>.

<sup>6</sup> “Golden Age,” in *Cambridge Dictionary*, August 30, 2022, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/golden-age>.

<sup>7</sup> George Saliba, *A History of Arabic Astronomy: Planetary Theories During the Golden Age of Islam* (New York University Press, 1994). p. 65.

<sup>8</sup> David A. King, “The Astronomy of the Mamluks,” *Isis*, Vol. 74, No. 4 (December 1983), pp. 531–55.

<sup>9</sup> Ahmed Renima, Habib *et al.*, “The Islamic Golden Age: A Story of the Triumph of the Islamic Civilization,” in *The State of Social Progress of Islamic Societies*, Habib Tiliouine and Richard J. Estes (ed.), (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2016), pp. 25-52.

Megasthenes (290 B.C).<sup>10</sup> This perception was carried by Arab tribes traveling along the traditional trade routes through the Arabian Peninsula, facilitating trans-regional commerce. This was made possible by the complex relationships among nomads, farmers, and trading communities on the peninsula, which maintained connections among the neighboring regions.<sup>11</sup>

The historical roots of Muslim influence in Bengal can be traced back to the establishment of commercial and religious ties by Arab Muslims with the region. Renowned for their maritime expertise, Arabs played a pivotal role in shaping the maritime landscape. The historical narrative unfolds in the 8th century when the illicit seizure of an Arab mercantile vessel off the coast of Sind triggered a retaliatory expedition led by Muhammad Bin Qasim. This campaign resulted in the conquest of Sind and adjacent territories in 712 AC. Following the Muslim Arab conquest of Sindh, the Indus River functioned as the natural eastern boundary for approximately three centuries. This juncture marked a transformative epoch for Islam and the Arabs, laying the groundwork for the gradual expansion of Islam and the establishment of Muslim political authority in the Indian subcontinent. Over time, these endeavors extended across the entire South Asian coast, encompassing regions such as Bengal, Burma, Malaysia, and Indonesia and stretching as far as China.

During the early days, Muslim immigrants settled in major Bengal cities such as Gaur, Satgaon, Pandua, and Sonargaon. They were mainly comprised of traders, travelers, and Muslim preachers. As time passed, the demographics expanded to include individuals from various professions, including soldiers, administrators, and scholars. During the period of the independent Sultanate (1338-1538), Bengal's ties with northern India became more distant. However, following the Mughal conquest in 1576, a renewed wave of immigrants from north India settled in the deltaic region of Bengal.<sup>12</sup> The infusion of Islam and the arrival of Muslims into Bengal had a transformative and favorable influence, leading to a period of socio-economic development, educational advancements, architectural and literary progress, the establishment of advanced legal and administrative systems, and the flourishing of

---

<sup>10</sup> Arrian *et al.*, *Ancient India as Described by Megasthenês and Arrian; Being a Translation of the Fragments of the Indika of Megasthenês Collected by Dr. Schwanbeck, and of the First Part of the Indika of Arrian* (Calcutta: Tancker, Spink, 1877).

<sup>11</sup> Jamal Malik, "Chapter 1 Muslim Expansion: Trade, Military & the Quest for Political Authority in South Asia (Approx. 700–1300)," in *Islam in South Asia* (BRILL, 2020), pp. 29–75.

<sup>12</sup> Richard M. Eaton, "Who Are the Bengal Muslims? Conversion and Islamization in Bengal," in *Understanding the Bengal Muslims* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 26–52.



cultural diversity. Consequently, the study identifies the arrival of Muslims as the onset of Bengal's Golden Age within the Islamic world.

This qualitative research delves into the historical transformation of Muslim Bengal, drawing from both primary and secondary sources. The study primarily relies on the writings of contemporary chroniclers and travelers to form a conceptual framework. These sources, originally documented in Arabic and Persian, have been translated into English by different scholars, forming the cornerstone of the study's historical investigation. Additionally, a comprehensive review of relevant secondary literature complements the primary sources, enriching the analysis and interpretation. The principal objective of this research is to provide a nuanced understanding of the evolution of Muslim Bengal within the context of the medieval Muslim Golden Age. Specifically, it aims to unravel the motivations driving Muslim territorial control in Bengal during this transformative period and to elucidate the prominent characteristics defining the era. By shedding light on these historical dynamics, the study endeavors to offer valuable insights into the socio-economic, political and cultural landscape of medieval Bengal. The study acknowledges the limitation due to the scarcity of historical sources, which often do not precisely describe the activities and functions of Muslim rulers and Muslim immigrants or the socio-economic conditions in Bengal. Additionally, the discussion on the transformation of Muslim Bengal in light of the Islamic Golden Age is brief and may not fully meet the expectations of all readers. Despite these constraints, the research has been conducted with the hope that its findings will make a significant contribution to the existing scholarship on Bengal's history.

### **Bengal before the Conquest by the Muslims**

The arrival of Muslims in Bengal had a significant impact on its socio-political and racial landscape. Therefore, to comprehend the transformation of Bengal under Muslim rule, it is essential first to examine the pre-existing conditions on the eve of their arrival. Bengal region was one of the very early centers of Aryan settlement in India. The pre-historic kingdom of Pragiyotish, stretching from present-day Jalpaiguri to the hinterland of Assam in India, represented one of the ancient Aryan colonies in the region.<sup>13</sup> Since early times, the Bengal region has been the cradle of significant religious movements. Buddhists and Jains successfully converted a substantial portion of Bengal's population to their respective beliefs, while

---

<sup>13</sup> Dinesh Chandra Sen, *History of Bengali Language and Literature* (Calcutta: Calcutta University, 1911). p. 1.

Brahminic influence remained comparatively subdued for centuries.<sup>14</sup> Even the country was in open rebellion against Hindu orthodoxy. Likely, Bengal was largely inhabited by the descendants of the early citizens of *Magadah* (a township of ancient India). Consequently, Brahminism struggled to sustain itself for many centuries among a population at the forefront of Buddhism.<sup>15</sup> Conversely, among the twenty-four Tirthankaras (divine men) of the Jains, an impressive twenty-three achieved Moksha (salvation) in the region of Bengal.<sup>16</sup> Throughout its extensive history, Bengal has proven to be fertile ground for growing new religions. Despite the presence of major religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, as well as various minor beliefs like animism, the region remained open to embracing the new faith of Islam in the early Middle Ages.

Apart from the Aryans, the indigenous people of Bengal possessed distinct racial and cultural characteristics that distinguished them from the Aryan population. Anthropological evidence and linguistic traits highlight the diverse elements that contribute to the makeup of the Bengali people and their language.<sup>17</sup> Different races settled in Bengal during the ancient period, which shaped the anthropology of the Bengali populace. Two primary origins can be identified in the formation of the Bengali race: the first group comprised primitive tribes like the Kols, Pulindas, Dom, Hadi, Sabaras, Chandala, and Mlechchhas. These early settlers, often referred to as non-Aryan people in Vedic literature, are recognized as the Nishadas and are associated with the Austro-Asiatic or Austric linguistic traditions. They represent most of the Bengali race and have inhabited Bengal since its earliest recorded history. The second wave of people, Aryans, consisted of the higher social classes within the caste system. These groups contributed to the development of Bengali society and civilization.<sup>18</sup> It is well-recognized that the Brahmanas belong to the Aryan race, which itself migrated to India from outside. The Brahmanas, who were outsiders, had a significant influence in shaping the social structure.

Specifically, the smaller yet influential upper caste Brahmins played a pivotal role at the periphery of Bengal's society and formed the very foundation of its social structure in ancient period. Professor Mahalanobis conducted research on the origins of this upper caste and observed a remarkable homogeneity between the upper castes

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 3

<sup>17</sup> R. C. Majumdar *et al.*, "Society," in *The History of Bengal, Hindu Period*, R. C. Majumdar (ed.) (Dhaka: The University of Dhaka, 1943). pp. 557-623.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 557

in Bengal and those in other regions of India. Ramaprashada Chanda noted that the Brahmanas of Bengal had closer ties to the Brahmanas in the heartland of India, suggesting a migration from northern India.<sup>19</sup> Alongside the general *Nishada* population, understanding the role of this Brahman class is crucial for comprehending the social and political dynamics of ancient Bengal. The upper caste set themselves apart from the *Nishada* population through religious sanctions and social customs, which led to a situation where the upper caste ruled the *Nishada* population and even often denied their rightful privileges.<sup>20</sup>

Referring to Brhihad Dhormo Purana, Niharranjan Roy enumerated forty-one distinct castes among the early inhabitants of Bengal, with certain castes delineating specific professions while others denoted racial distinctions. Notably, when castes were tied to professions, it allowed for the blending of races. Consequently, his conclusion posited that every Bengali race exhibited characteristics of hybridity.<sup>21</sup> Professor H. C. Raychaudhuri analyzed various ancient sources concerning the races of Bengali people and the early state system in Bengal. His conclusions can be summarized in four key points: firstly, the initial settlers in Bengal and Orissa were closely related to non-Aryan tribes, but from the first millennium B.C., there was a gradual influx of Aryan influence. Secondly, organized governance existed in Bengal well before the advent of the historical era. Thirdly, the region was typically segmented into multiple states, some periodically attaining significant power. Lastly, the kingdoms of Bengal maintained close and reciprocal connections with their immediate Western neighbors.<sup>22</sup>

According to Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Misra, the Sena dynasty governed Bengal for just over a century before the Muslims, during which their rule evolved into a substantial empire, enabling them to assert paramountcy over the entire region for the first time in its history. The process of integrating sub-regions, which maintained their existence throughout, commenced by the Sena rulers and eventually culminated in forming a unified regional state in the later part of the 14th century CE under Muslim rule.<sup>23</sup> Hence, it becomes evident that the Senas were not originally

<sup>19</sup> Ramaprasad Chanda, "The Indo-Aryan Races," *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, January 1917, pp. 167-75.

<sup>20</sup> Majumdar *et al.*, "Society", pp. 557-623.

<sup>21</sup> Niharranjan Roy, "Itihaser Gorar Kotha", in *Bangaleer Itihas: Aadi Parba* (Kolkata: Dey's Publishing, 1993), pp. 23-66.

<sup>22</sup> H. C. Raychaudhuri, "The Legendary Period," in *The History of Bengal, Hindu Period*, R. C. Majumdar (ed.), Vol. 1 (Dhaka: The University of Dhaka, 1943), pp. 35-40.

<sup>23</sup> Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Chitta Ranjan Misra, "The Sena Rule: Towards the Integration of Sub-Regions," in *History of Bangladesh: Early Bengal in Regional*

Bengali but outsiders from south India. Motivated by the prospect of improved opportunities, they ventured into the Bengal region. Seizing the opportunity amid the upheaval of the Pala kingdom, they began ruling autonomously in the smaller area of Radha (present-day Burdwan division) in the latter part of the 11th century. Over time, their influence expanded, eventually encompassing most parts of the Bengal region. Supplanting the Buddhist Pala kingdom, the Sena rulers actively sought to establish the sway. They spread the Indo-Aryan culture in the Bengal Delta before the Muslim conquest of Bengal in the early 13th century.

Notably, the Sena dynasty established itself in Bengal in the early 12th century after supplanting the Pala rulers and Buddhism as a religion. D. C. Ganguly analyzed the origin of the Sena rulers. Historical records from the Pala dynasty indicate that kings, starting from Devapala, appointed numerous foreign officers, including the Karnatas. So, it is conceivable that a distant ancestor of the Senas in Bengal originated from the Deccan and initially served under the Palas. Another plausible scenario is that the founder of the Senas accompanied one of the Chalukya rulers during their Bengal invasion, ultimately deciding to settle in the region. Therefore, one could argue that the Senas originated in the Kannada-speaking region in the South of India.<sup>24</sup> As per Britannica, the Sena dynasty, an Indian ruling dynasty in Bengal during the 11th and 12th centuries CE, had its roots in the southern regions of India. Their forebears migrated from the south and assumed leadership as chieftains in southwestern Bengal at the beginning of the 11th century.<sup>25</sup> R. C. Majumdar, through examination of early inscriptions and historical records, pinpointed the origin of the Senas. His analysis concluded that the Sena family hailed from Karnata in South India. There is no doubt that the original homeland of the Sena family was in Karnata, a region encompassing modern Mysore and Hyderabad States where Kanarese is the predominant language. Additionally, Majumdar noted that the Senas belonged to the esteemed Brahman-Kshatri caste.<sup>26</sup> The arrival of Muslims in Bengal significantly influenced the governance and demographics of the region within these diverse socio-political and religious contexts.

---

*Perspectives (up to c.1200 CE)*, Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Ranabir Chakravarti (ed.), Vol. 1, 2 vols. (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2018), pp. 833-56.

<sup>24</sup> D. C. Ganguly, "Northern India during the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries," in *The Struggle for Empire*, R. C. Majumdar (ed.), 1st ed., Vol. V, The History and Culture of the Indian People (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhaban, 1957), pp. 24-101.

<sup>25</sup> Britannica, the Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Sena dynasty". Encyclopedia Britannica, 26 Nov. 2013, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sena-dynasty>. Accessed 7 December 2023.

<sup>26</sup> R. C. Majumdar, (ed.), *The History of Bengal (Hindu Period)*, Vol. I (Delhi: Reprinted by B.R. Publishing Corporation, 2004). p. 205.

### **Expansion of Islam and the Conquest of Bengal by the Muslims**

In the seventh century, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) laid the foundation for the Islamic state modeled on Medina. Following his demise, the establishment of caliphates marked a pivotal era in expanding Islam beyond Arab lands. The impetus for conversion to Islam was multifaceted, fueled by the eloquence of Muslim preachers, the endeavors of traders, and the strategic advantage afforded by military prowess, enabling Muslim conquerors to assert dominance over vast regions of the world. Subsequently, after the four successor caliphates of the Prophet, influential Muslim dynasties such as the Umayyads, Abbasids, Mamluks, Seljuks, and Ayyubids emerged, ushering in dominant empires that left an indelible mark on global history. Clearly, within a century of the Prophet's passing, Islam triumphed over contemporary great empires like the Byzantine and Persian, supplanting deeply entrenched world religions and effecting substantial conversions.<sup>27</sup> This rapid and transformative spread underscores the historical significance of Islam's early centuries and its enduring impact on the geopolitical landscape.

Subsequently, the army swiftly seized control of most of North Africa, Spain, Anatolia, and Sindh (the northwestern corner of the Indian subcontinent). By 711, the Arab Empire spanned from Toledo (Spain) to Multan (Pakistan).<sup>28</sup> The final eastward expansion occurred as the 'Umayyads relinquished control of their Empire to the Abbasids (750–1258). As the Abbasid Empire expanded, its central authority weakened, resulting in a decentralized imperial structure and the rise of local dynasties throughout Asia. From the ninth to the tenth centuries, regional rulers acknowledged the Abbasid Caliph by delivering the Friday congregational prayer sermon (khotba), minting coins for the Empire, and presenting enslaved people acquired in raids on Turkic territories as tribute to Baghdad.<sup>29</sup> These captives were then converted to Islam and integrated into the Abbasid army as soldiers, with some managing to ascend the ranks and attain political-military influence. While maintaining allegiance to the Abbasids, these emerging dynasties concurrently pursued territorial conquests to secure additional resources.

---

<sup>27</sup> Bashar Bakkour, *The Spread of Islam: Perceptions and Misperceptions*, (Damascus, Al-Fatih Islamic Institute, 2011), <http://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=3359247>.

<sup>28</sup> "Islam across the Oxus (Seventh to Seventeenth Centuries)," in *Islam and Asia: A History*, by Chiara Formichi, *New Approaches to Asian History* (Cambridge New York, NY Port Melbourne New Delhi Singapore: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 10-42.

<sup>29</sup> "Islam across the Oxus (Seventh to Seventeenth Centuries)."

During the 9th and 10th centuries, the Iranian people showed dissatisfaction with the Abbasid caliphate and Arabic influence.<sup>30</sup> The Samanids<sup>31</sup> became influential in the Abbasid Caliphate's territory in the 9th century, creating a Persianate Sunni Muslim empire from 819 to 999 AD. This empire included Khorasan, Transoxiana<sup>32</sup>, and parts of modern-day Afghanistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan. Transoxania was a significant hub of Muslim civilization in the European Middle Ages and was the focal point of the Timurid Empire during the 15th century. Its cities, such as Bukhara and Samarkand, gained global recognition. However, in the 19th century, the region fell under Russian control through occupation.<sup>33</sup> The decline of the Samanids by the end of the 10th century led to the rise of two Turkish dynasties, the Ghaznavids and the Seljuk Turks. Sultan Mahmud, a prominent ruler of the Ghaznavids, played a significant role in molding the fate of the region. The 12th century saw the succession of the Khwarazm Shahs and the Ghorids after the Seljuks and Ghaznavids. The rivalry between these powers marked a new phase of Islamic expansion into the South Asian subcontinent.<sup>34</sup>

During the 11th to 13th centuries, Turkic dynasties with Islamic influence descended from the slave soldiers governed northern regions of the Indian subcontinent and extensive portions of Central Asia and Western China.<sup>35</sup> The rivalry between two rising powers, the Khwarazm Shahs and the Ghorids, accounted for the new phase of Islamic expansion in South Asia. The Khwarazm Shahs expelled the Ghorids from Khurasan, Ghazni, and Afghanistan in the early 13th century. Before that happened,

---

<sup>30</sup> Robert L. Canfield ed., "Introduction: The Turko Persian Tradition," in *Turko-Persia in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 1-34.

<sup>31</sup> The Samanids were a Persian dynasty that ruled in Central Asia from the 9th to the early 11th century. Established by Ismail ibn Ahmad in the early 9th century, the Samanid state centered around Bukhara in Transoxiana. The dynasty played a key role in the cultural and intellectual history of the region. Under the Samanids, Central Asia experienced a cultural renaissance, marked by patronage of the arts, literature, and sciences. The Samanid rulers were notable for their support of Persian language and culture, contributing to the flourishing of Persian literature during their reign. Bukhara, the Samanid capital, became a prominent center for scholarship and cultural exchange.

<sup>32</sup> Transoxania ("That Which Lies Beyond the River") is a historical region of Turkistan in Central Asia east of the Amu Darya (Oxus River) and west of the Syr Darya (Jaxartes River), roughly corresponding to present-day Uzbekistan and parts of Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan. (Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Transoxania". Encyclopedia Britannica, 7 Feb. 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Transoxania>. Accessed 26 November 2023.)

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> "Islam across the Oxus (Seventh to Seventeenth Centuries)".

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

Muazz al-Din Muhammad Ghori and his lieutenant, Qutubuddin Eibek, established the foundation of a new Islamic state in northern India.<sup>36</sup> The conquest of Bengal by Muslims was an extension of Muhammad Ghori's northern Indian campaign and marked a significant chapter in history. Bakhtiyar Khalji, a Turko-Afghan military general, played a crucial role during this period and further shaped the course of Islamic history in Bengal.

In 1203 AD, Khalji executed a swift assault on Bihar, taking control of Odantapuri Bihar before returning with a substantial treasure. Upon meeting Qutubuddin Eibek, Bakhtiyar presented him with valuable gifts, which were reciprocated with great honor by Qutubuddin. According to *Tarikh-i-Firishta*, Qutubuddin Eibek appointed Bakhtiyar Khalji as the governor of Bihar, and initially, he was neglecting the royal directives. However, he came to visit Qutubuddin, aiming to mend relations and extend a gesture of reconciliation through the presentation of lavish gifts.<sup>37</sup> Tabaka-i-Akbari mentioned that upon learning of Bakhtiyar's acts of bravery and fearlessness, Qutubuddin sent him a prestigious robe of honor (*Khilat*<sup>38</sup>) and ceremonial standard. Empowered by the Sultan's support, Bakhtiyar seized control of the Bihar Fort, leading to widespread plundering and ravages in the region.<sup>39</sup> The conquest of Udantapuri and the subjugation of Bihar brought the entire region up to Bengal under Bakhtiyar Khalji's control. Following the capture of Udantapuri, Qutubuddin entrusted Bakhtiyar with the governance of Lakhnawati (Bengal) and tasked him with the mission of conquering the region.<sup>40</sup> At that juncture, Bengal was under the rule of Sena monarch Lakshmansena.

According to the historical account in *Tarikh-i-Firishta*, the initial Muslim commander to invade the kingdom of Bengal was Malik Mohammad Bakhtiyar during the reign of Qutubuddin, the ruler of Delhi.<sup>41</sup> In the winter of 1204 AD, Bakhtiyar embarked on his Bengal expedition through the lesser-traveled Jharkhand region. Advancing towards Nadia, Bakhtiyar's pace was so rapid that only eighteen

---

<sup>36</sup> Muhammad Mohar Ali, *History of the Muslims of Bengal*, 1st ed., Vol. I A (Islamic Foundation of Bangladesh, 1985), p. 47.

<sup>37</sup> Muhammad Qasim Firishta, *Tarikh i Firishta*, trans. John Briggs, Vol. I, IV (Delhi-110052: Low Price Publications, 1829), p. 112.

<sup>38</sup> *Khilat*, or robe of honor, was a symbolic gesture of distinction often conferred by Islamic rulers during medieval times.

<sup>39</sup> Nizamuddin Ahmad, *Tabaqat i Akbari*, trans. Brajendranath De (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1927), p. 50.

<sup>40</sup> Ahmad, p. 50.

<sup>41</sup> Muhammad Qasim Firishta, *Tarikh i Firishta*, trans. John Briggs, Vol. IV, IV (Delhi-110052: Low Price Publications, 1829), p. 195.

horsemen could keep up with him. The city residents initially mistook him for a horse dealer, allowing Bakhtiyar to enter, and then he captured the palace. Raja Lakshmansena fled through the back door of the palace. Minhaj described the whole event like this: suddenly, Bakhtiyar emerged before the city of Nadia with such speed that only eighteen horsemen could keep pace with him while the rest of the troops trailed behind. Upon reaching the city gate, Bakhtiyar refrained from disturbing anyone, proceeding calmly and composedly. The residents assumed that perhaps his group was mere merchants who had brought horses for sale, oblivious to the fact that it was Muhammad Bakhtiyar. It wasn't until he uncovered his sword and launched an attack on the non-believers that the truth became apparent. During this crucial moment, Laskhmansena sat at the head of his table, surrounded by dishes made of gold and silver, filled with food, following his usual routine. However, a commotion erupted from the gateway of his palace and throughout the city. Before Laskhmansena could grasp the situation, Bakhtiyar had stormed through the gateway, entering the palace and slaying several individuals. The King escaped barefoot through the backdoor of his palace, leaving behind all his treasures, wives, other women, servants, and attendants. The Muslims seized numerous elephants, and the amount of plunder amassed was so immense that it defied enumeration. As Bakhtiyar's army arrived and took control of the city and its surroundings, he established his headquarters there. Lakshmansena fled towards Sankanat and Bang, leaving behind a town in the hands of the conquerors.<sup>42</sup> Tabakat-i-Akbari stated that after the invasion of Muhammad Bakhtiyar, Lakshmansen, in great confusion, hastily fled by boat to escape. Therefore, Muhammad Bakhtiyar seized control of all the vast treasures and the extensive paraphernalia of the state, which were beyond quantification. Instead of Nadia, Bakhtiyar established a new city named Lakhnauti as the new capital.<sup>43</sup>

On the other hand, by the end of the 12th century, the Sena kingdom, which originated in South India, was on the brink of collapse due to persistent conflicts with neighboring rulers. D. C. Ganguly, in his analysis of the Sena kingdom's state before the Muslim invasion, offered insights into the challenges and vulnerabilities faced by Lakshmansena;

The kingdom of the Sena began to disintegrate in the closing years of the twelfth century. *Khadi-mandala* was under the sway of Lakshmansena in the early part of his reign. But in

---

<sup>42</sup> Minhaj al-Din Ibn Umar al-Usmami, *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, trans. H. G. Raverty, vol. I (NJ, 08854, USA: Gorgias Press LLC (Reprinted from the 1881-1897 London edition), 2010, pp. 557-58

<sup>43</sup> Ahmad, *Tabaqat i Akbari*. p. 51.



or before A.C. 1196 one Dommanapala set up an independent kingdom in this region. While the Sena power was weakened by disruption within, it had to face the invasion of the Muslims who had by this time overrun the greater part of Northern India.<sup>44</sup>

Adding to their woes, the invasion of northern India and Bihar by Muslims instilled fear and unrest among the Sena nobility and the residents of Nadia, the capital of Sena rulers. Even Lakshmansena was acquainted with the physical attributes of Bakhtiyar Khalji through the information of his trusted persons and was known about his courage, gallantry, and triumphant exploits.<sup>45</sup>

Parmatma Saran and R. C. Majumdar delved into the reasons behind the decline of Hindu rule, acknowledging natural limitations but also seeking to analyze the root causes based on available historical sources. A prominent factor identified was the unjust caste system and the lack of engagement with the external world. The former led to the segmentation of Indian society into exclusive classes, where a privileged minority safeguarded their interests by denying the masses various civic rights, particularly in education and in freely interacting and associating with their peers on equal terms. Furthermore, this exclusivity fostered a sense of isolationism and insularity, breeding an attitude of arrogance among the Indian populace. The notion of exclusive superiority was propagated and sustained through intellectual fraud, as a significant portion of the literature from that period was manipulated for this purpose. The masses were urged to adhere to it unquestioningly in the name of sacred texts, and challenging their authority was deemed a grave offense. Consequently, this mindset hindered the comprehension of the profound importance of frontier defense and the necessary measures, given the significant geopolitical shifts and evolving military strategies occurring beyond India's borders.<sup>46</sup>

The narratives mentioned above imply that Bakhtiyar Khalji opted for strategic measures instead of resorting to widespread violence and conflict to establish control over the Kingdom of Bengal. The internal disarray within the Sena kingdom and the existing societal structure, combined with Bakhtiyar Khalji's victorious reputation and the influence of his forces already permeating Bengal's ruling class, paved the way for a peaceful triumph of the Muslim force over Bengal. Subsequently, for a span of over five hundred years, Muslim rulers governed Bengal with a policy emphasizing the peaceful coexistence of immigrant Muslim and local Bengali

---

<sup>44</sup> Ganguly, "Northern India during the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries", p. 39.

<sup>45</sup> Ibn Umar al-Usmami, *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, pp. 554-57.

<sup>46</sup> Paramatma Saran and R. C. Majumdar, "The Turkish Conquest of Northern India," in *The Struggle for Empire*, ed. R. C. Majumdar, 1st ed., Vol. V, The History and Culture of the Indian People (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhaban, 1957), 116-29, pp. 126-27.

populations. From Bakhtiyar Khalji's conquest in 1204 until 1765, when the East India Company assumed control of Bengal's Diwani (authorized power to collect revenue), Muslim rulers predominantly governed the region. This dominance extended beyond Bengal, encompassing various parts of the Indian subcontinent. Within this dynamic historical canvas of Muslim Bengal, it made relationships with the different hubs of Islamic world. These connections were seamlessly interwoven into extensive commercial networks, enriching the tapestry of Muslim Bengal with the threads of intellectual exchange and economic collaboration. According to Chiara Formichi, the ramifications of Islamic expansion in South and East Asia were profound, giving rise to diverse Muslim cultures characterized by multiethnic influences across the Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia, and China.<sup>47</sup> This era marked a geopolitical transformation and a flourishing of knowledge, culture, and commerce that left an indelible imprint on the annals of Islamic history.

### **The Transformation of Muslim Bengal**

The medieval metamorphosis of Muslim Bengal unfolded through an intricate interplay of socio-economic, cultural, and historical dynamics. Bengal's trajectory was significantly shaped by the profound influences of the Gupta and Pala Empires, fostering a rich tapestry of art, literature, and intellectual pursuits. The Indo-Aryan civilization of the Bengal region found its core in the upper and middle Gangatic zone of West Bengal, as it attracted a substantial influx of Brahman immigrants facilitated by geographical proximity. The decline of the Pala Empire marked a turning point, leading to the decline of Buddhism in Bengal and the subsequent resurgence of Hinduism under the patronage of the Sena rulers. This shift set the stage for a cultural clash, as Islamic influences confronted two deeply entrenched cultures in Bengal – the Buddhist and the Indo-Aryan. In this cultural tug-of-war, Eastern Bengal emerged as a distinct landscape, offering a more conducive environment for the assimilation of Islamic culture. Richard M. Eaton explained the spread of Bengali Hindu civilization, stating, “By the time of the Muslim conquest, then, the official cult of a cosmic overload, monumental state temples, and royal patronized Brahman priests had all emerged as central components of the Senas religious and political ideology.”<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, it was not the case that the early

---

<sup>47</sup> Chiara Formichi, *Islam and Asia: A History*, New Approaches to Asian History (Cambridge New York, NY Port Melbourne New Delhi Singapore: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

<sup>48</sup> Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760*, Comparative Studies on Muslim Societies 17 (Berkeley Los Angeles London: University of California Press, 1996). p. 17.

Indo-Aryan civilization and its subsequent Hindu manifestation had uniformly permeated all parts of the Bengal delta by then. Instead, the available evidence suggests that the northwestern and western sub-regions of Bengal were significantly more influenced by Indo-Aryan and Hindu civilization compared to the eastern delta, which retained a relatively lower degree of peasantization and Hinduization.<sup>49</sup>

For attesting to the less peasantization of the eastern delta, Richard M. Eaton also analyzed the land grants of ancient times in both eastern and western Bengal. In the case of East Bengal, the grants were allocated to Brahman groups or Buddhist monasteries and typically involved uncultivated lands intended for colonization and cultivation. On the other hand, land grants in western Bengal were characterized by the allocation of arable land, accompanied by specifications regarding revenue collection.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, animism held a predominant sway in rural Bengal, particularly in Eastern Bengal, contrasting with the prevalence of Hinduism in the western part of the region. This created a notable emptiness for the medieval Muslim conquerors to navigate, allowing them ample opportunity to foster agricultural development and propagate Islam in the absence of a prevailing dominant religious influence of the time. Consequently, this circumstance led to a substantial conversion of the Bengali population to Islam. Percival Spear stated the mass conversion in East Bengal in his writing. According to him, the most extensive instance of mass conversion took place in East Bengal, now Bangladesh. Over the 13th and 14th centuries, the entire rural landscape embraced Islam. The fading Buddhism of the Pala dynasty in Bengal was believed to have been layered onto their indigenous animistic beliefs. The substitution of the Brahminical Sena Kings for the Palas was seen as a decline in status and the imposition of caste restrictions. The Muslim conquest of Bengal, with its caste free religion, provided a welcomed opportunity for social liberation. Those who converted also brought their traditions with them, leading to the observation that the Islamization of India, to the extent it occurred, also involved the Hinduization of Indian Islam.<sup>51</sup>

Various scholars have explored the question of which class of Bengali inhabitants first embraced Islam. C. J. Lyall, Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam in

---

<sup>49</sup> Eaton, p. 17.

<sup>50</sup> "The Diffusion of Bengali Hindu Civilization," in *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760*, by Richard M. Eaton, pp. 17–21 (Berkeley Los Angeles London: University of California Press, 1996).

<sup>51</sup> Percival Spear, "The Position of the Muslims, Before and After Partition", in *India and Ceylon: Unity and Diversity, A Symposium*, ed. Philip Mason (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 30–50.

1882, as quoted by Anil Seal, shed light on this matter. According to Lyall, during the legendary conquest of Bengal by a small group of Muslims, those Bengali peasants who opted for Islam were already socially disadvantaged. As a result, the Hindu segment of the population inherently represents a higher social stratum, while the Muslim element occupies a lower one.<sup>52</sup> Eileen Macfarlane conducted an anthropological study in 1938 within the Twenty-four Parganas District of Bengal. The study revealed a significant conversion of a large number of peasants to Islam. Despite this conversion, the invaders did not establish a substantial settlement in the region. Analysis of blood group data from the Muslim population in Budge Budge indicated a clear ancestral connection to lower-caste Hindu converts, as supported by local tradition. Notably, the proportions of blood groups among the Muslim population remained remarkably similar to those of their contemporary Hindu neighbors.<sup>53</sup> Richard M Eaton quoted the study of D. N. Majumder and C. R. Rao published in 1960, but the data was collected in 1945 from both West and East Bengal just before the partition and massive shift of population. The study suggested that the potential origin of the Muslim population in Bengal might be traced among tribal and scheduled caste non-Muslim groups. Serological data from the pre-partition Muslim population in Bengal supports this perspective, suggesting a distinct dissociation of Bengali Muslims not only from those outside India but also from the Shias and Sunnis of Uttar Pradesh. This underscores the likelihood of a local origin for Bengali Muslims, assuming blood group evidence holds significance. Additionally, the authors observed fundamental differences in key anthropometric indicators, such as head length and breadth, as well as nasal length and breadth, between East Bengal groups (comprising both Muslims and non-Muslims) and their West Bengali counterparts. This noteworthy discovery further diminishes the historical significance attributed to internal migration from western to eastern Bengal.<sup>54</sup> All these studies suggested that socially disadvantaged local Bengali people were more likely to embrace Islam and emphasized that the influx of Muslims from external regions did not contribute significantly to the number of Muslim settlements in eastern Bengal.

---

<sup>52</sup> Anil Seal, "The Muslim Breakaway," in *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 298–340.

<sup>53</sup> Eileen W. Erlanson Macfarlane, "Blood-Group Distribution in India with Special Reference to Bengal," *Journal of Genetics*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (July 1938), pp. 225–37.

<sup>54</sup> "Theories of Islamization in Bengal," in *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760*, by Richard M. Eaton, 17 (Berkeley Los Angeles London: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 119–34.

The Muslim conquest of Bengal, introducing a caste free religion, was seen as an attractive pathway for social advancement. The important thing is the individuals who converted to Islam did not abandon their cultural practices. Instead, they took these customs into their newly adopted religious identity, underscoring the dynamic nature of cultural and spiritual interactions. P. Spear explained that Indian Muslims had diverse origins, but their predominant ancestry was Indian. Socially, they tended to organize themselves based on their previous social standing. The ruling Turks, Afghans, and Persians constituted the aristocracy, supplemented by the well-born among the Indian converts. In addition, the impact on the culture came from various sources. The Quran and its theology brought Arabic influence, while Turkish influence was evident in action and administration. Also, a widespread Persian influence contributed to language, literature, and a set of manners, taste, and elegance.<sup>55</sup> Prominent Bengali historian Abdul Karim described the process of Islamization and the socialization of the Muslims in Bengal;

The Muslim society in Bengal developed gradually so that after a lapse of more than three hundred years, it became a part and parcel of Bengal's body politic. The facts that the Muslims settled in this country, learnt the local language, lived in harmony with the local people, accepted local wives, adopted various professions suited to their genius, and that in their dietary system and dwelling houses, they depended on materials locally available, bear out that they considered Bengal as their homeland. Side by side, they adhered to Islamic religious principles and built religious institutions of their own. There is, therefore, good ground to suggest that a Bengali Muslim society already passed its formative stage, took a different shape, and breathed a new spirit of tolerance, equality, and universal love in the country so much so that large masses accepted Islam.<sup>56</sup>

In the context of medieval Bengal, referring to the period from the early thirteenth to the mid-eighteenth centuries, various cultural and historical changes occurred in the region, and one of the notable transformations was the gradual adoption of Islam. Bengali society adopts Islam as its dominant religion, incorporating Islamic beliefs, practices, and cultural elements into its way of life. Both immigration and conversion theories were functional in the process of the expansion of Islam as the dominant religion in eastern Bengal. During the medieval era, Muslims who had migrated became integrated into the pre-existing social fabric of the Bengali nation. This amalgamation included diverse groups such as Arabs, Turks, Afghans, Mughals, Syrians, and Persians, who all migrated to Bengal. The Muslim immigrants, driven by religious and economic pursuits, actively endeavored to disseminate their beliefs and engage in commerce and the development of cultivation. They established social

---

<sup>55</sup> Spear, "The Position of the Muslims, Before and After Partition".

<sup>56</sup> Abdul Karim, *Social History of the Muslims in Bengal (Down to A. D. 1538)*, 1st ed. (Dhaka: The Asiatic Society of Pakistan, Dacca, 1959), pp. 210-11.

bonds and economic relations through marriage ties, socio-cultural contributions, and financial transactions, thereby weaving themselves into the societal fabric. The Muslims, upholding familial responsibilities, adhering to social contracts, and maintaining ethical business practices, garnered the acceptance of the local populace in Bengal. In this context, when Muslims eventually assumed positions of dominance in the socio-political structure of Bengal, their ascendancy was generally accepted by the prevailing social system, except for the established ruling classes and their associates. Gradually, Islamic values and norms permeated the public sphere of Bengal in the medieval period. Over time, these influences became integral to the fabric of Bengal's society, contributing to the region's rich and diverse cultural heritage. This period signifies a transformational era for Muslim Bengal, marking the inception of a golden age in the region.

#### **Dawn of the Golden Age in Medieval Bengal**

While the golden age of Bengal is not extensively explored in contemporary academic discussions, a wealth of historical accounts by distinguished scholars, travelers, and experts corroborate this assertion. Abdul Karim notably highlights the widespread renown of the medieval Muslim kingdom and its populace in Bengal. Bengal's Sultans engaged in diplomatic exchanges with kingdoms as distant as China, Delhi, and Khurasan, illustrating the region's significance on the international stage. Moreover, instances where Bengal's rulers sought to arbitrate succession disputes in places like Arakan and Tippera underscore their authority and influence.<sup>57</sup> MA Rahim provides further insight into the transformative impact of Muslim rule on Bengal's political and socio-cultural landscape from 1342 to 1576. This era witnessed the emergence of new institutions and the initiation of pivotal socio-cultural trends, signifying a profound shift in Bengali society. The governance of the Muslim rulers facilitated progress and prosperity across various spheres of life, significantly benefiting the Bengali populace. It is evident that the establishment of Muslim rule in Bengal marked a seminal moment in the region's history, laying the foundation for the emergence of Bengal and the Bengali identity.<sup>58</sup>

According to Sushil Chaudhury, the conditions required for a prosperous economic life were present in Bengal. Its fertile soil was suitable for thriving agriculture. Bengal had a variety of natural products, which were abundant. This enabled the region to export its surplus agricultural products to different parts of India and

---

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p. 208.

<sup>58</sup> M.A. Rahim, *Social and Cultural History of Bengal*, Vol. 1, Pakistan Historical Society Publication (Pakistan Historical Society, 1959), pp. 413-14.

neighboring countries.<sup>59</sup> Akbar Ali Khan's examination of the 'Golden Bengal Hypothesis' is structured around three key dimensions. Initially, Bengal has sustained continuous economic prosperity throughout its history, highlighted by the absence of famines in pre-industrial societies. Secondly, there existed an extraordinary affordability of essential goods, resulting in a notably high standard of living for individuals with modest incomes. Lastly, the economic affluence experienced by Bengal contributed to the absence of native slavery.<sup>60</sup> Akbar Ali Khan explained the historical facts of Golden Bengal, characterized by economic prosperity, low price of commodities, and absence of slavery in the light of economic theory.

To discuss the beginning of the Golden Age in Bengal, it is important to first provide a brief overview of the socio-economic conditions that existed in Bengal before the Muslim rule. This will help us understand the context in which Muslims made their significant contributions. In the analysis of the economic conditions in India before 1200, Simon Digby noted the scarcity and complexity of materials available for reconstructing the medieval Indian economic history preceding the late twelfth-century Muslim conquests. He highlighted two key interpretations: firstly, landholding emerged as the primary determinant of social and political status during this era. Secondly, a growing share of agricultural products was extracted from the peasantry to sustain military vassals and beneficiaries of religious grants. Moreover, the issuance of gold coins significantly declined after the fall of the Guptas, and both silver and copper coinages became scarce and of inferior quality.<sup>61</sup> P. C. Chakravarti depicted the economic conditions of Bengal before the Muslim conquest. Relying on fragmentary information from archaeology, sporadic mentions, and accounts by foreign travelers and historians, Chakravarti painted a picture of an economy where people predominantly lived in villages, organizing their lands for agriculture, meadows, and woodlands to fulfill their essential needs. The rural population's livelihoods were primarily tied to the land, while urban dwellers engaged in diverse activities such as commerce, industry, politics, judiciary, and military functions. Paddy cultivation was central to sustenance, and cotton played a crucial role in

---

<sup>59</sup> "General Economic Conditions under the Nawabs," in *Companies, Commerce and Merchants: Bengal in the Pre-Colonial Era*, by Sushil Chaudhury (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), p. 264.

<sup>60</sup> Akbar Ali Khan, "The Golden Bengal Hypothesis: Facts and Fiction," in *History of Bangladesh: Sulatanate and Mughal Periods (c.1200 to 1800 CE)*, ed. Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Ranabir Chakravarti, Vol. 2 (Dhaka, Bangladesh: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2018), pp. 175–200.

<sup>61</sup> Simon Digby, "Economic Conditions before 1200", in *The Cambridge Economic History of India, C. 1200 - c. 1750*, Vol. 1, ed. Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib, Reprinted (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 45–48.

supporting a significant provincial industry. In addition to paddy and cotton, the cultivation of sugar cane and various fruits was widespread. Various crafts and industries flourished, including textiles, sugar production, metalwork, stonework, woodworking, and pottery. Notably, after the Gupta period, the use of metal coins, including gold, silver, and copper, became outmoded. During the reign of the Sena kings, cowrie shells served as the medium of exchange.<sup>62</sup>

John S. Deyell studied the economic landscape of medieval Bengal, meticulously delineating three distinct eras marked by evolving monetary exchange systems. In the early medieval period, from 590 to 1205 AD, gold and silver coinage was used only in the extreme southeast Bengal, coupled with the widespread use of cowry currency in Bengal. The subsequent Bengal Sultanate era, spanning from 1205 to 1576, was characterized by the circulation of silver coins and cowries across the entire region. From 1576 to 1757, the Mughal period saw the emergence of gold mohurs, silver rupees, and copper dams as dominant currencies throughout Bengal.<sup>63</sup> Deyell specifically referenced the present Chattagram division, encompassing Cumilla and Noakhali, as the southeastern extremity of Bengal.<sup>64</sup> Historians generally describe that Pala Bengal and Sena Bengal operated without coined money, relying instead on cowries as the predominant currency across the region. The kingdoms were built on agricultural revenue and operated with a coinless monetary system.

At the beginning of the 13th century, cowry was in vogue as currency in Bengal despite Muslim conquerors being accustomed to coins. Muslim rulers aimed to attract Muslim immigrants for governance and thus, they introduced coined money immediately. Deyell argues that Muslim rulers introduced two elements into Bengal polity: the maintenance of non-indigenous cavalry and the induction of Muslim immigrant nobility, officials, and religious jurors. To attract Muslim immigrants, they introduced a salary paid in coins.<sup>65</sup> In the sultanate period, both cowry and silver coins, namely *tankas*, were used in the monetary system. Another study by John S. Deyell titled 'Cowries and coins: the dual monetary System of the Bengal Sultanate' examined the operational part of cowry and silver coins. A heavy, high-quality silver

---

<sup>62</sup> P. C. Chakravarti, "Economic Conditions", in *The History of Bengal (Hindu Period)*, ed. R. C Majumdar, Vol. I (Delhi: Reprinted by B.R. Publishing Corporation, 2004), pp. 642–69.

<sup>63</sup> John S. Deyell, "The Transition from Ancient to Medieval in Bengal's Monetary Realms," in *History of Bangladesh: Sulatanate and Mughal Periods (c.1200 to 1800 CE)*, ed. Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Ranabir Chakravarti, Vol. 2, (Dhaka, Bangladesh: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2018), pp. 129–40.

<sup>64</sup> Deyell, p. 131.

<sup>65</sup> Deyell, p. 134.



coin served the needs of government and trade, while cowry shells served the demands of low-value transactions of the population. The exchange between these two forms of currency was facilitated by a private financial sector. As time passed, there was a notable change in the significance of cowries and silver tankas, with metallic currency taking precedence by the sixteenth century. This shift mirrored the Sultanate's expansion, the increasing maturity of its state system, and the enhanced availability of bullion.<sup>66</sup>

Therefore, the trimetallic system of coin currency (gold, silver, and copper) became available in Bengal during the Mughal period. However, Muhammad Bin Tugloq minted voluminous trimetallic coins in Delhi in the 14th century. During this time, independent Bengal sultans used silver coins and cowry shells. Moroccan Traveler Ibn Battuta mentioned that the inhabitants of the Maldives Islands use cowrie shells as money. The people of Bengal also use cowrie as money, which they collect from the Maldives Islands. The people of the Maldives Islands sell cowries in exchange for rice to the people of Bengal.<sup>67</sup> The trimetallic system is basically an Islamic norm established by Ummaiyya Khalifa Abdul Malik in 696 CE.<sup>68</sup> This system allows for a range of denominations and facilitates transactions at various economic levels. The coins may have different values, with gold coins being the most valuable, followed by silver coins and copper coins being the least valuable. This approach provides flexibility in catering to diverse economic needs and contributes to the overall stability of the monetary system. From the Sultanate period, metal coins started with silver, and gradually, all metal coins were widely used in Bengal within the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Mizanur Rahman conducted an archaeobotanical study in the Jaldhaka area of Nilfamari district, Bangladesh, unveiling medieval agricultural practices. This emerging field in archaeology uses scientific methods to uncover historical farming practices. The study delineated two phases: the Sultanate period (1266 to 1393 CE) and the subsequent Mughal and early British colonial period (1646 to 1806). Throughout both phases, rice served as the primary subsistence crop, accompanied by secondary crops such as wheat, barley, millets, pulses, and some wild fruits. The

---

<sup>66</sup> John S. Deyell, "Cowries and Coins: The Dual Monetary System of the Bengal Sultanate", *The Indian Economic & Social History Review*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (January 2010), pp. 63–106.

<sup>67</sup> Ibn Battuta, *Ibn Battuta Travels in Asia and Africa, 1325-1354 (The Rihla)*, ed. E. Denison Ross and Eileen Power, trans. H. A. R. Gibb, First Indian edition (New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1986), p. 247.

<sup>68</sup> Deyell, "The Transition from Ancient to Medieval in Bengal's Monetary Realms", p. 130.

later phase, characterized by the dominance of Indian little millet, the absence of barley, and a near disappearance of wheat, suggests a decline in winter cropping. This shift indicates a transition towards more summer cropping and a departure from double cropping.<sup>69</sup> Muslim rulers and their associates who migrated to Bengal from different parts of the contemporary Muslim world contributed to the development of agriculture and land reclamation through cleaning the forests. Richard M Eaton characterized these individuals as ‘superhuman heroes,’ possessing the ability to subdue the wilderness, expand cultivable regions, and establish novel religious practices.

Typically, these heroes combined holy man piety with the organizational skills necessary for forest clearing and land reclamation; hence, they were remembered not only for establishing mosques and shrines but also for mobilizing communities to cut the forests and settle the land. As this happened, people gradually came to venerate these men, most of whom were Muslims.<sup>70</sup>

The 13th and 14th centuries witnessed a remarkable surge in agricultural and economic development in Bengal, attributable to the collaborative efforts of immigrant Muslims and local residents. Mizanur Rahman's research delves into this transformative period, shedding light on the prevalence of double cropping and diverse crop cultivation during the Sultanate era.<sup>71</sup> The prosperity of the region, particularly in the 14th century, is substantiated by the accounts of Ibn Battuta, a Moroccan traveler, who visited Bengal in about 1345. According to Ibn Battuta, Bengal, referred to as the Bengala, was an expansive region overflowing with rice production. Nowhere on earth have I seen any land where prices are lower than Bengal's. In this region, I have seen fat fowls sold at the rate of eight for just one dirham, young pigeons priced at fifteen per dirham, and a fat ram sold for just two dirhams. Additionally, I witnessed the sale of superior quality pieces of cotton cloth, measuring thirty cubits in length, for a mere two dinars.<sup>72</sup> Ibn Battuta traveled about 70000 miles and explored the diverse and relatively known worlds of his era. He attested to the unparalleled affordability of goods in Muslim Bengal.

---

<sup>69</sup> Mizanur Rahman, “Medieval Agriculture: An Archaeobotanical Study,” in *History of Bangladesh: Sulatanate and Mughal Periods (c.1200 to 1800 CE)*, ed. Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Ranabir Chakravarti, Vol. 2, (Dhaka, Bangladesh: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2018), pp. 87–108.

<sup>70</sup> Richard M. Eaton, “Three Overlapping Frontiers in Early Modern Bengal: Religious, Agrarian, Imperial,” in *History of Bangladesh: Sulatanate and Mughal Periods (c.1200 to 1800 CE)*, Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Ranabir Chakravarti (ed.), Vol. 2, (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2018), p. 226.

<sup>71</sup> Rahman, “Medieval Agriculture: An Archaeobotanical Study”.

<sup>72</sup> Battuta, *Ibn Battuta Travels in Asia and Africa, 1325-1354 (The Rihla)*, p. 267.

Thus, the agricultural sector undeniably served as the cornerstone of the nation's economy, providing the foundation for its trade and commerce. Certain crops, such as sugar cane, cotton, and mulberry trees, were strategically cultivated to cater to the specific requirements of local industries. The surplus of food grains and industrial products derived from locally grown raw materials significantly boosted trade and commerce. The arrival of Muslims in Bengal marked its integration into the extensive international trade of that era, primarily dominated by the Arabs, Persians, and Turks.<sup>73</sup> Foreign traders, travelers, and visitors established connections with Bengal primarily through the prominent port towns of Chhattagram (Sudkawan), Sonargaon, and the capital city of Pandua. Remarkably, Ibn Battuta, a renowned traveler, accessed Bengal through the port town of Sudkawan (Chhattagram), describing it as a significant urban center situated on the coastline of the Great Sea.<sup>74</sup>

Under Muslim rule, Bengal experienced a notable surge in economic prosperity, particularly in the domains of trade and commerce. This era witnessed advancements in various industries and the establishment of trade connections with distant regions in both the East and the West. The concurrent growth of agriculture, trade, and industries captured the attention of foreign traders and observers. Despite the challenging weather conditions, Bengal's economic vitality was widely acknowledged. In reference to the inhabitants of Khorasan, Ibn Battuta characterized Bengal as a realm abundant with prosperity, stating it to be a "hell full of good things" (*dozak pur-i-ni'amat*)<sup>75</sup> or "inferno full of gifts" (*dozakh-i-pur n'imat*)<sup>76</sup>. Mahuan's account provides an insightful portrayal of the socio-economic landscape in Bengal during his visit in the early 15th century. He depicts Bengal as a vast region characterized by abundant production and a large population. According to his observations, the inhabitants of Bengal predominantly follow the Islamic faith, engaging in transparent and straightforward dealings. The affluent individuals in Bengal invested in building ships to facilitate trade with foreign nations. A substantial portion of the population is involved in commerce, while others dedicate themselves to agricultural pursuits or practice various crafts as artisans. Importantly, large economic transactions are conducted using silver coins, namely *Tangka*, while smaller purchases are made using seashells, namely cowrie.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Muhammad Mohar Ali, *History of the Muslims of Bengal*, 1st ed., Vol. I B (Riyadh: Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, 1985), p. 936.

<sup>74</sup> Battuta, *Ibn Battuta Travels in Asia and Africa, 1325-1354 (The Rihla)*, p. 267.

<sup>75</sup> Battuta, p. 267.

<sup>76</sup> Hossain, Mahdi, trans. *The Rehla of Ibn Battuta*. Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1976, p. 234.

<sup>77</sup> Geo. Phillips, "Art. XIV.—Mahuan's Account of the Kingdom of Bengala (Bengal)", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (July 1895), pp. 523–35.

Furthermore, Muslim rulers patronized centers of learning, fostering an environment conducive to intellectual pursuits. The establishment of madrasas and educational institutions promoted the dissemination of knowledge through Arabic, Persian, and vernacular languages. Dinesh Chandra Sen articulated that “the elevation of Bengali to a literary status was brought about by several influences, of which the Mohammedan conquest was undoubtedly one of the foremost. If the Hindu Kings had continued to enjoy independence, the Bengali language would scarcely have got an opportunity to find its way to the courts of Kings.”<sup>78</sup> Dinesh Chandra noted that from the time of King Vikramaditya (1st century BCE), keeping a number of Sanskrit scholars attached was the fashion of the Hindu courts. However, the Brahmins were apprehensive about the gradual emergence and acknowledgment of Bengali as a written language. They aimed to confine all religious truths within the realm of Sanskrit texts.<sup>79</sup> Under these circumstances, Muslim conquerors settled themselves in the Bengal region, actively engaging with the local Hindu population. In an effort to foster understanding and communication, they took the initiative to learn the Bengali language. Driven by a commitment to disseminating knowledge, these rulers appointed scholars to translate the epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata into Bengali, the language they had come to speak and comprehend.

According to Ma-Huan, the rituals marking significant life events among the people of Bengal, such as coming of age, funerals, sacrifices, and marriages, closely resemble those practiced by the Muhammadans. Not having any tea, they offer betelnuts to their guests. The streets are lined with diverse shops, also drinking and eating houses, and bathing facilities. Legal transgressions are met with punishments like beatings, the bastinado, and exile to both nearby and distant lands. Similar to our system, the region has officials of varying ranks with official residences, seals, and an established system of communication. Medical practitioners, astrologers, geomancy experts, skilled artisans, and craftsmen contribute to the societal fabric. A structured military force led by a commander-in-chief is maintained with regular remuneration.<sup>80</sup>

The Sultan bore the titles of Sultan al-Azam (The Greatest Sultan), Nasir al-Islam wa al-Muslimin (Helper of Islam and Muslims), and Al Mujahid fi Sabilillah (The Fighter in the Way of the Most Merciful). Operating within the confines of Islamic jurisprudence, the Sultan, by and large, had no power to change the fundamental laws

---

<sup>78</sup> Sen, *History of Bengali Language and Literature*, p. 10.

<sup>79</sup> Sen, pp. 8-9.

<sup>80</sup> Phillips, “Art. XIV.—Mahuan’s Account of the Kingdom of Bengala (Bengal)”.

of the society. Generally, people had the power to file a case against the sultan to the Qazi. A historical account chronicled in *Riyazu-s-Salatin* delineates an illustrative incident during the rule of Sultan Ghias Uddin Azam Shah. In the course of archery exercises, an accidental discharge of the Sultan's arrow resulted in the accidental demise of a widow's son. Seeking redress, the aggrieved widow invoked the jurisdiction of Qazi Siraj Uddin, accusing the Sultan of murder. The Qazi, in due course, served a summons upon the Sultan, prompting his appearance before the court in an ordinary capacity, thereby subjecting himself to adjudication. Upon the Sultan's presence in court, the Qazi implored, 'Consolate the heart of this elderly woman.' Within the bounds of his capacity, the Sultan offered solace to the grieving widow and expressed to the Qazi, 'Qazi, now the elderly woman is satisfied.' The widow herself attested to her contentment. Subsequently, the Qazi conveyed respect to the Sultan. In response, the Sultan issued a stern declaration: If today I found you deviating from strict adherence to the legal injunctions, I would have resorted to beheading with my sword. The Qazi responded, if I discover even the slightest transgression against the sacred laws of Allah today, I will employ this whip to administer punitive correction, turning your back red and black.<sup>81</sup>

The Muslim rulers brought the benefits of the Golden Age of Islam to Bengal through various advancements and contributions that significantly enriched the region. By proficiently integrating the esteemed principles of the contemporary Golden Age of Islam into the prevailing socio-economic structure of Bengal, the Muslim rulers took a proactive role in agricultural development and the expansion of trade and commerce—both inland and foreign. Motivated by a deep devotion to the Almighty and an unwavering spirit, Muslims cleared the jungles and forests of Bengal, rendering the land cultivable and suitable for settlements. The infusion of Islamic values brought by Muslim rulers and immigrant communities, coupled with the rich tapestry of native cultures, reshaped the social fabric of Bengal. Drawing parallels with the esteemed features of the Islamic Golden Age, four significant aspects interconnected the Islamic Golden Age with medieval Muslim Bengal. Firstly, under Muslim leadership, there was a concerted effort in land reclamation and agricultural development. Secondly, trade and commerce flourished, accompanied by establishing trade routes, hubs, and necessary facilities. Thirdly, a vibrant exchange transpired between Islamic and native Bengali cultures, fostering the promotion of vernacular languages. Lastly, a commitment to social justice

---

<sup>81</sup> Ghulam Husain Salim, *Riyazu-s-Salatin*, trans. Maulavi Abdus Salam (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1902). pp. 110-111

protected the Bengali population from the aggression of the upper class or external forces. These features, directly or indirectly derived from the principles of the Islamic Golden Age, found application in medieval Bengal through the efforts of Muslim rulers and benevolent Muslim community members. Consequently, the values, norms, and culture of Islam gradually integrated into the mainstream of Bengal's socioeconomic and political landscape.

### **Conclusion**

Indeed, Islam became the dominant religion in medieval Bengal. Muslim immigrants assimilated into Bengali society and established social bonds and economic relations. They adhered to social contracts, maintained ethical business practices, and eventually assumed positions of dominance in the socio-political structure of Bengal. Islamic values and norms permeated the public sphere, contributing to the region's diverse cultural heritage. The rise of Muslim rulers and elites in Bengal resulted in the widespread adoption of Islamic cultural elements throughout the region. This integration of Islamic customs into the societal fabric of Bengal had a profound impact on language, culture, and social customs. The construction of mosques and educational institutions played a critical role in the public visibility of Islam. Mosques were not simply places of worship but also served as centers for community gatherings, education, and dissemination of Islamic teachings. Bengal's location along maritime trade routes facilitated cultural exchanges with other Islamic regions, contributing to the spread of Islamic influence. Trade networks connected Bengal with the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and other areas, fostering a multiethnic atmosphere heavily influenced by Islamic culture. In summary, the pervasive presence of Islamic elements in various facets of public life in Bengal during this historical period was the result of a complex interplay of historical events, political developments, social transformations, and institutional influences that firmly established Islam's dominance in the public sphere of the region.

Ikhtiauddin Muhammad Bin Bakhtiyar Khalji (1204 AD) used strategic measures to establish control over the Kingdom of Bengal instead of resorting to widespread violence. Muslim rulers governed Bengal for over five hundred years, emphasizing the peaceful coexistence of immigrant Muslims, converted Muslims, and local Bengali populations. The dominance of Islam in the public sphere of medieval Bengal can be attributed to a combination of historical, political, and social factors. The establishment of Muslim political entities and dynasties played a crucial role. The Delhi Sultanate and, later, the Bengal Sultanate were instrumental in consolidating Muslim dominance in the region. The Bengal Sultanate, founded in the

14th century, contributed significantly to the Islamization of Bengal. The conversion of local populations to Islam was a gradual but pervasive process. Indeed, the majority of the present Muslim population is of native origin. Additionally, a section of the Muslim population of the land are descendants of Muslim immigrants from different parts of the world. Therefore, the foundation of the Muslim population in Bengal is composed mainly of indigenous converted Muslims and partly of immigrant Muslims of extra-Indian origin.

During the medieval period in Bengal, which roughly spanned from the early 13th to the mid-18th century, Muslim rulers and their associates played a significant role in introducing the benefits of the Golden Age of Islam to the region. They incorporated the principles of the Golden Age into the socioeconomic structure of Bengal, resulting in agricultural development and expansion of inland and foreign trade and commerce. This led to four significant aspects that enriched and enlightened Bengal and its population: concentrated efforts in land reclamation and agrarian development, flourishing trade and commerce, vibrant cultural exchange and accommodation, and a commitment to social justice. Muslim rulers and communities implemented these features, gradually integrating Islamic values into Bengal's socioeconomic and political landscape.

## **The Situation of the Dhaka University Campus during the Liberation War of Bangladesh**

Nasir Ahmad\*

### **Abstract**

Operation Searchlight was a brutal, planned military operation carried out by the Pakistan army on 25<sup>th</sup> March 1971. It signified the beginning of Bangladesh's Liberation War. The operation was deployed simultaneously throughout the province. Their main target was the provincial capital, Dhaka. One of their primary targeted places in Dhaka was the University of Dhaka (DU) Campus. It is estimated that around 4000 to 6000 were killed in Dhaka city during Operation Searchlight. Among them, around 300 were killed inside the DU campus. Operation Searchlight killing destroyed the academic situation of the university. During the war, the government and the DU administration tried to ensure normalcy inside the campus. On the contrary, Bengali nationalist students and teachers tried to prove that an abnormal situation prevailed inside the campus. Thus, a worse situation was created inside the campus. In that situation, most teachers were bound to join the university to save their lives and jobs. However, Bengali nationalist teachers were under surveillance and some of them received Shani and Jamdot's letters. Some teachers were rusticated, some were removed from the Syndicate, and some were arrested. The trial of some teachers and students was also organized in their absence, and ultimately, they brutally killed ten teachers of DU on 14<sup>th</sup> December 1971. In that worst situation, only 30 to 50 students attended the class. At last, on 16<sup>th</sup> December, the Pakistan Army surrendered at the Race Course ground, which is adjacent to the DU campus. This article explores the academic situation of the DU campus during the Liberation War of Bangladesh. It also focuses on the miserable conditions and the different types of punishment of Bengali nationalist teachers and students that they had to endure at that time.

**Key words:** Situation, Operation Searchlight, Nationalist, Normalcy, Anomalous, Explosion, Punishment, Surveillance.

### **Introduction**

The University of Dhaka's educational situation was worse during the Liberation War of Bangladesh. Operation Searchlight was the beginning of the War. The operation was unleashed on the unaware, sleeping Bengali population of East Bengal at midnight on 25<sup>th</sup> March 1971. It was deployed simultaneously throughout the province. Their main target was the provincial capital, Dhaka. One of their prime targets in Dhaka was the University of Dhaka (DU) campus. Inside the campus, their primary target were Zahurul Haq Hall and Jagannath Hall. However, all the halls, teachers' quarters, staff quarters, Dhaka University Club, Teacher-Student Center (TSC) and

---

\*Associate Professor, Department of History, Jagannath University, Dhaka, Bangladesh



BNCC building came under merciless attack. The purpose of the genocide was to demolish the Non-cooperation movement. It also aimed to halt Bengali nationalism at its peak and, hence, stop the emergence of Bangladesh. The Bengali people considered the operation as a war and started their nine-month-long war against the military government. During the war, the government and the DU administration tried to ensure normalcy inside the campus. On the contrary, Bengali nationalist students and teachers tried to prove that an abnormal situation prevailed inside the campus. Thus, a worse situation was created inside the campus. In that situation, most teachers were bound to join the university to save their lives and jobs. However, Bengali nationalist teachers were under surveillance. Some received threat letters from *Shani* and *Jamdot's Bahini*; some were rusticated and captivated. Even they killed ten teachers on 14<sup>th</sup> December. In that worst situation, only 30 to 50 students attended the class. At last, on 16<sup>th</sup> December, the Pakistan Army surrendered at the Race Course ground, which is adjacent to the DU campus. This article explores the academic situation of the DU campus during the Liberation War of Bangladesh. It also focuses on the miserable conditions and the different types of punishment of Bengali nationalist teachers and students that they had to endure at that time.

### **Operation Searchlight and the University of Dhaka Campus**

The DU campus was one of the worst sufferers of the Operation Searchlight. The operation activities began from the Dhaka cantonment on 25<sup>th</sup> March night when Major-General Khadim's green telephone rang at about 11 am; on the other side, Lieutenant-General Tikka Khan said, 'Khadim, it is tonight'.<sup>1</sup> He passed the order to his staff for action. According to the plan, the army marched out of the cantonment instantly. Jacob said, "Troops began to move from the cantonment into the city at 2300 hours on 25 March".<sup>2</sup> On the way to the DU, they faced a roadblock at Farmgate. Overcoming the obstacle, a composite force consisting of one company each of 18 Punjab, 22 Baluch and 32 Punjab marched towards the DU campus under the command of L. Corner Taj.<sup>3</sup> Later, Taj was awarded a promotion to Deputy Sub-administrator Martial Law (DSAML) due to his leadership in the mass killings.<sup>4</sup> Taj Bahini planned to kill every student, teacher and employee inside the campus. Archer Blood said, "What was generally believed that the Army plan of attack the University was to take

<sup>1</sup> Siddiq Salik, *Witness to Surrender*, (University Press Limited 1997), p. 71.

<sup>2</sup> Lt Gen JFR Jacob, *Surrender at Dacca: Birth of a Nation*, (University Press Limited 2019), p. 33.

<sup>3</sup> Rafiqul Islam, *Swadhinota Sangrame Dhaka Bishwabidyalay (Dhaka University in the Freedom Struggle)*, (Agamee Prakashani 2016), p. 153.

<sup>4</sup> Hasan Hafizur Rahman (ed.), *Bangladesher Swadhinata Yuddho: Dalilpatra (History of Bangladesh War of Independence: Documents)*, Vol. 8, (Hakkani Publishers 2011), p. 354.

no prisoners and to kill all students present in the dorms.”<sup>5</sup> Muazzam Hussain said he could hear the voice of the control on the radio saying, “There is no question of taking prisoner. They are shooting at you. So, wipe them off.”<sup>6</sup>

Pakistan Army first attacked Jagannath Hall around 12.30 am and then Zahurul Haq Hall at 1.30 am. The same night, they attacked Ruqayyah Hall and Dhaka Hall. On the morning of 26<sup>th</sup> March, they attacked Salimullah Hall, Surjansen Hall, Mohsin Hall, Jagannath Hall, Fuller Road, Nilkhat, teachers club, Sibbari, Ramna Kali Bari and TSC. They took 36 hours to complete the operation in DU. Ratan Lal Chakraborty said the total duration of the DU operation was 36 hours. It started at midnight on 25<sup>th</sup> March and ended on the morning of 27<sup>th</sup> March.<sup>7</sup>

It is estimated that around 4000 to 6000 were killed in Dhaka city alone during Operation Searchlight.<sup>8</sup> Among them, around 300 were killed inside the DU campus, including nine teachers, many students, staff, their family members, relatives, guests, and slum dwellers. The nine teachers were Anudaypayan Bhattacharya (1945-1971), Atawor Rahman Khan Khadem (1933-1971), Muhammad Abdul Muktader (1940-1971), Govinda Chandra Dev (1907-1971), Jyotirmoy Guhathakurta (1920-1971), Abu Nasar Muhammad Muniruzzaman (1924-1971), Fazlur Rahman Khan (1939-1971), Muhammad Sadek (1939-1971) and Sharafat Ali (1943-1971).

Regarding the number of deaths, Rafiqul Islam said it is estimated that 300 people were killed inside the DU campus on the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> of March.<sup>9</sup> The number 300 was also known from the discussions between 88 units and the control room of the MLA on the morning of 26<sup>th</sup> March. Dr Moazzam Hossain<sup>10</sup> recorded the discussions. The discussions were:

Control: how many persons are wounded in the university area. It is enough if you tell me the approximate number—answer 300.

Control: wonderful. All 300 is killed or someone wounded or captured.

<sup>5</sup> Archer K. Blood, *The Cruel Birth of Bangladesh: Memoirs of an American Diplomat*, (UPL 2021), p. 207.

<sup>6</sup> Hasan Hafizur Rahman (ed.), Vol.8, *ibid.*, p. 354.

<sup>7</sup> Ratan Lal Chakraborty, *Bangladesher Swadhinota Sangrame Dhaka Bishwabidyalay, 1947-1971 (The Liberation War of Bangladesh and Dhaka University, 1947-1971)*, Vol. 1, (The Universal Academy 2015), pp. 541-543.

<sup>8</sup> Department of State, Telegram, 31 March 1971, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 79, 2002.

<sup>9</sup> Rafiqul Islam, *ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>10</sup> Moazzam Hossain was a scientist. During Operation Searchlight, he could hear the discussion of the different army units through radio and recorded some portion of the debate. He sent his recorded copy to Calcutta through his friend during the war. *Akash Bani Kolkata* broadcasted the record in the middle of May

The answer, I only like one thing. Three hundred die.

Control: I also agree with you. That job was easy. Would not you want to know anything more?

I further said, wonderful.<sup>11</sup>

Due to Operation Searchlight's mass killing, the educational situation of the DU collapsed. There was a twofold trend among DU's teachers and students in those circumstances. The first one was to stay inside Bangladesh, and the other was to cross the border, take shelter in India, and lead the war from there. This article explores the first one. Those who stayed inside the country were divided into two significant fractions. One group collaborated with the Pakistani government. They supported the government for their interest or ideological reasons and worked to implement its policy. The other group supported the war and secretly maintained good communication with the freedom fighters and the Bengali nationalist leaders.

The two groups performed opposite actions during the Liberation War. The government, university administration, and pro-Pakistani students and teachers tried to bring normalcy to the university campus. On the contrary, the nationalist students and teachers tried to create a weird situation. Therefore, both groups performed contradictory activities inside the DU campus to implement their purposes during the Liberation War.

#### **Academic Situation of the University of Dhaka during the Liberation War of Bangladesh**

The academic situation of the DU campus was worse during the Liberation War of Bangladesh because the government and the Bengali nationalist students and teachers took opposing positions inside the campus. The government initiated the restoration of normalcy inside the campus, but the Bengali nationalist teachers and students secretly discouraged students from attending class. The DU campus has been vacating since the middle of March 1971 due to the non-cooperation movement. After the Operation Searchlight massacre, the university became utterly vacant. Even the pro-Pakistani teachers left the campus due to the circumstances. The government had very sharp eyes on the DU campus because the institute had been the hub of the Bengali nationalist movement for a long time. The eyes of the Bengali people, Pakistani people, and the international media were on the activities of the DU campus from the beginning of March 1971. Secondly, as a renowned higher education institution, the DU was well-known to the world's intellectuals and politicians. So, the government was worried that if the news of the mass killing of the students and teachers were disclosed, the government would face immense international pressure. Therefore, the government and the university authority were keen to establish normalcy inside the campus.

---

<sup>11</sup> Hasan Hafizur Rahman (ed.), Vol. 8, *ibid.*, p. 355.

To focus on normalcy, the government opened the university on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1971. They made compulsory regular attendance for teachers and students to ensure their presence in the class. They sent letters to the students' permanent addresses to ensure their presence in the halls. The university authorities organised conferences, arranged final examinations and obligated some teachers to attend the mass media to discuss things in favour of the government. Evidence shows that on 20<sup>th</sup> May 1971, the provincial government decided to start classes in all the universities and colleges from 2<sup>nd</sup> August. However, they summoned all the teachers to join the university from 1<sup>st</sup> June 1971.<sup>12</sup> Following the government notice on 21<sup>st</sup> May, the DU authorities published a circular announcing that all the teachers would have to join on 1<sup>st</sup> June, and the class would start on 2<sup>nd</sup> August.<sup>13</sup> Mafizullah Kabir said everyone was asking if the classes would start on 2<sup>nd</sup> August and why the teachers were asked to join on 1<sup>st</sup> June.<sup>14</sup> On 24<sup>th</sup> May, the government published another notice extending the teachers' joining date till 15<sup>th</sup> June. The university authority forwarded the letter to the heads of the departments for further action.<sup>15</sup> Tikka Khan published a Military Ordinance in this regard. The ordinance said that if the teachers failed to join between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of June, they would be rusticated from the job, and their trial would be organised under the military court.<sup>16</sup> On 4<sup>th</sup> June, the Deputy Secretary of the Education Department of East Pakistan sent a letter to the Vice-Chancellor of the DU. The letter suggested that the university authorities ensure the teachers join within the prescribed time. It also requested to take all the necessary preparations for the commencement of the classes on 2<sup>nd</sup> August and that the teachers' detailed work programme be sent to the Education Department and ensure the teacher's presence during office hours.<sup>17</sup> The registrar of DU published a notice on 15<sup>th</sup> June. The notice informed all the departments that the university authority would not allow teachers to join after 15<sup>th</sup> June. Moreover, the absent teacher's post will be considered vacant from 16<sup>th</sup> June.

In preparation for the reopening, the university authorities started a campaign to clean the campus. As part of the cleaning campaign, students' books, clothes, and other belongings, including furniture, were taken out in the open, and a bonfire was made of them. This was done for several days in the Iqbal Hall (Zahurul Huq Hall), S.M. Hall, and Jagannath Hall.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> *The Purbodesh*, May 21, 1971.

<sup>13</sup> *Daily Pakistan*, May 21, 1971.

<sup>14</sup> Mafizullah Kabir, *Experiences of an Exile at Home: Life in Occupied Bangladesh*, (Rezina N. Kabir 1972), p. 78.

<sup>15</sup> Ratan Lal Chakraborty, Vol. 2, *ibid.*, p. 677.

<sup>16</sup> *Daily Pakistan*, June 3, 1971.

<sup>17</sup> Hasan Hafizur Rahman (ed.), Vol. 7, *ibid.*, p. 476.

<sup>18</sup> Mafizullah Kabir, *ibid.*, p. 73.

Due to the government initiative, the non-Bengali and pro-Pakistani teachers joined the university due to their ideological beliefs and personal interests, and the Bengali nationalist teachers joined to save their lives and jobs. Ratan Lal Chakraborty said that all the pro-Pakistani teachers joined the university willingly and the Bengali nationalist teachers joined under pressure. He argued that after the mass killing of 26<sup>th</sup> March, some teachers escaped to India and some to their native houses. However, those unable to go to India or escape their locality joined the university.<sup>19</sup> Mafizullah Kabir said he communicated with some of his university colleagues; among them notable was the President of the Teachers Association. He advised him to join and argued they couldn't stay in the country without joining the office and, at the same time, go undetected.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, he joined the university.

Attendance sheets for teachers and students were not compulsory earlier, but the government made them mandatory during the war to ensure their presence. The University authorities published a notice on 31<sup>st</sup> May. The notice requested all the heads of the departments to send the names of the teachers who would be absent from 1<sup>st</sup> June.<sup>21</sup> The secretariat also supplied a proforma to send the teachers' attendance reports daily.<sup>22</sup> The authorities monitored the system precisely. Evidence shows that on 2<sup>nd</sup> June, the university authorities published a notice. The notice said many departments had stopped sending the teachers' presence sheet and suggested sending it regularly. It also mentioned that students' attendance sheets had to be routinely sent from 2<sup>nd</sup> August.<sup>23</sup> On 6<sup>th</sup> August 1971, the Registrar's Office sent the second reminder notice to all the heads of departments. The notice said the attendance report of the students must be sent regularly to the office by 11.00 am.<sup>24</sup> On 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1971, the Registrar's Office published the third reminder notice. The notice said,

In inviting your attention to this office letter No. C/73819 dated the 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1971 and subsequent reminders No. 2400-440 dated the 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1971 and No- 3054-95 dated 6<sup>th</sup> August 1971, on the above subject. I am to inform you that the daily report of the students' attendance from some of the departments are not being received in this office even by the noon of the following day. I am therefore, to request you to kindly send the report to this office by 10 A.M. positively on the following day in order to enable this office to forward the consolidated report to the Govt. in time.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Ratan Lal Chakraborty, Vol.2, *ibid.*, pp. 677-681.

<sup>20</sup> Mafizullah Kabir, *ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>21</sup> Ratan Lal Chakraborty, Vol.2, *ibid.*, p. 677.

<sup>22</sup> Mafizullah Kabir, *ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>23</sup> Ratan Lal Chakraborty, Vol.2, *ibid.*, p. 653.

<sup>24</sup> Hasan Hafizur Rahman (ed.), Vol. 7, *ibid.*, p. 486.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p. 525.

To ensure the presence of the students in the halls, almost all the hall provosts of DU sent letters to the students' permanent addresses at the beginning of November 1971. The letter motivated the students to return to their halls to continue their studies and warned them that their residential facility would be removed if they failed to return. Mir Fakhruzzaman, Provost of Fazlul Haque Hall and Aktar Imam Provost of Ruqayyah Hall, assured that they had sent a letter to the guardians following the order of the Vice-Chancellor.<sup>26</sup>

To bring normalcy inside the campus, the government and the university authorities started organizing conferences, arranging final examinations, and opening the university during Ramadan. Evidence showed that on 6<sup>th</sup> November, the Education Ministry sent a notice to all the educational institutions of East Bengal. The DU administration forwarded the letter to all the departments. The notice said that to create a peaceful environment and trust in the country, the authorities had to organise meetings and conferences at the university. In the meetings and conferences, they had to focus on the contemporary crisis of Pakistan and criticising India's rule in Pakistan.<sup>27</sup> Following the notice, DU organised many conferences during wartime. The university administration arranged BA Honours, MA Preliminary and MA Final examinations from 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1971 to prove the situation of the DU was normal. Following their example, the colleges under DU also arranged the examination in September.<sup>28</sup> However, only a few students participated in the examination. The authority also took the initiative not to stop the university during Ramadan and reduced the Eid vacation.<sup>29</sup>

The authorities also obligated some teachers to attend the mass media to discuss things in favour of the government. For instance, Kabir said he was bound to appear on Television discussions to prove that he had not died in the military operation and directed him to speak clearly about the current situation, bringing out Pakistan's point of view and condemning India.<sup>30</sup> All leave except on medical grounds was cancelled, and no one was allowed to leave the station.<sup>31</sup>

The Bengali nationalist students and teachers very secretly opposed the activities of the authorities and performed different activities to create a weird situation inside the

---

<sup>26</sup> Ratan Lal Chakraborty, Vol. 2, *ibid.*, pp. 731-732.

<sup>27</sup> Letter from Zainul Abedin, Section Officer, Government of East Pakistan, Education Department to the Registrar, University of Dacca, 6 November 1971, D-Register, Bundle-17, Serial No. 436, Dhaka University Record Room.

<sup>28</sup> 'Forms, Fees Submission dates for DU Examinations', *Morning News*, August 24, 1971.

<sup>29</sup> Ratan Lal Chakraborty, Vol. 2, *ibid.*, p. 714.

<sup>30</sup> Mafizullah Kabir, *ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79

DU campus. For instance, some of the nationalist students secretly put up posters on the university walls. They exploded bombs inside the campus to discourage the students and teachers from attending classes and prove that an abnormal situation prevailed inside the DU campus. Evidence shows that the authorities published a circular accusing the students of being anti-state elements. The circular said,

It has also been observed that various sorts of posters dissuading the students and teachers to attend classes are pasted on the walls of the institutions by anti-state elements. This also happens with the connivance of the staff of the institution. The heads of the institutions should be directed to ensure that the institution premises are not used for striking or pasting posters of any kind. They should also be asked to take steps to issue identity cards to students with their photographs pasted therein so that these be produced in case of necessity.<sup>32</sup>

Freedom fighter students exploded bombs inside the DU campus to create panic and break the apparent normalcy. Evidence shows that on 11<sup>th</sup> October, they exploded a bomb in front of the Arts Building. However, nobody was injured.<sup>33</sup> The *Morning News* wrote that “a bomb exploded in the Arts Building of the DU yesterday morning. No one was injured”.<sup>34</sup> The *Dainik Pakistan* wrote that there was an explosion within the compound of the Arts Faculty Building for the first time.<sup>35</sup> The second explosion in the Arts Building took place on 4<sup>th</sup> November. The third explosion occurred on 8<sup>th</sup> November. It was a severe one. The freedom fighters threw a grenade in the corridor leading to the Philosophy Department. Some of the teachers, students and staff were injured.<sup>36</sup> Mofizullah Kabir wrote, “Explosions on 4 and 8 November surprised everybody and embarrassed the Police personnel who came to investigate the incidents because these explosions took place even after thorough checking every day when it was not possible for an ant or a fly to smuggle itself into the building. How could then the bombs find their way in?”<sup>37</sup> The *New York Times* wrote that on 8<sup>th</sup> November, bomb explosions rocked three educational institutions in Dhaka. Six people were injured. Among them, one was critical.<sup>38</sup>

Due to the explosion, university authorities and the government became concerned. They took some initiative to tackle the situation. On 9<sup>th</sup> November, Sazzad Hossain published a notice. The notice said,

---

<sup>32</sup> Circular from the Deputy Secretary to the Government of East Pakistan, Education Department, 7 September 1971, No. G/10-13/71 890-Edn. D-Register, Bundle 10-A, Dhaka University Record Room.

<sup>33</sup> Ratan Lal Chakraborty, Vol.2, *ibid.*, p. 729.

<sup>34</sup> *Morning News*, November 5, 1971. p. 8.

<sup>35</sup> *Dainik Pakistan*, October 12, 1971.

<sup>36</sup> Mafizullah Kabir, *ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119.

<sup>38</sup> ‘Terrorism in Dacca’, *The New York Times*, November 9, 1971.

In view of the sense of insecurity which has been created by three successive incidents in the Art Building arrangements to check entry into the buildings have become essentially necessary. The Proctor has been asked by me to take the necessary steps in the matter and he will need the assistance of all the office assistants in this building. They will have to be spared for periods of one hour and a half each. I hope the Deans and all the Heads of Departments would kindly do the needful.<sup>39</sup>

On 3<sup>rd</sup> December, the Education Department published a notice. The notice said that bomb blasts often occur in educational institutions despite the necessary security arrangements. The government took this seriously and decided that if any bomb blast occurred within the institutions in the future, the Head of the Educational Institutions would be personally responsible.<sup>40</sup>

Some DU students, teachers and employees directly and indirectly participated in the war. Evidence showed that 113 DU students sacrificed their lives for the liberation of Bangladesh.<sup>41</sup>

Some of the DU employees arranged the accommodation for the *Mukti Bahini*, directed them in the right ways, and provided them with moral and economic support.<sup>42</sup> Due to the government's and nationalist students' and teachers' contrary activities, fewer students were present in the DU during the war and the university was almost vacant. The quiet condition of the university was known from Kabir's narration. He said,

If for any reason I sat in the office beyond noon, I found the whole Ramna area deserted, and I could hardly get a transport for my return. On many occasions, I walked down from the University Building at Nilkhet to the Medical College, finding no rickshaw or auto-rickshaw on the way; buses were few and far between and carried alien elements. By 1 O'clock, the roads quickly emptied all over, and one would notice streams of rickshaws, cars and pedestrians moving fast and racing with one another to reach their destinations as quickly as possible. People in the university area got panicky every now and then, and renewed army actions in the area served only to affect adversely the much-publicised normalcy.<sup>43</sup>

Kabir also provided the scenario of his department. He said that after reopening the DU on 2<sup>nd</sup> August, he could not get one student until 24<sup>th</sup> August. On 7<sup>th</sup> September, the number rose to three, the maximum attendance during the period of occupation being

<sup>39</sup> Letter from Sajjad Husain, Vice-Chancellor, Dhaka University to all the Deans and Heads of the Departments in the Arts Building, 9th November 1971, D-Register, Bundle-61, Dhaka University Record Room.

<sup>40</sup> Letter from Mr. Zainul Abedin, Section Officer, Education Department, Government of East Pakistan to the Vice-Chancellor, Dacca University, 3rd December, 1971, Ref. No. 110-13/71/1340 (8) edn., D-Register, Bundle-61, Dhaka University Record Room.

<sup>41</sup> Ratan Lal Chakraborty, Vol.2, *ibid.*, p. 969.

<sup>42</sup> Annual Report: 1970-71, University of Dacca, p. 27.

<sup>43</sup> Mafizullah Kabir, *ibid.*, p. 72.



seven.<sup>44</sup> Evidence shows that the total number of students at DU in the 1970-1971 session was 6,409.<sup>45</sup> Among them, only 30 to 50 students were present in the class. The newspaper *Janmabhumi* wrote that only 30-40 students were participating in class.<sup>46</sup> *Banglar Bani* wrote that only 47-48 students were participating in class.<sup>47</sup> The low number of students also became evident from the proctor's annual report. The report said that when the classes resumed on 2<sup>nd</sup> August, only a handful of students, around 1% of the total roll strength, turned up on the campus. Classes were held with only one or two students and, more often than not, were abandoned for want of attendance.<sup>48</sup> Among the 30 to 50 students, some attend the class to avoid government harassment, and others do so for ideological reasons or to spy on their teachers. The annual report of the English Department of DU stated,

Not many students attended classes. A few came because their guardians feared harassment by the Military rulers in case their wards failed to contribute to the so-called restoration of normalcy. It is, however, not unlikely that a handful came because they believed in Pakistan and that the odd one or two had accepted the job of spying on their teachers.<sup>49</sup>

Kabir said most students came to the university to watch the situation, and they told some of the teachers about their intentions. But a few of them were spies. From the very beginning, they came to please the military authorities.<sup>50</sup>

The government accused the teachers and staff of a low presence. Blaming them, a circular from the Education Department said that it has come to the government's notice that apart from the circulation of baseless rumours by anti-state elements, some teachers are directly or indirectly discouraging students from attending classes. In some instances, the conduct of the educational institution staff is a significant factor in low attendance. The heads of institutions should ensure that all the staff under them perform their duties properly and loyally. They should also see that the teachers positively encourage the students to attend classes and create confidence in them. They should also explain to them that the rumourmongers are not their friends and that they should attend classes in their own interest.<sup>51</sup> Kabir said the military authorities had

---

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>45</sup> Annual Report: 1970-71, University of Dacca, p. 107

<sup>46</sup> *The Janmabhumi*, September 13, 1971.

<sup>47</sup> *The Daily Banglar Bani*, September 14, 1971.

<sup>48</sup> Annual Report for the Session 1971-72, Office of the Proctor. D-Register, File No. 3141, Dhaka University Record Room.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Mafizullah Kabir, *ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>51</sup> Circular from the Deputy Secretary to the Government of East Pakistan, Education Department, 7 September, 1971, No. G/10-13/71 890-Edn. D-Register, Bundle 10-A, Dhaka University Record Room.

specific information that some teachers discouraged students from attending classes.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, the government and the university administration punished the Bengali nationalist teachers and students differently.

### **Different Punishments Against the Bengali Nationalist Teachers and Students**

During the Liberation War, the Bengali nationalist teachers who joined the university faced different punishments from the authorities. Some of them were under surveillance and received Shani and Jamdot's letters. Some teachers were rusticated, some were removed from the Syndicate, and some were arrested. The trial of some teachers and students was also organized in their absence, and ultimately, they brutally killed ten teachers of DU on 14<sup>th</sup> December 1971.

Bengali nationalist teachers who joined the university were under the surveillance of government intelligence agencies, their pro-Pakistani colleagues and student spies and were harassed and tortured in different ways. Most Bengali nationalist teachers tried staying in their rooms, avoiding the department office, classroom, teacher's lounge, and public places during office hours because there were so few students that they could conduct the class in their rooms. Moreover, they could avoid surveillance of pro-Pakistani teachers and spies. However, when the Pakistan army entered the campus, they took shelter in the teacher's lounge for their safety.<sup>53</sup>

On 10<sup>th</sup> August, the government sent a notice to all public, private, and autonomous institutions to send the details of their employees and their family members to the government.<sup>54</sup> Following the notice, all the DU chairpersons sent the details of their teachers, staff, and family members to the government.<sup>55</sup> Kabir said that one day in the second week of August, they were required to provide residential addresses by 12 noon. Although this aroused great suspicion in their minds, and they were apprehensive of trouble, they could not but comply.<sup>56</sup> So, it was easy for the government to monitor the activities of the teachers. Accordingly, the teachers who were suspected of engaging in the Liberation War or *Mukti Bahini* received threatening letters from the *Jamdot Bahini* or *Shani Bahini*. The sample of the *Jamdot Bahini* letter was:

You Mr. Agent,

Due to your malicious machinations to fulfil the dream of *Akhand Hindusthan*, thousands of innocent people have been butchered by you the agents of '*Bharat Mata*', with the help of Indian armed infiltrators. You cannot conceal your seditious misdeeds, the penalty of

---

<sup>52</sup> Mafizullah Kabir, *ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>53</sup> Ratan Lal Chakraborty, Vol. 2, *ibid.*, p. 710.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 654.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Mafizullah Kabir, *ibid.*, p. 83.

which is death and death alone. Correct your ways or else you will be eaten up by dogs and vultures. Mind, you are under constant watch. JamdutBahini.<sup>57</sup>

The sample of the Shani Bahini letter:

Annihilation of Devils

Devils,

You are one of those main leg-licking dogs of the Hindu Brahmins and the agents of Indian Indrabad who are hopelessly trying to destroy the greater Pakistan state, the homeland the Muslims. Nothing of your attitude, movement and activities is unknown to us. Be off without late and refrain from licking the legs of India, otherwise you will find no outlet to escape. On receiving this letter be ready to be completely annihilated. Shani.<sup>58</sup>

Following the surveillance on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1971, General Tikka Khan, Chancellor of DU, warned some DU teachers not to indulge in anti-state activities in the future. Those who were warned included Dr Munir Chowdhury and Dr Nilima Ibrahim, teachers of the Bengali Department, and Dr Serajul Islam Chowdhury, teacher of the English Department.<sup>59</sup>

Under the government's surveillance, the Pakistan army arrested nine teachers of the DU from 13<sup>th</sup> August to 17<sup>th</sup> November 1971. The allegation against them was that they gave statements against the government, attended the procession, incited the students and assisted the freedom fighters and Liberation War.<sup>60</sup> The list of the arrested teachers included:

**Table 1:** List of Teachers Arrested by the Government during the Liberation War

Sl.	Name of teacher	Department	Date of arrest	Date of release
1	AMM Shahidullah	Mathematics	13 August 1971	30 September 1971
2	Dr. M Abul Khair	History	13 August 1971	30 September 1971
3	Rafiqul Islam	Bengali	13 August 1971	30 September 1971
4	Saduddin	Social Science	13 August 1971	30 September 1971
5	Ahsanul Haq	English	31 August 1971	2 November 1971
6	Dr.Rashidul Hasan	English	20 September 1971	2 November 1971
7	Wadudur Rahman	History	17 November 1971	They were arrested but not held in the jail.
8	Dr.Ghyasuddin Ahmed	History	17 November 1971	
9	Zahurul Haque	Philosophy	17 November 1971	

Source: Ratan Lal Chakraborty, *Bangladesher Swadhinota Sangrame Dhaka Bishwabidyalay*, Vol. 2, p. 688.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>58</sup> Ratan Lal Chakraborty, Vol. 2, *ibid.*, pp. 665-66.

<sup>59</sup> Hasan Hafizur Rahman (ed.), Vol.7, *ibid.*, p. 502.

<sup>60</sup> Ratan Lal Chakraborty, Vol. 2, *ibid.*, p. 694.

The arrested teachers were taken to the old MP Hostel (Head office of the Martial Law Administrator) first for primary interrogation. Then, they were taken to the Dhaka Cantonment, but the authorities did not accept the professors there. Then, they were taken to a house at Shere Bangla Nagar. The house was a jail for particular persons, and this is where the Pakistan army interrogated and tortured the teachers.<sup>61</sup> During the interrogation, they tried to find out about their earlier nationalist activities, their explanation of Bengali nationalism, what was necessary for Pakistan's unity, and their perception of the national hero of Pakistan.<sup>62</sup> Later, most of them were sent to Dhaka Central Jail. Finally, all of them were released by 2<sup>nd</sup> November. Among them, three were killed on 14<sup>th</sup> December.

General Tikka Khan (1915-2002), Chancellor of DU, rusticated six DU teachers on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1971 and warned them. They were Dr. Anamul Haque (1902-82), Dr. Muhammad Moniruzzaman, Dr. Nilima Ibrahim, and Dr. Munir Chowdhury (1925-1971), teachers of the Bengali department; Dr. Abu Mohamed Habibullah (1911-1984), teacher of Islamic History and Culture; and Dr. Sirajul Islam Chowdhury, teacher of English.<sup>63</sup>

The university syndicate meeting suspended three nationalist DU teachers from the syndicate and appointed three pro-Pakistani members to increase government control. The suspended teachers were Dr. Muhammad Enamul Haq, Dr. Muhammad Quadrat-i-Khuda, and Dr. Mamtaz Uddin Ahmed. Justice Muhammad Asir, Mohamad Osman Gani, and Jalal Uddin Ahmed were the three new members.<sup>64</sup>

The DU administration took the initiative to donate to the government's war fund. On 6<sup>th</sup> November, the registrar of the DU published a notice proposing that all teachers and staff donate 1 percent of their salary to the Governor's War Fund. It also suggested they fill out a form and deposit the money by 15<sup>th</sup> December. Due to the circumstances, the authority did not have time to implement it.<sup>65</sup>

During the Liberation War, 32 teachers did not join the DU. Evidence shows that within the time limit (1<sup>st</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> June 1971), 52 teachers did not join the university. The

---

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 689.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 694.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 671.

<sup>64</sup> Extract from the Minutes of the Syndicate Meeting held on Wednesday, the 10th November 1971 at 9.00 am. In the Vice-Chancellor's House, University Campus, Ramna, Dacca.

<sup>65</sup> Ratan Lal Chakraborty, Vol. 2, *ibid.*, p.738.

first syndicate meeting of Syed Sajjad Hussain temporarily suspended all 52 teachers.<sup>66</sup> The government appointed Sajjad Hussain as the Vice-Chancellor of DU on 19<sup>th</sup> July 1971, and the syndicate meeting was held on 5<sup>th</sup> August. His second syndicate meeting was held on 30<sup>th</sup> September. The meeting allowed ten teachers to join after the ultimatum.<sup>67</sup> Nine teachers of DU were killed on 26<sup>th</sup> March, and one Sadat Ali was killed on 26<sup>th</sup> April by the Pakistan army. Eventually, 32 teachers did not join the university. They went to India and worked for the Liberation War. The DU administration sent a suspension notice to the suspended teacher's address. The contents of the notice came to be known from Anudwaipayan Bhattacharjee's letter. On 4<sup>th</sup> September, the university authorities sent a notice to his address. The notice declared that all the DU teachers were asked to join the university from 1<sup>st</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> June 1971. The Governor and Martial Law Administrator, Zone 'B', had ordered all officers to join their duties by the afternoon of 15<sup>th</sup> June 1971. The university authorities also issued a notification to all its employees to join the university by 15<sup>th</sup> June. Therefore, the said Anudwaipayan Bhattacharjee was hereby informed that in pursuance of the said order of the Governor and Martial Law Administrator, Zone 'B' and the Syndicate resolution thereon dated 5<sup>th</sup> August 1971, he had been placed under suspension with effect from the forenoon of 16<sup>th</sup> June 1971.<sup>68</sup> Mr. Anudwaipayan Bhattacharjee's father received the suspension letter. Like him, the authorities sent the same notice to other suspended teachers.

Martial law administrators organized the trial of absent teachers under martial law. Evidence shows that at the beginning of September 1971, Tikka Khan ordered five prominent teachers of DU to be present at the Sub Martial Law Administrator office located at MP Hostel of 6<sup>th</sup> Sector on the morning of 8<sup>th</sup> September. The notice said that their trial would start under the Military Ordinance if they failed to attend. They were Muzaffar Ahmed, Abdur Razzak, Sarwar Murshid, Mazharul Islam and Abu Zafar Shamsuddin.<sup>69</sup> They did not respond to the government order. Therefore, they were punished with 14 years of rigorous imprisonment. *The Kalantar* wrote that the special military court of Dhaka gave 14 years of rigorous imprisonment of four teachers in their absence.<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> Extract from the Minutes of the Syndicate held on 5th August 1971, Dhaka University Record Room.

<sup>67</sup> Extract from the Minutes of the Syndicate held on 30th September 1971, Dhaka University Record Room.

<sup>68</sup> Personal File of Anudwaipayan, Nathi (File) no. 9, DU Record Room.

<sup>69</sup> *Daily Pakistan*, September 2, 1971.

<sup>70</sup> *The Kalantar*, November 14, 1971.

Some of the student leaders and ordinary students also faced government punishment. For instance, on 4<sup>th</sup> May 1971, Tikka Khan, in a statement, called four student leaders of the DU to surrender to the military by 10<sup>th</sup> May. Otherwise, their trial would be organized under military law in their absence. They were ASM Abdur Rab, Abdul KuddusMakhon, Nur-e-Alam Siddiki and Shahjahan Siraj.<sup>71</sup>

Some students were arrested upon returning to the DU campus on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1971. Most notable were Zillur Murshid Mithu, Homayon Ahmed and Rina Khanom. Zillur Murshid Mithu was a history student at DU. He was a resident of Surya Sen Hall. On 26<sup>th</sup> March, he was inside the hall and miraculously survived. On 28<sup>th</sup> March, he left the campus and went to his sister's house at Dhanmondi, then to his native house at Goalgram in Faridpur. After opening the university, he came to the campus several times. On 11<sup>th</sup> August, the government arrested him from his relative's house on an arms collection and preservation charge. Then, he was sent to the central jail. The government released him on 16<sup>th</sup> November. However, he was kidnapped by some people dressed in black on 5<sup>th</sup> December and did not return.<sup>72</sup> Humayun Ahmed was an MA student in chemistry in 1971. Pakistan army killed his father, Fayzur Rahman Ahmed, on 5 May. Then he went to Barisal, his native place with his mother, sister and brother, and then to Mohon Ganj Mymensing. He had difficulty staying in an unknown place during the war. Therefore, he came back to Mohsin Hall in July. Pakistan army arrested him on 17<sup>th</sup> November. After interrogation, he was released.<sup>73</sup> Rina Khanom was a philosophy student at DU. She was a resident at Ruqayyah Hall. She left the hall before 26<sup>th</sup> March and took shelter in her sister's house at Malibagh. On 11<sup>th</sup> September, the Pakistan army arrested her from her sister's house. After interrogation, she, too, was released.<sup>74</sup>

At the beginning of December 1971, when India directly declared war against Pakistan, the Liberation War of Bangladesh entered its penultimate stage. In response, the government proclaimed an emergency and suspended all classes from 6<sup>th</sup> December. Suspending class, the DU administration published two notices. The first notice was, "In view of the present emergency, University classes have been suspended until further orders. They will be resumed as soon as practicable. No one should, therefore,

---

<sup>71</sup> *Morning News*, May 4, 1971.

<sup>72</sup> Ratan Lal Chakraborty, *71 Ar Shahid Jibon: ItihasBibhag ('71's Martyr Life: History Department)*, (Collan Prokasan 1997), pp. 121-131.

<sup>73</sup> Ratan Lal Chakraborty, *Bangladesher Swadhinota Sangrame Dhaka Bishwabidyalay*, Vol. 2, *ibid.*, p. 704.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.705-06.

leave the station without permission. Teachers are requested to remain in touch with the Heads daily.”<sup>75</sup>

The second notice was, “In view of the emergency created by Indian aggression against Pakistan, University classes will remain suspended until further orders. All offices, however, will function normally.”<sup>76</sup> DU was re-opened on 8<sup>th</sup> February 1972.

A brutal mass killing of intellectuals took place in Bangladesh on 14<sup>th</sup> December 1971, only two days before the surrender of West Pakistani troops. It was a planned operation and an extreme pinpoint of the intellectual killing in Bangladesh during the Liberation War. On 14<sup>th</sup> December, they killed 10 teachers of the DU.<sup>77</sup>

The killers raided the residence of the targeted teachers on the 14<sup>th</sup> of December morning and abducted them at gunpoint. They were blindfolded and carried to the torture cell on a bus.<sup>78</sup> None of the abducted teachers returned. So, it was difficult to fathom how they were exactly killed. However, it is assumed from a survivor’s narrative, Delwar Hussain. He was the chief accountant of the Greenland Mercantile Company of Dhaka. He said that on the morning of December 14, several *razakars* pulled him out of his house. After placing a blindfold around his eyes, they drove him by bus to camp on the outskirts of Dhaka. He was forced into a room. A little later, the cloth around his eyes slackened and he discovered that he was in a room with a score or so of other prisoners. Some of them had been tortured. Toenails had been ripped off and toes amputated. After an hour, they were interrogated. The prisoners identified themselves as doctors, lawyers, professors and journalists. They were forced into a bus and driven out to marshlands on the outskirts of Dhaka. The *razakars* led their victims to a big tree where about another 130 prisoners were huddled. Several prisoners asked the *razakars* why they were killing fellow Bengalis. One of them told us to shut up and gave an order: finish the bastards off. Mr. Hussain said they started to shoot prisoners with rifles, and others were simply stabbed to death. He managed to slip the rope off his wrists and dashed to the river. By a miracle, he escaped.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>75</sup> D-Register, Bundle No. 17, File no. 377, Smark no. 14567-C, dated 6.12.197, Dhaka University Record Room.

<sup>76</sup> D-Register, Bundle No. 17, File no. 377, Smarak no. 14569-C, Dated 6-12-1971, Dhaka University Record Room.

<sup>77</sup> Ratan Lal Chakraborty, *Bangladesher Swadhinota Sangrame Dhaka Bishwabidyalay*, Vol. 1, *ibid.*, p. 612.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 613.

<sup>79</sup> ‘Witness Describes Massacre Before Dacca Fell’, *The London Times*, December 30, 1971.

**Table 2** : List of ten teachers Killed on 14<sup>th</sup> December 1971

Sl.	Name	Department	Place of their arrest
1.	Dr.Anwar Pasha	Bengali	30 Isha Khan Road
2.	Dr. M Abul Khair	History	35 Fular Road
3.	Dr.Ghyasuddin Ahmed	History	Mohsin Hall
4.	Dr. Faizul Mahi	Education Research	35 Fular Road
5.	Munier Chowdhury	Bengali	House at Hitirpul
6.	Dr.Mofazzal Haider Chaudhury	Bengali	68/1 Indira Road
7.	Dr.Mohammad Mortaza	Doctor	14/A Fular Road
8.	Dr.Rashidul Hasan	English	30 Isha Khan Road
9.	Dr. Santosh Chandra Bhattacharyya	History	31 Isha Khan Road
10.	Dr. Sirajul Haque Khan	Education and Research	16 Fular Road

Source: Chakraborty, *Bangladesher Swadhinota Sangrame Dhaka Bishwabidyalay*, p. 612.

A special branch of police discovered the decomposed body of the intellectuals under the leadership of N.M Khan, D.I.G, Abdus Samad Talukdar, SP of the Intelligence and Special Branch of Dhaka and Major Kondu of the alliance force on 4<sup>th</sup> January 1972.<sup>80</sup> Most of the rotten bodies were found scattered in ditches, plains and inside the heaps of bricks in the marshy land at Mirpur and Rayerbazar. The dead bodies, eyes covered, and hands tied on the back, were found bruised all over, with bullet shots to the chest, head or back and bayonet injuries all over the bodies.<sup>81</sup> It was almost impossible to identify the bodies because their faces had decomposed. However, their family members or relatives identified them through their belongings. Omar Hayat identified his brother-in-law, Dr. Mohammad Mortaza, by his lungi, shirt and the sari with which his eyes were blindfolded. Anamul Haque Khan identified his father, Dr. Sirajul Haque Khan, through his shirt, pants and belt. Anamul Haque Khan identified Dr Santosh Chandra Bhattacharyya, by his grey hair and dress. Abdul Awal identified the body of his brother Dr Faizul Mahi. Among ten teachers, the bodies of three were not found. The Namaz e Janaza of the deceased was held at DU Central Mosque on 6 January. Then, they were buried beside the DU Mosque. The body of Santosh Chandra Bhattacharyya was cremated at the Shampur crematorium.<sup>82</sup>

There is no clear indication of who exactly killed the Bengali intellectuals. However, the most accepted opinion in Bangladesh is that Al-Badar militants (local collaborators

<sup>80</sup> Ratan Lal Chakraborty, *Bangladesher Swadhinota Sangrame Dhaka Bishwabidyalay*, Vol. 1, *ibid.*, pp. 614-615.

<sup>81</sup> *Banglapedia*, accessed at [https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php/Killing\\_of\\_Intellectuals](https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php/Killing_of_Intellectuals), on 22 March, 2021.

<sup>82</sup> *Daily Ittefaq*, January 6, 1972.



of the Pakistan Army) killed them with direct assistance from the Pakistan government. The evidence supporting this claim may be found in two diaries. One was the diary of Rao Farman Ali, and the other was the diary of Ashrafuzzaman Khan. Rao Farman Ali left a diary at the Governor House, and the Bengali intellectuals' list was discovered in its pages. Most of them were executed on 14<sup>th</sup> December. Therefore, it is assumed that Rao Farman Ali chalked out the blueprint of crippling the intelligentsia on 14<sup>th</sup> December. Some of the military officers who assisted him were Lt. General Ameer Abdullah Khan Niazi, Brigadier Bashir, Lt Colonel Hejazi, Major Zahur, Major Aslam, Captain Nasir and Captain Qayyum. However, the mission of killing the university teachers was executed by a young group of Al-Badar militants.<sup>83</sup> Their leader was Ashrafuzzaman Khan, commander of the Al-Badar force in Dhaka.

The diary of Ashrafuzzaman Khan was discovered in his house (no. 350) at Nakhla Para after the Liberation War. His diary mentioned the names of 20 people. There were names of eight DU teachers who were killed on 14<sup>th</sup> December.<sup>84</sup> Both the diaries bear evidence that it was a planned killing and that the killers were from Al-Badar. Some of the family members of the *Shahid* also identified Ashrafuzzaman as the killer. Al-Badar Bahini worked against the Liberation War from the beginning of its formation. Some of the Al-Badar leaders followed the activities of the murdered teachers for a long time. They were also accused of sending threatening letters to the teachers named *Jamdut and Shani*.

Al-Badar militants killed the Bengali intellectuals because they were the voice of East Bengal. From the beginning of the creation of Pakistan, they focused on the disparity between the two Pakistan and the government's exploitation. They planted the idea of Bengali nationalism in the heart of Bengalis through intellectual, political and cultural activities. They also played a crucial role in the nationalist movement of Bangladesh and the Liberation War. The killing aimed to eliminate the intellectuals, thereby forcing the Bengali nation into intellectual bankruptcy and depriving the newly emerging Bangladesh of education, culture, ideology, and leadership.

### Conclusion

The above discussion shows that during the nine-month-long Liberation War of Bangladesh, the DU campus was closed for five months and opened only from 2<sup>nd</sup> August to 6<sup>th</sup> December 1971. At that time, the government and the university administration tried to establish normalcy on the campus and took different initiatives to ensure the presence of teachers and students. Due to government initiatives, most

<sup>83</sup> *Banglapedia*, accessed at [https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php/Killing\\_of\\_Intellectuals](https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php/Killing_of_Intellectuals), on 22 March, 2021.

<sup>84</sup> Ratan Lal Chakraborty, *Bangladesher Swadhinota Sangrame Dhaka Bishwabidyalay*, Vol.1, *ibid.*, pp. 616-617.

teachers joined the university to save their lives and jobs. However, they could ensure the presence of only 30 to 50 students, where the total number of students in 1970-71 session was 6,409. Therefore, it is very logical to say that the University of Dhaka's academic situation was worse during the Liberation War of Bangladesh. Mofizullah Kabir correctly said, "During the morning hours, offices opened, and some employees came. But offices for whom? No student ever came to the area of the Campus. The University functions for students. But now the University was opened without students."<sup>85</sup>

The DU teachers and students were divided into two groups. One group supported the Pakistani government and implemented its policies, and the other was the Bengali nationalists. The Bengali nationalist teachers and students worked very secretly for the liberation of Bangladesh. Therefore, they had to endure different punishments. The Pakistan government killed 20 teachers, arrested 9 teachers, rusticated six teachers, and suspended three teachers from the DU syndicate. The special military court gave four teachers 14 years of rigorous imprisonment in their absence. Some students were arrested upon returning to the DU campus. Some student leader's trials were organised under military law in their absence and 113 students of DU sacrificed their life to liberate Bangladesh. However, the government could not stop the emergence of Bangladesh. Bangladesh became independent on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1971, and the Bengali nationalist teachers and students were honoured, and the pro-Pakistani teachers came under trial in the independent Bangladesh.

---

<sup>85</sup> Mafizullah Kabir, *ibid.*, pp. 71-72.

## Exploring the Common Ground: A Comparative Analysis of Zoroastrianism and Islam

Shafi Md. Mostofa\*

### Abstract

Islam and Zoroastrianism share remarkable similarities in their theological and eschatological beliefs. They both believe in the oneness of God, with different names (Ahura Mazda for Zoroastrians and Allah for Muslims) but similar attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. Both religions acknowledge archangels, with Zoroastrianism recognizing six and Islam recognizing four, along with other minor angels. Both religions consider humans as the pinnacle of creation and emphasize the establishment of justice and truth on earth. They share beliefs about the nature of the universe as a creation of God, and the role of prophets as messengers of God. Prayer is considered important in both religions, with similar practices of five daily prayers (Salat in Islam, Gah Worship in Zoroastrianism) and similar beliefs about the afterlife, including the immortality of the soul, resurrection of the dead, balance of judgment, heaven and hell, and the existence of a bridge to be crossed after death (Chinvat Bridge in Zoroastrianism, Al-Siraat in Islam). Ethical codes emphasizing purity of mind and body are also similar in both religions. Thus, this article argues, using intertextuality theory, that Islam is not a new beginning but rather a continuation of earlier revelations, such as Zoroastrianism. This perspective further suggests that Zoroastrianism can be categorized within the Abrahamic traditions.

**Key words:** Islam, Zoroastrianism, Five Times Prayer, Chinvat Bridge, Eschatology.

### Introduction

Zoroastrianism is one of the world's oldest known religions, founded by the prophet Zoroaster (also known as Zarathustra) in ancient Persia (modern-day Iran) around 6th or 7th century BCE. The exact timeline of Zoroaster's life and the early history of Zoroastrianism are debated among scholars due to limited historical records, but it is generally believed that Zoroastrianism emerged during the Achaemenid Empire (550-330 BCE).<sup>1</sup> Zoroastrianism became the dominant religion of the Achaemenid Empire, which was known for its tolerance towards different faiths. However, with

---

\* Associate Professor, Department of World Religions and Culture, University of Dhaka

<sup>1</sup> Mary Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism: Volume II: Under the Achaemenians*, Vol. 8, No. 8, Brill, 1982, p. 8

the decline of the Achaemenid Empire and the conquest of Persia by Alexander the Great in 330 BCE, Zoroastrianism faced challenges and declined in popularity.<sup>2</sup> During the subsequent Seleucid and Parthian periods, Zoroastrianism continued to be practiced by some, but it faced competition from other religions, including Hellenistic influences.<sup>3</sup>

The Sassanian Empire (224-651 CE) marked a period of revival for Zoroastrianism, with Zoroastrianism becoming the state religion and the official faith of the Sassanian rulers. The Sassanian kings promoted Zoroastrianism and implemented policies to suppress other religions. Zoroastrianism flourished during this time, with the compilation of the Avesta, the sacred texts of Zoroastrianism, and the establishment of religious institutions. However, the rise of Islam in the 7th century CE had a profound impact on Zoroastrianism. Persia was then conquered by the Arab Muslims, and many Zoroastrians were converted to Islam. And many of them migrated to other regions, such as India, where they came to be known as Parsees.<sup>4</sup> Zoroastrianism gradually declined in Persia and became a minority religion. Despite facing challenges and decline in numbers, Zoroastrianism has managed to survive and has pockets of followers in various parts of the world, including Iran, India, and diaspora communities. Zoroastrians continue to practice their faith, uphold their traditions, and maintain their unique religious identity. Today, Zoroastrianism is recognized as one of the world's major ancient religions and is appreciated for its teachings on monotheism, ethical conduct, and the importance of truth and justice.

Islam is a monotheistic religion too that emerged in the 7th century CE in the Arabian Peninsula. It was founded by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who is considered the last prophet in a long line of prophets that includes Adam, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, among others. The history of Islam can be divided into several key periods. This was a time when Arabia was a diverse region with various tribal religions and polytheistic beliefs. Muhammad, born in Mecca in 570 CE, received revelations from Allah through the angel Gabriel and began preaching the message of Islam, calling for the worship of one God named Allah and the rejection of idols. Muhammad's message faced opposition from the tribal leaders in Mecca, who resisted his call for monotheism and social justice. Despite facing persecution,

---

<sup>2</sup> Mary Boyce (ed.), *A history of Zoroastrianism: The early period*, Vol. 1, Brill, 1996, pp. 120-190

<sup>3</sup> Maneckji Nusservanji Dhalla, *History of Zoroastrianism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1938, pp. 302-309

<sup>4</sup> Mary Boyce and Frantz Grenet, *A History of Zoroastrianism, Zoroastrianism under Macedonian and Roman Rule*, Vol. 3, Brill, 1991, pp. 125-151

Muhammad and his followers continued to spread the message of Islam. In 622 CE, Muhammad and his followers migrated to Medina in an event known as the Hijra, marking the beginning of the Islamic calendar.<sup>5</sup>

In Medina, Muhammad established a community based on Islamic principles, and Islam began to gain followers. Muhammad also engaged in defensive battles against the Meccan leaders and their allies, known as the Battle of Badr (624 CE), the Battle of Uhud (625 CE), and the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah (628 CE). In 630 CE, Muhammad returned to Mecca with a large following and was able to conquer the city without bloodshed. The idols in the Kaaba, a sacred site in Mecca, were destroyed, and Islam became the dominant religion in the Arabian Peninsula. After Muhammad's death in 632 CE, Islam spread rapidly under the leadership of his successors, known as the Caliphs. The Islamic Empire expanded to include regions such as Persia, Egypt, Syria, and North Africa. This period also saw the development of Islamic jurisprudence, theology, and other aspects of Islamic civilization. During this period, Islamic civilization flourished in various fields, including art, architecture, literature, philosophy, science, and medicine. Scholars translated and preserved the works of Greek, Persian, and Indian scholars, making significant contributions to human knowledge.

The Islamic Empire experienced internal conflicts and external invasions, leading to the fragmentation of the empire into various dynasties and kingdoms. The Mongol invasions, Crusades, and establishment of the Ottoman Empire were some of the significant events during this period. In the modern era, many Muslim-majority countries experienced colonization, independence movements, and the establishment of nation-states. Nonetheless, Islam has continued to be a significant global religion, with diverse interpretations, practices, and cultures among its followers. Throughout its history, Islam has had a profound impact on societies, cultures, and civilizations, shaping art, architecture, literature, sciences, and other fields. Today, Islam is one of the world's major religions, with over 1.9 billion followers around the globe, and it continues to be a source of spiritual guidance, ethical teachings, and cultural richness for millions of people.<sup>6</sup>

This paper argues, Islam as a monotheistic religion shares several beliefs and practices with Zoroastrianism, an older faith that originated in ancient Persia. In fact,

---

<sup>5</sup> Peter Malcolm Holt, Ann KS Lambton, and Bernard Lewis (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Islam*, Vol. 2, Cambridge University Press, 1978, pp. 32-49; John L. Esposito, *The Oxford History of Islam*, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 16-39

<sup>6</sup> Philip Khuri Hitti, *The Arabs: A Short History*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 1996, p. 757

Islam was influenced by Zoroastrianism to a significant extent, and many tenets of faith from Zoroastrianism were incorporated into Islam, as Islam was founded after Zoroastrianism. Several aspects of Islam have their roots in Zoroastrianism, including the belief in the oneness of God, the concept of creation rather than evolution, the concept of heaven and hell, the practice of five times daily prayer, the idea of a final judgment, and the belief in resurrection. All of these concepts were originally taught in Zoroastrianism before the emergence of Islam.

### **Methodology**

The comparative methodology employed in this analysis focuses on elucidating the striking parallels between Islam and Zoroastrianism across theological, eschatological, and ethical dimensions. Through a systematic examination, it identifies core theological concepts such as monotheism and attributes of the divine, compares the recognition and roles of celestial entities, and explores shared beliefs regarding human existence and the pursuit of justice. Delving into eschatological perspectives, it contrasts and correlates beliefs about the universe's creation, the prophetic role, ritualistic practices like prayer, and the intricacies of afterlife beliefs, including resurrection, judgment, and symbolic bridges. Furthermore, this methodology contextualizes historical, cultural, and geographical contexts to underscore the continuity between these faiths, ultimately challenging the conventional narrative by suggesting that Islam, rather than a novel inception, represents a continuation of earlier revelations like Zoroastrianism, thus potentially reshaping the categorization of Zoroastrianism within the Abrahamic traditions.

This study utilizes Intertextuality Theory to explore the theological and eschatological connections between Zoroastrianism and Islam. Intertextuality posits that no religious text or tradition exists in isolation; rather, it is shaped by previous narratives and ideas. Applying this theory allows us to analyze how Islamic beliefs may have been influenced by Zoroastrian concepts. For example, shared motifs such as the presence of archangels, the afterlife, and ethical codes are reflections of these textual connections. Kristeva (1980)<sup>7</sup> suggests that religious narratives are shaped by ongoing dialogues between traditions, revealing a continuity of theological thought. By tracing these intertextual links, the study highlights Islam as a continuation of older theological ideas, rather than a complete departure from previous traditions, underscoring shared cosmological beliefs like the Chinvat Bridge in Zoroastrianism and Al-Siraat in Islam.

---

<sup>7</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Columbia University Press, New York, 1980, pp. 15-20

### Similarities between Zoroastrianism and Islam

Zoroastrianism has significantly influenced Islam in various aspects, resulting in notable similarities between the two religions. Here are some key similarities that are worth mentioning:

#### Oneness of God

Both Zoroastrianism and Islam share a common emphasis on the belief in the oneness of God, which is considered the most fundamental article of faith in both religions. In Zoroastrianism, Ahura Mazda is recognized as the sole creator and supreme ruler of all creations. The term "Ahura" translates to "Lord" and "Mazda" means "Wise, All Knowing", hence "Ahura Mazda" signifies "All Wise Lord".<sup>8</sup> Ahura Mazda is unparalleled and beyond comparison. He is the Supreme Being through whom everything exists, brighter than the brightest of creations, higher than the highest heavens, and older than the oldest in the universe. He is the epitome of perfection, knowing no equal or elder, and there is none to contest His Supremacy. He is the first and foremost, the Almighty, and the absolute sovereign. He is benevolent, changeless, and eternal, remaining unaffected amidst the manifold changes in the universe. He will ultimately decide the victory between good and evil, and He is the ultimate source of felicity and joy. There is none before Him, and He is the greatest of all. He is the one and only true God, from whom everything emanates, and He is the Lord of all, encompassing numerous attributes.<sup>9</sup> Although Zoroastrianism acknowledges the existence of two rival spirits - Spenta Mainyu (Good Spirit) and Angra Mainyu (Evil Spirit), who are identified with Ahura Mazda and Ahriman respectively,<sup>10</sup> they are considered to emanate from Ahura Mazda and are not independent entities.<sup>11</sup> Hence, this duality does not compromise the monotheistic nature of Zoroastrianism, as Ahura Mazda remains the ultimate source of all creation and the supreme deity in this faith. Thus, it can be summarized that Ahura Mazda is recognized as the sole creator and ruler of all creations, and although there are two rival spirits - Spenta Mainyu (Good Spirit) and Angra Mainyu (Evil Spirit), they are not independent of Ahura Mazda. This does not break down the monotheistic nature of Zoroastrianism, as both spirits emanate from the Supreme God.

---

<sup>8</sup> Karan Singh, *Religions of India*, Clarion Books, New Delhi, 1983, pp. 179-208

<sup>9</sup> Meena Iyer, *Faith and Philosophy of Zoroastrianism*. Kalpaz Publications, Delhi, 2009, pp. 77-104

<sup>10</sup> Shafi Md. Mostofa, *Concept of God in Zoroastrianism*, *Far Eastern Studies*, University of Dhaka, 2015, pp. 1-12

<sup>11</sup> Kedar Nath Tiwari, *Comparative Religion*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1983, pp. 90-102

On the other hand, Islam, as a monotheistic religion, places utmost importance on the concept of Tawhid, meaning the "Oneness of God". It is the foundational belief of Islam, asserting that Allah is the One and Only God. Tawhid forms the foremost article of faith in Islam, and the declaration of belief in the oneness of God is the first part of the Shahada, the Islamic declaration of faith. According to the Qur'an, attributing divinity to anything besides Allah, known as shirk, is considered an unpardonable sin. Muslims believe that the entirety of Islamic teachings is based on the principle of Tawhid, which sets Islam apart from other major religions by its uncompromising monotheism. The Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes the oneness of God, as stated in verses such as "There is no god but Me, so worship Me (alone)" (Qur'an 21:25), "He is Allah, the One; Allah the Self-Sufficient; He begets not, nor is He begotten; and there is nothing that could be compared with Him" (Qur'an 112:1-3), "O my people! Worship Allah alone! You have no god besides Him. Will you not then be conscious of Allah?" (Qur'an 7:65), and "O my people! Worship Allah alone! You have no god besides Him" (Qur'an 7:73). The concept of Tawhid is central to Islamic belief,<sup>12</sup> emphasizing the absolute oneness of God and the need to worship Him alone, as a distinguishing aspect of Islam among other major religions.

### **Position of Human Being**

Islam has been, to some extent, influenced by the Zoroastrian concept of humanity. Allah has sent man as His representative on earth. Islam makes man the greatest of all creatures. He says, "We have indeed honored the children of Adam; spread them in the land and the sea, provided them with good things; and preferred them in esteem over many things that We have created." (Quran, 17: 70) Islam teaches that every human being is born as sinless; no child carries the burden of his or her ancestors' sins. God says, "No carrier shall carry the burden of others" (Quran, 35: 18). Each human being is born with a pure conscience which can absorb and accept the true message of God. It is only the social and familial influences which take a person away from God's message. Islam also emphasizes on the issue of responsibility and accountability of human beings. Each person is responsible for his or her own actions. Although Islam teaches that God has predetermined the span of our life and the time of our death, it does not mean that even our actions are predetermined by Him. We surely are free in our actions and are, therefore, accountable for them. God only provides guidance for us to know what is good and what is bad. He says, "We created man of a water-drop...Surely We guided him to the

---

<sup>12</sup> Shafi Md Mostofa, Position of Women in Islam and Sikhism: A Comparative Study, *Arts Faculty Journal*, Vol. 58, pp. 145-160



right way--now whether he (follows it and) be grateful or (goes astray and) be ungrateful is up to him (Quran, 76: 3). On the other hand, Zoroastrianism teaches that God has provided the human soul with every kind of apparatus to enable him to perform his work successfully. The following are a few of them: energy, knowledge, consideration, wisdom, intelligence, perception, sense, mind, thought, speech, action, free will, religious animated conscience, practical conscience, memory etc.<sup>13</sup> Like Islam, Zoroastrianism also believes that man is born as pure and sinless. He is free from the burden of past actions and original sin. He is completely free to choose and his final destiny fully depends upon the exercise of his free choice. If he opts for the good and thereby assists God in his mission, he is sure to have a place in heaven, otherwise he is to be damned in hell.<sup>14</sup>

### **Concept of Evil**

The belief in the existence of evil or Satan is common among many religions worldwide, including Zoroastrianism and Islam. While there may be variations in the beliefs about evil and suffering among different religions, both Zoroastrianism and Islam share the belief that evil and suffering are allowed by God for inherent good purposes. In Zoroastrianism, evil is attributed to Ahriman, also known as Angra Mainyu, who is considered the embodiment of darkness, falsehood, and wickedness. Ahriman is believed to be constantly at odds with Ahura Mazda, the supreme deity of Zoroastrianism, and represents the forces of evil in the world.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, in Islam, Iblis, also known as Satan or Shaytan, is believed to be a disobedient jinn who refused to bow to Adam and was cast out of paradise as a result. Iblis is considered the arch-enemy of humanity and is believed to tempt humans towards evil and disobedience to God. However, in Islamic belief, Iblis has free will and is not an independent force opposing God, rather a creation of God who chooses to rebel.<sup>16</sup> Both Zoroastrianism and Islam hold the belief that ultimately good will prevail over evil. They believe that one day, evil will be destroyed eternally and only good or justice will prevail on earth. This belief reflects the concept of divine justice and the ultimate triumph of righteousness in these religions.<sup>17</sup> It's important to note that religious beliefs and interpretations may vary within different sects and

---

<sup>13</sup> Ervad Sheriarji Dadabhai Bharucha, *A Brief Sketch of the Zoroastrian Religion and Customs*, D. B. Taraporevala Sons & Co., Bombay, 1893, pp. 57-97

<sup>14</sup> Tiwari, 1983, *op. cit.*, p. 92

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p. 93

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p. 92

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p. 97

communities within each religion, and not all adherents may hold the same views on these matters.

### **Concept of Angels**

The Islamic concept of angels appears to be significantly influenced by Zoroastrianism. In Zoroastrian belief, angels surround God and wait for His orders. Zoroaster, the prophet of Zoroastrianism, mentioned these angels in the Gathas as six divine abstractions known as the Amesha Spentas or the bountiful immortals. These angels are associated with virtues such as good mind, righteousness, absolute power, devotion, perfection, and immortality. These angels are Vohu Manah or the good mind, Asha Vahishta or the righteousness, Khsatra Vairya or the absolute power, Aramaiti or the devotion, Haurvatat or the perfection, and Ameretat or the immortality.<sup>18</sup> Zoroastrianism also acknowledges the existence of minor angels who are tasked with specific responsibilities and represent different aspects of nature. Similarly, Islam also believes in four highest angels that were created by Allah from Light. These angels are invisible to the human eye, have no gender, and are equipped to carry out Allah's commands and glorify Him. The four highest angels in Islam are Gabriel (Jibril), who is charged with bringing divine revelations and messages of Allah to the Prophets; Israfil, who will blow the Trumpet on the Day of Resurrection; Mikael (Mikail), who is responsible for arranging rainfall; and Izrael (Azrael), who is entrusted with taking souls at the time of death.<sup>19</sup> Likewise Zoroastrianism, Islam also acknowledges the existence of minor angels mentioned in the Quran and Hadith, who are assigned specific tasks, similar to the roles of Zoroastrian angels. However, it's important to note that while there may be similarities in the concept of angels between Zoroastrianism and Islam, there may also be differences in their specific roles, functions, and interpretations within the respective religious traditions. Religious beliefs and practices can vary among different sects, communities, and interpretations within a religion.

### **Prayer**

Prayer is a universal practice across religions, as it is seen as a means of communication with the Divine. Both Islam and Zoroastrianism place special emphasis on prayer as an important aspect of their respective faiths. In Zoroastrianism, there is a set of prayers known as the 'Gah Prayer'. The term 'Gah'

---

<sup>18</sup> R. P. Masani, *The Religion of the Good Life: Zoroastrianism*, George Allan and Unwin Ltd, London, 1938, p. 63

<sup>19</sup> Shamim Akhtar, *Faith and Philosophy of Islam*, Kalpaz Publications, India, 2009, pp. 24-56

typically refers to a period of time or a place, thus 'Gah Worship' signifies 'Timed Worship'. On the other hand, in Islam, it is referred to as 'Salat', derived from the root word 's-l' which, in Aramaic terminology, means to bow, to bend, and to stretch. It is used in various Arabic dialects to denote ritual prayer, indicating spontaneous individual prayer.<sup>20</sup>

Both Zoroastrianism and Islam have a common practice of offering worship five times a day. In both religions, these daily worships are intricately connected to the movement of the Sun. Just like Muslims, Zoroastrians also divide each day into five specific periods for their religious devotions. It is noteworthy that during each of these periods, the presence of a priest is necessary to conduct the worship, as stated by Noss.<sup>21</sup> The similarity between Islam and Zoroastrianism is remarkable in terms of the timing of their five daily worships, which are structured in a similar manner.

<b>Time</b>	<b>Islam</b>	<b>Zoroastrianism</b>
Dawn	<i>Fajr</i>	<i>Havaan</i>
Noon	<i>Zuhar</i>	<i>Rapithwan</i>
Afternoon	<i>Asr</i>	<i>Uziren</i>
Evening	<i>Maghrib</i>	<i>Aiwisuthrem</i>
Night	<i>Isha</i>	<i>Ushaen</i>

In both Islam and Zoroastrianism, ablution is necessary for the performance of the five daily prayers. Muslims are commanded to perform ritual purification, known as wudu, which involves washing the face, hands, and feet before each prayer. If water is not available, sand can be used as a substitute. Similarly, Zoroastrians are required to wash their face and limbs before commencing Gah worship, a form of daily prayer.<sup>22</sup> Both religions have a call to prayer that summons their followers to perform their daily prayers. Muslims have the adhan, traditionally announced by a muezzin from a mosque's minaret, while Zoroastrians are summoned by the ringing of a bell in the Fire Temple to perform Gah worship.<sup>23</sup>

The direction in which prayers are performed is also significant in both religions. Muslims are required to face the Ka'ba shrine in Mecca, known as the Qiblah, during their prayers as instructed in the Quran. Similarly, Zoroastrians pray in the direction of the room where the Sacred Fire is kept, called the Keblaah in Zoroastrianism.

<sup>20</sup> Syed Mahmudul Hasan, *Islam*, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1980, p. 139

<sup>21</sup> John B. Noss, *Man's Religions*, Macmillan Publishing Company, USA, 1984, pp. 332-351

<sup>22</sup> Iyer, 2009, *op. cit.*, pp. 251-252

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 243-255

Covering the head is also a common practice in both religions during prayer. Muslims cover their heads with a hat or a turban, while Zoroastrians cover their heads with a piece of cloth when performing Gah worship.<sup>24</sup> Recitation of sacred texts is an important aspect of prayers in both Islam and Zoroastrianism. Zoroastrians believe that recitation of sacred texts provides the spoken substance of Gah worship, and their priests are required to recite from memory from the Avesta, the sacred scripture, in its original language of revelation<sup>25</sup>. Similarly, Muslims recite from the Holy Qur'an, the Islamic scripture, in Arabic during their prayers as it is considered the original language of its revelation.

### **Concept of the World**

Zoroastrians hold the belief that Ahura Mazda, the supreme deity, created everything in the universe, including the stars, sun, moon, sea, and all that is high and low, light and dark. They believe that everything in creation acts and moves in complete subservience to the will of Ahura Mazda. According to Zoroastrian teachings, humans, as microcosms, are endowed with various faculties that enable them to strive towards righteousness in this world and attain an exalted life in the next.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Muslims believe that the world was created by Allah, the one true God in Islam. According to Islamic teachings, everything in the world, including rivers, mountains, trees, animals, birds, and all that is seen and unseen, has been created by Allah. The Holy Qur'an emphasizes the omnipresence of Allah's creation in every aspect of the world, reflecting His glory and power.<sup>27</sup> Despite their differences in theological details, both Zoroastrianism and Islam share the belief that the world is real and serves as a perfect working ground for human beings. However, both religions also hold that the world is not eternal and will ultimately be destroyed according to the will of God.

### **Life after Death**

There are striking similarities between Islam and Zoroastrianism when it comes to their beliefs about life after death. Both religions share common concepts such as the immortality of the soul, the balance of judgment, resurrection of the dead, and the existence of heaven and hell. The eschatology, or teachings about the end times, in these two religions is more or less same, and there are various aspects where they can

---

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 243-255

<sup>25</sup> Noss, 1984, *op. cit.*, pp. 347-348

<sup>26</sup> Madhusudan Mallik, *Introduction to Parsee Religion: Customs and Ceremonies*, Visva Bharati Research Publications Committee, India, 1980, pp. 52-55

<sup>27</sup> Tiwari, 1983, *op. cit.*, pp. 92-97

find common ground. According to Zoroastrian beliefs, death is a natural phenomenon that no one can escape. Zoroastrianism views death as the result of the soul leaving the body, and the body loses its sanctity and movement when the soul departs. The religion holds that the human soul is not destroyed with physical death, rather it is eternal while the body is temporary.<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, in the Holy Qur'an of Islam, it is stated that all humans will experience death, and there is no escaping it as it is inevitable<sup>29</sup>. Islam also believes that the human soul is immortal and will continue to exist in either heaven or hell after death. Zoroastrianism teaches that all souls, whether righteous or wicked, must cross the Chinvat Bridge made by Ahura Mazda, the supreme deity in Zoroastrianism. To the righteous, the bridge offers an easy passage, while to the wicked, it is as sharp as the edge of a razor, and they fall into the abyss of hell with no hope of salvation.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Muslims also believe in a bridge called the Siraat in Islam, which is established over Hell and extends to Paradise. It is believed that those who have been steadfast in their faith in God during their earthly lives will find it easy to pass the Siraat on the Day of Judgment, as mentioned in the sacred Qur'an. The Qur'an also teaches that after death, Allah will revive and restore life to humans, and this resurrection will occur on the Day of Judgment, where every living human being will be held accountable for their deeds in the world.<sup>31</sup> Zoroastrianism also shares the belief in resurrection, where on the Day of Judgment, all souls will rise from their graves and reunite with their bodies.<sup>32</sup> This concept is also present in Islam, where the Day of Judgment is believed to be a time of resurrection and accountability for one's actions in the world.

In Islam, the concept of the final judgment day entails that after the resurrection, all people will be brought before Allah for judgment. Each person will face the consequences of their actions, both good and evil, without any possibility of intervention for sinners. Allah will examine the records of their deeds, and pronounce judgment between them, rewarding the virtuous and penalizing the sinful.<sup>33</sup> Zoroastrianism also believes in a final judgment day. According to Zoroastrian belief, at the entrance to the Chinvat bridge, individual judgment takes

---

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 92-97

<sup>29</sup> Shamim, 2009, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-32

<sup>30</sup> Mallik, 1980, *op. cit.*, p. 55

<sup>31</sup> Shamim, 2009, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-65

<sup>32</sup> Mallik, 1980, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-56

<sup>33</sup> Shamim, 2009, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-74

place in the presence of Mithra, Shraosha, and Rashnu, who weigh the life-accounts in the balance and render a final decision of good or bad.<sup>34</sup> Zoroastrianism holds that the afterlife is determined by the balance of good thoughts, good words, and good deeds, as well as evil thoughts, evil words, and evil deeds accumulated throughout one's life. Those whose good deeds outweigh the bad are sent to heaven, while those whose evil deeds outweigh the good are sent to hell.<sup>35</sup> Some Zoroastrians also believe that souls are born in the material world as part of God's decree to overcome their defects and achieve perfection, viewing life on Earth as an opportunity to refine their character and become perfect beings of light.

In Islam, heaven is believed to be determined by having the right faith, performing good deeds, and observing prayers, while hell is associated with wrong beliefs, evil deeds, and neglecting prayers. In Zoroastrianism, heaven is generally regarded as a place of eternal light where Ahura Mazda dwells in joy, known as the fair abode, the best life, and the abode of good mind. In contrast, the concept of paradise in Islam is described as a vast garden, as broad as the heavens and the earth, filled with abundant blessings such as flowing rivers, various types of foods, fruits, vessel wine, and natural springs.<sup>36</sup> In Zoroastrianism, hell is described as a place of deep gloom, located in the middle of the earth beneath the Chinvat Bridge. It is believed to be the abode of falsehood and the worst existence, where evil thoughts, evil words, and evil deeds reign supreme.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, in Islam, hell is depicted as a place filled with fire and unimaginable horrors, intended to penalize the wrongdoers. It is believed that when the offenders' skins are consumed by fire, they will be granted fresh skins to continue experiencing the agony.<sup>38</sup> Both Zoroastrianism and Islam acknowledge the existence of an intermediate stage for those whose deeds are equally balanced. In Zoroastrianism, this stage is referred to as "hamistakan" in Pahlavi literature, where individuals do not usually suffer severe punishments but may experience changes of heat and cold due to the seasons.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, in Islam, there is a place called A'raf, which is situated between heaven and hell, and is believed to be inhabited by those who are evenly balanced in their sins and virtues.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Mallik, 1980, *op. cit.*, p. 55

<sup>35</sup> Tiwari, 1983, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-98

<sup>36</sup> Shamim, 2009, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-87

<sup>37</sup> Mallik, 1980, *op. cit.*, p. 55

<sup>38</sup> Shamim, 2009, *op. cit.*, p. 54

<sup>39</sup> Mallik, 1980, *op. cit.*, p. 55

<sup>40</sup> Shamim, 2009, *op. cit.*, p. 64

### Charity

Both Islam and Zoroastrianism emphasize the importance of charity and giving to the less fortunate as a means of expressing compassion, social responsibility, and acknowledging the ownership of resources by a higher power. In Islam, charity, known as Zakat, is considered one of the five pillars of the faith, and Muslims are required to give a certain portion of their net income and holdings to those in need. Zakat is seen as a way of fulfilling one's Islamic trust and recognizing that all wealth belongs to Allah, and humans are trustees who should share their wealth with those who are less fortunate. This act of charity also serves to reduce inequalities in society and promote a sense of community and solidarity.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, in Zoroastrianism, followers are encouraged to give 10% of their income to help the poor. The act of giving to the poor is seen as acknowledging the kingdom of God and is considered a way to come closer to the friendship of Ahura Mazda, the supreme god in Zoroastrianism. It is believed that helping those who live righteously and with good mind is a means of expressing devotion and righteousness.<sup>42</sup> Both Islam and Zoroastrianism view charity as a virtuous act that promotes social welfare, compassion, and generosity. It is seen as a means of fulfilling one's religious duties, acknowledging the higher power's ownership of resources, and promoting social harmony and equality.

### Ethics

Zoroastrianism is a religion that places a strong emphasis on ethics and the cosmic importance of choosing good over evil. According to Zoroastrian teachings, humans have the freedom to choose between right and wrong, truth and lie, and light and dark, and their choices have eternal consequences. The fundamental principles that guide the life of a Zoroastrian are Good Thoughts (Humata), Good Words (Hukhata), and Good Deeds (Havarashta), and these virtues are contrasted with Evil Thoughts (Dushmata), Evil Words (Duzukhta), and Evil Deeds (Duzvarshta) which are considered morally wrong.<sup>43</sup> Zoroastrianism also promotes values such as righteousness, thrift, temperance, moderation, and industry, and altruistic virtues such as charity, benevolence, and philanthropy are given a prominent place.<sup>44</sup>

Similarly, Islam, which means "peace", is a religion that promotes serenity, well-being, and compassion. Muslims are encouraged to accept the moral commandments

---

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, p. 55

<sup>42</sup> Masani, 1938, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-78

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, p. 89

<sup>44</sup> Mallik, 1980, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-45

of the Qur'an as a model for clemency, compassion, tolerance, and peace in the world.<sup>45</sup> Islamic teachings emphasize the sanctity of human life, and Muslims are required to uphold truthfulness, reliability, honesty, forgiveness, and kindness in their character and behavior. Prohibitions in Islam include lying, cheating, injustice, unfairness, killing, stealing, and adultery.<sup>46</sup>

Purity, modesty, and decency in behavior, appearance, dress, and speech are also emphasized in Islam, and behaviors such as gossiping, back-biting, prying into others' affairs, suspicion, and violating others' privacy are discouraged.<sup>47</sup> Both Zoroastrianism and Islam promote ethical values and virtues such as righteousness, compassion, tolerance, and peace, and emphasize the importance of choosing good over evil in one's thoughts, words, and actions. These religions encourage adherents to cultivate positive character traits and behaviors that contribute to a just and harmonious society.

### **Prophethood**

In Islam, the belief in Prophets, known as nabi or rasul, is a fundamental principle of the Muslim creed. Muslims acknowledge that God has sent Prophets throughout history to guide humanity away from disbelief and superstition, and to teach them the religion and laws of God. The Holy Qur'an states, "Righteousness is this that one should believe in Allah and the Books and the Prophets" (Qur'an, 2:77). Similarly, Zoroastrianism, based on the teachings of the Prophet Zoroaster, believes that God has manifested Himself to Zoroaster in a vision and has given him religious instructions to be followed by people on earth in order to pursue the path of righteousness. The Holy Zenda Avesta, the sacred scripture of Zoroastrianism, contains the teachings of Zoroaster. Zoroaster recognized the importance of Prophets as lawgivers who enforce Divine laws that are acceptable to all, promoting peace, harmony, and rooting out tyranny, deceit, and ill-feeling from the world. Zoroaster stated, "A prophet is needed for enforcing such laws which everybody could abide by. Men are inter-dependent and they stand in need of Divine laws acceptable to all of them, which could root out tyranny, deceit and ill-feeling and give peace and harmony to the world. These lawgivers should be divinely inspired men so that all could submit to them".<sup>48</sup> Both Islam and Zoroastrianism emphasize the role of

---

<sup>45</sup> Shamim, 2009, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-87

<sup>46</sup> Suzanne Haneef, *Islam and Muslims*, Saeed International (Regd.), New Delhi-110014, 1999, pp. 42-74

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 36-64

<sup>48</sup> "Zoroaster", 2022. Accessed on 22 November 2023, the article is available here <https://mb-soft.com/believe/txo/zoroastr.htm>



Prophets as messengers of God, guiding humanity towards righteousness and promoting harmonious living according to Divine teachings.

### **Conclusion**

From the above discussion, it is evident that there are remarkable similarities between Islam and Zoroastrianism. Both religions share common theological and eschatological beliefs. They both believe in the oneness of God, with Zoroastrians referring to Him as Ahura Mazda and Muslims as Allah. Both religions believe in the omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence of God. While Zoroastrianism acknowledges six archangels, Islam recognizes four archangels, along with other minor angels with specific tasks. Both Islam and Zoroastrianism consider human beings as the pinnacle of creation, with everything on earth created for their betterment. They emphasize the establishment of justice and truth on earth. Both religions also believe that everything in the universe is not a part of God rather a creation of God, which is controlled and sustained by Him. Prophethood is also a shared belief in both religions, and prayer is considered as the means of communication with God. Muslims and Zoroastrians both pray five times a day, with similar timings, referred to as Salat in Islam and Gah Worship in Zoroastrianism. The concept of life after death or eschatology in Zoroastrianism aligns with Islamic beliefs. Both religions believe in the immortality of the soul, which persists after physical death, and that the soul is eternal while the body is temporary. They share beliefs in the resurrection of the dead, the balance of judgment, heaven and hell, and an intermediary place. Both religions acknowledge the existence of a bridge that must be crossed after death, known as the Chinvat Bridge in Zoroastrianism and Al-Siraat in Islam. Ethical codes are also similar in both religions, with emphasis on the purity of mind and body.

The argument presented challenges the notion of Islam as a radical departure from previous traditions, positing it as a continuum of earlier beliefs like Zoroastrianism. If Islam indeed shares foundational elements with Zoroastrianism, it prompts us to reconsider the rigid categorization of religious traditions. This nuanced understanding might reshape how we perceive the evolution and interplay of faiths, emphasizing the intricate tapestry of shared beliefs and ideas throughout history. Ultimately, it invites a broader exploration of the rich complexities within religious narratives and their interconnectedness across time.

## **Resistance on the Stage and Beyond: The Role of Women in the Cultural Conferences of East Pakistan, 1948-57**

Shanta Patranobish\*

### **Abstract**

Since the birth of Pakistan in 1947, there had been a consistent assault on the language, heritage and culture of East Bengal by the Pakistani government. The authoritarian and aggressive behaviour of the central administration of Pakistan and its adherents in the cultural sphere had pushed the Bengali community into a crisis of existence. In response, intellectuals, artists and cultural activists of East Pakistan became involved in the struggle to preserve Bengali cultural heritage and freedom. As part of this cultural resistance, literary and cultural conferences were organised in various cities of East Pakistan from 1948 to 1957. Women's participation was evident in these literary-cultural conferences. Despite their courageous participation in cultural activities that surpassed contemporary social conservatism, their role remained largely unexplored. Therefore, there is a need to evaluate women's role separately in the cultural movement of that period. The aim of this article is to explore and analyse the diverse and multifaceted contributions of women in the literary and cultural conferences of East Pakistan. This paper presents an analysis of women's participation and performance in the literary and cultural conferences of East Pakistan. The research utilizes both primary and secondary sources that include autobiographies, newspapers, interviews of cultural movement organisers and artists, books and scholarly articles. Following a historical research method, the paper concludes with the findings that nonconformist activism, spontaneity, unprecedented courage of Bengali-women were significant contributors in the cultural resistance movement against the oppressive government of Pakistan.

**Key words:** Women, Cultural conference, Cultural identity, Hegemonic statecraft, Cultural resistance, Bengali Nationalism

### **Introduction**

In the final phase of British rule, the significant Muslim majority population of East Bengal enthusiastically contributed to the formation of an Islamic state, Pakistan. However, due to several reasons, their disillusionment occurred shortly after its establishment. While there was political marginalization and economic deprivation, it was primarily the cultural sphere where the central administration and its adherents' intolerant and aggressive behavior led to the cultural unification programme that immediately created a crisis of existence for the Bengali community. To preserve their Bengali identity and cultural individuality, the Bengali nationalist activists orchestrated

---

\* Associate Professor, Department of History, University of Dhaka, Dhaka-1000

several arrangements, i.e., establishing cultural organisations, initiating institutions, organising seminars-symposia, etc. Cultural conferences were one of these activities. Along with their male counterpart, women of East Pakistan, took part, and contributed in multiple roles to those conferences despite the presence of a discouraging conservative patriarchy in the then society.

From 1948 to 1957, several literary and cultural conferences were held in East Pakistan.<sup>1</sup> These literary and cultural conferences, held in Dhaka and other cities, played a significant role in fostering Bengali nationalism and contributing to its development in East Pakistan. These conferences created a strong foundation for nationalist consciousness, which spread rapidly through political movements and struggles. Each conference contributed significantly to the characterisation of the cultural progress of the eastern part of Pakistan. These conferences were organised amidst various political barriers and reactions. As a result, cultural conflicts in the society became more apparent through their debates and counter-debates.<sup>2</sup> These literary and cultural conferences had seen significant participation by women. East Pakistan Women's role in the conferences resembled as a protest against the hegemonic Statecraft. This paper sets out to discover the nature of women's participation in the literary and cultural conferences of East Pakistan. Other objectives of this research are to identify the fields in which the women contributed in the conferences, how far women participation contributed to the success of the conferences, and how much they contributed in the greater movement of Bengali nation to protect its cultural heritage and identity.

This research utilizes both primary and secondary sources. In this research, contemporary daily, weekly, fortnightly, monthly, trimestral reports of newspapers, periodicals, cultural organization's newsletters, magazines, memoirs, letters, and diaries have been used as primary sources. Additionally, interviews of cultural movement organisers and artists by researcher, narratives, autobiographies have also been used as primary sources. Research articles, essays, books, and websites on related subjects have been consulted as secondary sources. This qualitative research has been conducted following historical research methodology.

---

1 East Pakistan was officially started to be named in Pakistan's First Constitution of 1956. Before 1956, this eastern part of Pakistan was popularly called as East Bengal. In this Article, this region will be majorly presented as East Pakistan and in some cases as East Bengal.

2 Rezwana Siddiqui, *Purba Banglar Sangskritik Sangathan o Sangskritik Andolon 1947-1971*, Gyan Bitarani, Dhaka, 2002, p. 5.

The paper is divided into two sections. Theoretical framework being one of the two, includes how cultural resistance becomes a form of resistance, and women get involved. The other section covers the narratives of the conferences each of which has been separately presented and analysed in the light of the theoretical insights. Narratives and analysis of the cultural conferences will strive to showcase the role of the women in the greater Bengali cultural movement against Pakistan.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Resistance may be generally defined as 'to act against'. In a broader sense, resistance has been defined as 'a politics of contention on a more fundamental scale'<sup>3</sup> that involves active efforts to oppose, fight, and refuse to cooperate with modes of control. Resistance is not in itself a right but constitutes the rightful defense of a right, of freedom or of property.<sup>4</sup> According to postcolonial theories, resistance covers commonly four models and of those four, the third model advocates the liberation of the colonized people through the materialist and collective resistance against the colonial power. This model instructs struggle and even violent resistance against the colonizers.<sup>5</sup> In the history of anticolonial struggle, we have fairly enough examples of both violent and non-violent resistance. Mahatma Gandhi, Daniel O'Connell, K. Nkrumah are the exponents of non-violent movements against the colonists. Cultural resistance is undoubtedly a non-violent form of resistance.

Cultural resistance is defined normally as a rejection of dominant culture of a society. This type of resistance may come out as subcultures or minority culture within a state against its dominant form of culture. In twentieth century, youth subcultures like Rastafarians, Rockers, Mods, Teddy Boys, Skinheads, and Hippies were a reaction against the dominant culture of USA and UK society.<sup>6</sup> Apart from this, cultural resistance is defined partly as the rejection of foreign cultures and the celebration of indigenous traditions, spread across the globe as European colonies in Africa and Asia were overturned by struggles of national liberation. But in the case of a multi-cultural

3 Charles Tripp, *The Power and the People Paths of Resistance in the Middle East*, Cambridge University Press, London. 2013, p. 4.

4 Robert J. C. Young, 'The Right to Resist', Oboe Annalisa and Shaul Bassi, eds., *Experiences of Freedom in Postcolonial Literatures and Cultures*, London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2011, p. 51.

5 N. B. Bhandari, 'Resistance and Postcolonialism: A Critical Review', *Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 22, February 2022, Department of Political Science, Prithvi Narayan Campus, TU, Pokhara, Nepal.

6 Stephen Duncombe, 'From Cultural Resistance to Community Development', *Community Development Journal*, Vol. 42, No. 4, Oxford University Press, October, 2007.

state, cultural resistance as a non-conformist reaction to state's cultural unification program, experiences quite a different scenario. Cultural majority may even face challenges of cultural extinction because of hegemonic state policy. In that case, question of cultural freedom within a state convincingly appears to be grounded. Nobel winner Albert Camus once wrote that, "Freedom is the concern of the oppressed, and her natural protectors have always come from among the oppressed... freedom is not a gift received from a State or a leader but a possession to be won every day by the effort of each and the union of all."<sup>7</sup> So, freedom, cultural or otherwise, demands united response to its opponent. Antonio Gramsci observed very inquisitively that power resides not only in government institutions, but also in the ways people of the state make sense of their own world. Hegemony is certainly a political and cultural process. Being armed with culture instead of guns, he argued, one fights a different type of battle. Whereas traditional battles were 'wars of manoeuvres', cultural battles were 'wars of position'.<sup>8</sup>

Pakistan, since its inception has been a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural dominion. So, cultural unification was its State programme to preserve her identity and integration. That being the case, the State, from the very beginning, exercised its authority and power to ensure her 'hegemonic position' in people's psyche. In response to this undemocratic attitude, different local cultural groups of Pakistan reacted sharply. This reaction was in fact a clear resistance to the attack on culture, of which language is the most important part. Within this theoretical bracket, the cultural resistance movement of the Bengali nation which sought cultural freedom from Pakistan, can be explained. And certainly, the role of Bengali women, being an integral part of that united movement as well as a part of the society, could be examined.

#### **East Pakistan Literary Conference (Purbo Pakistan Sahitya Sammelan) Dhaka, 1948**

The first literary conference (December 31, 1948-January 1, 1949) in East Pakistan was organised at the Curzon Hall in Dhaka under the initiative of the then provincial Health Minister Habibullah Bahar Chowdhury. The reception committee formed for the purpose of the conference included Habibullah Bahar as its president and Ajit Kumar Guha and Syed Ali Ashraf as its secretaries. On December 5, 1948, during a meeting of the committee, various branches and their presidents were nominated for

7 Albert, Camus trans. Justin O' Brien, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, Vintage International, New York, 1995, pp. 89, 97.

8 Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith, eds., International, New York, 1971, pp. 229-39

the conference, among whom was Shamsunnahar Mahmud. She presided Children's Literature Session.<sup>9</sup>

On December 7, during the second meeting of the reception committee, a decision was made to organise a cultural event on the second day of the conference, i.e., January 1, 1949, and for this purpose, a committee was formed. This committee included Habibullah Bahar, Syed Ali Ahsan, Nazir Ahmad, Abdul Ahad, Abbasuddin Ahmed, Farrukh Ahmad, Fateh Lohani, Mujibur Rahman Khan, Shamsul Huda, Bedaruddin Ahmed, Leila Arjumand Banu, Momtaz Ali Khan, Mohammad Kasem, and Kazi Motahar Hossain as prominent members. The committee members convened a meeting at the Fazlul Haq Hall Auditorium of Dhaka University on December 17, 1948, at 3.30 o'clock in the afternoon to organise a discussion on cultural events. Leila Arjumand Banu was present at this meeting.<sup>10</sup>

On Friday, December 31, 1948, at 2:30 pm, the programme of East Pakistan Literary Conference commenced at Curzon Hall. Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah presided over the first session, where among others, poet Golam Mustafa and Habibullah Bahar delivered their speeches. Golam Mustafa spoke about the aspirations of the newly formed state and the future of literature and the responsibilities of writers. Habibullah Bahar discussed Dhaka's heritage and the arts and literature of East Bengal. Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah, the session chair of the conference, in his speech, mentioned the historically amalgamated literature, culture, and heritage of Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists in Bengal. He further emphasized that Bengali language should be the medium of the literary practice of East Bengal.<sup>11</sup> Through his words, the individuality of Bengali language, literature, and culture in East Bengal became apparent. These words profoundly influenced public sentiment at that time.

On the second day of the literary conference, i.e., January 1, 1949, a proposal for the formation of an effective organisation was put forward. This proposal included the names of Habibullah Bahar, Syed Ali Ahsan, Syed Ali Ashraf, and Shamsunnahar Mahmud as members of the organisation. Due to the absence of the names of some prominent Bengali progressive young writers and intellectuals, both of Dhaka and beyond, Professor Abul Kashem with several other individuals opposed the names of the proposal. At that time, Habibullah Bahar withdrew his name from this organisation. Additionally, on the session of the second day, Professor Abul Kashem proposed the

---

9 Rezwan Siddiqui, *Purba Banglar Sangskritik Sangathan o Sangskritik Andolon 1947-1971*, Gyan Bitarani, Dhaka, 2002, p.169.

10 Ibid., p.170.

11 *Daily Azad*, 1 January 1949, pp. 1, 6.

recognition of Bengali as the state language of East Pakistan, and this proposal was unanimously accepted.<sup>12</sup> The concluding part of the conference featured a cultural event. Leila Arjumand Banu was among the others who contributed to organise the cultural event.<sup>13</sup>

Primarily organised in the backdrop of the declaration of Urdu as the only state language of Pakistan, this conference aimed at pacifying the burning resentment in the minds of Bengalis. However, its main objective was the revival of Pakistani literature.<sup>14</sup> Through this conference, along with other achievements, distinct thoughts regarding Bengali language, literature, and culture in East Bengal were vividly reflected. It's very interesting to note that though this literary conference was organised under the initiative of the provincial minister as well as supported by the government, instead, this conference gave birth the unavoidable question of self-identity of the Bengalis of East Pakistan. This development was very indicative for the days to come. In the later conferences, this conflict became more pronounced and gradually progressed the end. Although the participation of women in this conference was limited, the role of women in conducting literary sessions and organizing cultural programmes of the conference is significant. It may seem very poor today, but in reality it was a ground-breaking phase on the part of the women as well as for the society which created the path for others to follow.

#### **The East Pakistan Cultural Conference (Chittagong, 1951)**

Progressive cultural organizations like Sanskriti Parishad and Prantik Nabonaty Sangha were established in Chattogram in the aftermath of the partition of India. Through the joint efforts of these two organizations, a four-day cultural conference was organised at the Harikhola Maidan in Chittagong from March 16-19, 1951.<sup>15</sup> The main organisers of this conference were Abul Fazal, Syedul Hasan, Mahbub Ul Alam Chowdhury, Shawkat Osman, Harunur Rashid, TP Beg and several others. Professor Motaher Hossain Chowdhury and renowned artist Kalim Sharafi played significant roles in it. Professor Abul Fazal, one of the exponents of the Buddhir Mukti Andolon (Movement for the Freedom of Intellect), accepted the role of president in the

<sup>12</sup> *Weekly Sainik*, 9 January 1949, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Badruddin Umar, *Purba Banglar Bhasha Andolon o Tatkalin Rajniti*, 1st edition, Jatio Grantha Prakashan, Dhaka, 1995, p. 144.

<sup>14</sup> Israel Khan, *Muktijuddher Potobhumi*, Kashban Prakashan, Dhaka, 1999, p. 62.

<sup>15</sup> Mahbub Ul Alam Chowdhury, "Sanskritika Andolone Chattagrama", *Chattagram Sanskritika andolana pragatishila dhara*, [Ed. Mahbub Hasan], Smaranik, Chattagrama, 1991, p. 8.

conference.<sup>16</sup> Although there were possibilities of the participation of many writers and intellectuals from Dhaka in this conference, *Morning News* and *Daily Azad* newspapers characterised the conference as a Communist gathering, which led to create confusion and opposition from writers and intellectuals from Dhaka to participate in the conference in Chittagong. However, Professor Abul Fazal remained undeterred. A detailed description of this incident can be found in his autobiography. He wrote:

I don't know by whose instigation suddenly 'Azad' and 'Morning News' started propagating against the conference. All the professors and dignitaries from Dhaka who had agreed to read papers or chair sessions at the conference were scared and backed out. Even at the last moment, they refused to come. The organisers of the conference were all accused of being Communists. ... I said: Even if only three people come, we will still hold the conference. We won't back down. Let whatever happens in the future happen. Workers seemed to regain their enthusiasm. Preparations began anew. I was told: If nobody comes from Dhaka, it won't look good. I said: Even if nobody else comes, Sufia Kamal will definitely come. ... The next day, I boarded a plane to Dhaka. It was my first time flying in an airplane, all funded by the conference. When Sufia Kamal heard everything, she said: Alright, I'll go.<sup>17</sup>  
[My translation]

Abul Fazal on receipt of the approval of Sufia Kamal decided on March 16 and 17 as the date of the literary conference. In this conference, Abdul Karim Sahityavisharad was the main chair and Sufia Kamal was nominated as the chief guest. Alauddin Al-Azad, Mustafa Nur-Ul Islam, and many other prominent literary and cultural activists from Dhaka participated in this event. From Kolkata, Satyendranath Majumdar, Seabrata Biswas, Salil Chowdhury, Radharani Devi, Suchitra Mitra, and Hena Barman joined the cultural conference.<sup>18</sup> The speakers at the conference included Abdul Karim Sahityvisarad, Satyendranath Majumdar, Sufia Kamal, Motaher Hossain Chowdhury, and Abul Fazal. The conference defined the literary heritage of East Bengal and its organisers claimed themselves as the successors of ancient Bengali literature and the modern works of Rabindranath and Nazrul.<sup>19</sup> Abdul Karim Sahityavisharad emphasized the importance of acquiring knowledge about the history, culture, and traditions of the country. Sufia Kamal stressed the significance of prioritizing domestic literature and culture over foreign literature. In her keynote speech, she said:

16 Muhammad Ali Chowdhury, "Bhaṣa Andolone Caṭṭagrama: Rajanaitika, samajika o sanskr̥tika prekṣapaṭa", *Bangla Akademi Patrika*, 1402 (Bengali calendar), Dhaka, p.25.

17 Abul Fazal, *Rekhachitra*, Gatidhara, Dhaka, 2015, p. 221.

18 Muhammad Ali Chowdhury, "Bhaṣa Andolone Caṭṭagrama: Rajanaitika, samajika o sanskr̥tika prekṣapaṭa", *Bangla Akademi Patrika*, 1402 (Bengali calendar), Dhaka, 1402, p. 25.

19 Saeed-Ur Rahman, *Purba Banglar Rajniti-Sanskriti o Kobita*, Dhaka Biswabidyaloy Prakashana Sangstha, Dhaka, 2001, p.36.



... The development and expression of the mind lie in the arts and culture. Therefore, one must first understand the language of the country, its literature, and culture. In one word, to understand the essence that enriches the mind and soul, one must discover everything within oneself first. If one can discover oneself, then there is no need to rush towards internationality. Isn't it ridiculous to suddenly jump into internationality without knowing oneself, without knowing one's own mind, like swimming across the ocean? Literature and art have always created the eternal mind of humanity, whether at home or abroad, across continents. Know your home first, then everything outside will become easier for you. Look towards the nature of your country, towards the people of your country. Get acquainted with the joys and sorrows of the people of the country, love them. Only then will their joyful and sorrowful life be captured in your writings. There is no magic spell more powerful than love for creation!<sup>20</sup> [My translation]

Sufia Kamal, in her keynote address, firmly declared their unwavering stance amidst the ongoing conflict, indirectly hinting at the government's hostile attitude, saying, "Life's journey lies along inaccessible paths. So, when we see the frown of difficulty, we shall not retreat. Everyone can create chaos, but not everyone can create flowers. You have organised various events within this conference to bloom flowers. May your efforts be meaningful and successful."<sup>21</sup> [My translation] Abul Fazal concluded his speech by saying, "Humanity and the practice of human values are culture. Only this practice can make life beautiful and healthy."<sup>22</sup> [My translation] Some proposals were also accepted at the conference. Among the accepted proposals, highly mentionable was the creation of literature to advance social life and providing freedom for the development of language, education, and culture in favor of peace and against communalism. Even though unable to attend, Muhammad Shahidullah, Annadashankar Roy, and Muhammad Enamul Haque expressed their wishes for the success of the conference through messages. Notable events of the conference included art exhibitions and musical performances. The artworks of Zainul Abedin, Shafiuddin Ahmed, Quamrul Hassan, and Anwarul Huq were displayed in the art exhibition. In the musical performance, Salil Chowdhury's song 'War or Peace' was presented. Farida Hasin also participated in the musical performance. She presented the song 'Sheta Kopoter Pakhaya Pakhaya Shanti Ase' (Peace comes on the wings of white doves).<sup>23</sup>

This conference had a profound impact on the cultural dynamism of East Bengal. It may be treated as the first anti-establishment and progressive cultural conference in former East Pakistan. Especially, this conference created a sense of awareness to uphold the dignity of the Bengali language, Bengali culture, and tradition. In this

20 *Weekly Begum*, April 1, 1951.

21 Ibid.

22 Rezwan Siddiqui, *Purba Banglar Sangskritik Sangathan o Sangskritik Andolon 1947-1971*, Gyan Bitarani, Dhaka, 2002, p.187.

23 Ibid., p. 188.

regard, Badruddin Umar wrote, "After the East Pakistan Cultural Conference was held in Chittagong, various cultural gatherings were held one after another in East Bengal on occasions like New Year (Pahela Baishakh), Rabindra Jayanti, Nazrul Jayanti, death anniversaries of Iqbal (Allama) and Sukanta Bhattacharya. Almost every event of recitation and musical performances enhanced the vibrancy of these conferences."<sup>24</sup> In this way, the cultural conference of Chittagong opened a new chapter in the progressive cultural movement of East Bengal. Sufia Kamal's presence and her speech as the chief guest at the conference undoubtedly served as a guiding light for the new cultural consciousness of East Bengal.

#### **The East Pakistan Cultural Conference (Cumilla, 1952)**

Organised by the 'Pragati Majlis' a cultural organization, the East Pakistan Cultural Conference was held in Cumilla on August 22, 23, and 24, 1952. Local Forward Bloc, Youth League, Communist Party, Revolutionary Socialist Party and some other progressive political and cultural organizations actively supported the organisers. Various regional cultural organizations also participated in the conference. From Chittagong, the Prantik Nabanatya Sangha, Railway Artists' Association from Sylhet, Muslim Literary Society from Dhaka, Art Group, Agrani (Pioneer) Artists' Association, and Dhaka University Cultural Society participated in the conference.<sup>25</sup> Cumilla Victoria College, Surlok, Shailarani Girls' School, and Kanya Shikshalaya also participated in this conference. A reception committee was formed to make the conference successful and meaningful. Prof. Ajitnath Nandi, Prof. Abul Khair Ahmad, and Prof. Ashutosh Chakraborty were elected as the chairman of the reception committee, general secretary, and treasurer respectively. A booklet titled 'Ahbana' (An Appeal) was published to propagate the objectives and purposes of the Cumilla Cultural Conference.

In response to their invitation, representatives from Cumilla, Chittagong, Sylhet, and Dhaka participated in the conference. Among the female representatives who joined the conference from Dhaka were prominent figures such as Sufia Kamal, Sanjida Khatun, Lily Khan, Noorjahan Morshed, and Raushan Jamil.<sup>26</sup> Among the female representatives who participated in the conference from Chittagong were Moni Imam, Arati Datta, Joushan Ara Rahman, Jahanara Jubilee, Deepti Khastagir, Sukti Khastagir,

24 Badruddin Umar, *Purba Banglar Bhasha Andolon o Tatkalin Rajniti*, 3rd edition, Jatio Granth Prakashan, Dhaka, 1995, p. 19.

25 Mahbub UI Alam Chowdhury, *Sanskriti: Jatio Mukhoshri*, Palok Publishers, Dhaka, 2006, p. 20.

26 Mamun Siddiqui, *Cumillai Bhasha Andolon*, Sahitya Prakash, Dhaka, 2015, pp. 123-24.

Meera Sen, Sadida Khanam, Juthi Parial, and some others.<sup>27</sup> Their participation in every event of the cultural programme of the conference, especially the folk music session, is noteworthy. In the conference, an art exhibition was arranged by Dhaka Art School at the Theosophical Building in Cumilla Town Hall. The responsibility for the art exhibition was undertaken by Quamrul Hassan, a teacher at Dhaka Art School. The inauguration of the art exhibition was done by Sufia Kamal.<sup>28</sup>

The inauguration of the East Pakistan Cultural Conference held in Cumilla on August 22, 1952, was declared by principal Akhtar Hamid Khan. The flag was hoisted by Abdul Karim Sahityavisharad, the main chair of the conference. The students of Shaila Rani Girl's School performed the national anthem in the flag hoisting ceremony. Then, the chairman of the reception committee, Ajitnath Nandi, and the main Chair of the conference, Abdul Karim Sahityavisharad, gave written speeches. On the second day of the conference, that is, on August 23, Mahbub Ul Alam chaired the morning session, and Sufia Kamal chaired the literary session. In her speech as the literary session chairperson, she said, "... I love my language so much that I don't feel it lacks anything. Is there any deficiency in my language if it has produced so much literature and poetry? From Alawal to Daulat Kazi, from Rabindranath's era to the post-war era of Nazrul, haven't the poets of Bengali language contributed enough to Bengali literature, poetry, music, and culture?"<sup>29</sup>

Actually, the commencement of the new victorious paths of the Bengalis and a new consciousness that was born through the Language Movement, has been repeatedly echoed in her speech. She highlighted the mother tongue to be the medium of literary practice and identified that the true meaning of literature was to create joy.

In addition to articles, poetry readings, and recitations, original discussions on various topics were also conducted at the conference. Women participated in the article reading sessions. In the assembly, Laila Samad presented an article titled "Culture-Crisis," Begum Hashmat Rashid on "Women's Progress," Raushan Yajdani on "Folklore of Mymensingh," and Mrs. Jinat Gani presented an article titled "On Dance." Abdul Gani Hazari, on behalf of Basudha Chakrabarty presented an article titled "In Search of Culture." Rashida Dolly Khan also participated in the recitations.<sup>30</sup>

27 Mahbub Ul Alam Chowdhury, *Smritir Sandhane*, Palok Publishers, Dhaka, 2008, p. 457.

28 Rezwan Siddiqui, *Purba Banglar Sangskritik Sangathan o Sangskritik Andolon 1947-1971*, Gyan Bitarani, Dhaka, 2002, p. 194.

29 Mamun Siddiqui, "Sufia Kamaler ekaṭi duṣprapya abhibhaṣaṇa", *Sufia Kamal Smarakgrantha*, [Ed. Anisuzzaman and others], Sufia Kamal Smarakgrantha Sampadana Parishad, Dhaka, 2011, p. 293.

30 Mamun Siddiqui, *Cumillai Bhasha Andolon*, Sahitya Prakash, Dhaka, 2015, p.131.

During the second session of the conference, cultural events were held every evening at Mahesh Prangan's Natmandir. On the first day, the atmosphere was filled with Nazrul songs, inaugurated by Mahbub Ul Alam Chowdhury. The second day featured Rabindra Sangeet. After the musical event, the play 'Jobanbondi' (The Testimony) by Bijon Bhattacharya was staged by Dhaka University Sanskriti Sangsad. Despite oppositions in staging the play, it was successfully performed. Rokeya Kabeer, Laila Samad, and Nurunnahar acted in this play. Regarding this, Obaidul Haque Sarkar said, "In the play 'Jobanbondi,' Mrs. Rokeya Kabeer, Mrs. Laila Samad, and Miss Nurunnahar performed. These women were not only educated but also highly respected in society. Their presence on the stage in Cumilla naturally created a stir in the women's circle."<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, the play 'Arunodoyer Pothe' (On the Path to Sunrise) was also staged. On the third day, there was a strong presence of folk songs. The Prantik Nabanatya Sangha of Chittagong presented folk songs composed in their local language. The East Pakistan Artists' Association performed the Dance-dramas 'The Farmer's Story' and 'The Laborer.' Notable artists from East Pakistan Artists' Association were Gowhar Jamil, Shipra Devi, Puspa and Mamata. Their performances were acclaimed during the cultural event. Among those who participated in the cultural event were Mira Das, Nilima Kar, Shipra Devi, Rani Roy, Mridula Chatterjee, Ayesha Siddika, and prominent figure Latifa Rashid.<sup>32</sup> Through songs, plays and other cultural activism, women played a role in making the people of East Bengal aware of their cultural self as well as the ongoing cultural oppression by Pakistan government. A proposal was made at the conference to express mourning for the death of poet Mohitlal Majumdar and Urdu writer Rashid Bahar, and tribute was paid to the martyrs of the Language Movement. Another proposal condemned the attempt to suppress the cultural and Bengali Language Movement in the country.

The Cumilla conference was a pioneering step in the cultural development of the country. Anisuzzaman, participating as a representative of the weekly newspaper *Nawbelal*, wrote, "There was no doubt about the special expression of the non-communal Bengali consciousness acquired through the Language Movement."<sup>33</sup> This conference had a significant impact on the cultural workers of East Bengal. A generous, non-communal and humanitarian atmosphere prevailed throughout the conference, reflected through all activities. Ahmed Sharif wrote, "In songs, dances, dramas, speeches, articles, poems, and even in the competition of the poets, the same

31 Obaidul Haque Sarkar, "Prasanga: Cumillar Manche Meyeder Agamana", *Alakta*, May-October, 1978, pp.86-91.

32 Mamun Siddiqui, *Cumillai Bhasha Andolon*, Sahitya Prakash, Dhaka, 2015, p.133.

33 Anisuzzaman, *Kal Nirabodhi*, Sahitya Prakash, Dhaka, 2003, p.200.

tone resonated. That tone is the tone of humanity—the tone of mass awakening; the tone of the beautiful, healthy life."<sup>34</sup> Kolkata's daily newspaper *Jugantar* stated about the conference, "The initiators of the cultural conference have left their mark on every event, showing their acquaintance with this unique non-communalism. This conference has disseminated the inspiration of a new worldview among the youth of East Bengal. These culture enthusiasts are the carriers of the spirit of the new era."<sup>35</sup> In essence, the conference played a significant role in reminding the people of the country of their separate culture and their own language. The conference fulfilled a vital role in this regard. Among the speeches, presented articles, recitations, art exhibitions, and cultural events, there was an indirect focus on the emergence of nationalist consciousness. The participation and role of women in making the conference successful were particularly noteworthy.

#### **East Pakistan Literary Conference (Dhaka, 1954)**

At the initiative of the progressive cultural workers of East Bengal, the East Pakistan Literary Conference was organised in Dhaka from April 23 to 26, 1954. The most notable event in 1954, following the historic victory of the United Front in the general election of East Bengal, was this literary conference. Although the conference was scheduled to be held from April 23 to 26, it was extended until April 27. The Curzon Hall of Dhaka University and Bardhawan House were used as the main venues of the conference. Principal Abdur Rahman Khan was the president of the organizing committee of the conference, and Abu Jafar Shamsuddin and Abdul Ghani Hazari served as joint secretaries. The inaugural session of the conference was chaired by Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah, and researcher Abdul Gafur Siddiqi presided over the main conference. The preparation for the conference was reported by the *Daily Azad*, stating that more than four hundred representatives from various districts of East Pakistan would participate in the conference, among whom more than fifty were women representatives. Accommodation for women representatives was arranged at Eden College.<sup>36</sup> Women from various districts of East Bengal and West Bengal participated in this literary conference. From Chittagong, Fauzia Samad, Kamela Sharafi, Maleka Azim, Jahanara Jubilee, Hosne Ara Makki, Deepti Khastagir, Supti Khastagir, Moni Imam, Bebi, Munni, Khaleda Rahman, and Jowshan Ara Rahman came to participate in this literary conference.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, among the participants in the literary

34 Ahmad Sharif, "Ebarera sanskr̥tika sammelana", *Insafa*, 12 Ashwina 1359 (Bengali calendar), Dhaka.

35 Saralananda Sen, *Dhakar Chithi*, 1st edition, Muktohdhara, Dhaka, 1971, p.216.

36 *Daily Azad*, 23 April 1954, p. 6.

37 Jaushon Ara Rahman, *Smritikotha Ekti Ojana Meye*, Nobojug Prakashani, Dhaka, 2005,84.

assemblies and cultural events were Sufia Kamal, Shamsunnahar Mahmud, Anwara Bahar Chowdhury, Saleha Mahmud, Meher Kabir, Hosne Ara, Laila Samad, Mahmuda Khatun Siddika, Sanjida Khatun, Farida Bari Malik, and Mahbuba Hasnat, among others. From West Bengal, Radharani Devi, Pratibha Basu, and Debi Prasad Chattopadhyay also participated the literary conference. Expressing regret for being unable to attend and wishing success for the conference, Suchitra Mitra sent her message.<sup>38</sup> A leading figure in this conference was Sufia Kamal. Pratibha Mutsuddi, being a student representative from Chittagong College, saw Sufia Kamal in different role and activities and thus remembered:

I saw the poet for the second time at the literary conference held at Curzon Hall in Dhaka in 1954. ...Poet Sufia Kamal was a leading figure in this event. I participated in this conference as another student representative from Chittagong College. Witnessing the poet's dedication and strong role in this grand conference left me impressed and inspired.<sup>39</sup>

Like previous conferences, Sufia Kamal played a significant role in this conference as well. She chaired various sessions of the conference. It is worth noting that the participation of women in the early conferences was limited, but later the participation of women in the conferences increased significantly. The reflection of which can be seen in this conference.

In the morning of April 23, 1954, at nine o'clock, the announcement of the East Pakistan Literary Conference was made at Dhaka University's Curzon Hall, which lasted for five days. The inaugural ceremony of the literary conference began with the rendition of the song 'Rashtrobhasha Bangla Chai' (we want Bengali to be the state language) by Abdul Latif. Then, two minutes of silence were observed in homage to the martyrs of the Language Movement. Among the various programs of this five-day conference were lectures on Bengali language, literature and culture, recitations of articles, group songs, folk songs, dances, folk dramas, solo performances, shadow plays, exhibitions of art and books, and poetry recitations. On the first day of the conference, nearly two hundred representatives, participated from Chittagong, among whom approximately twenty were women.<sup>40</sup> It must be understood that in the conservative social environment of the 1950s, participation of twenty women was a very remarkable feat.

At the inaugural ceremony of the conference, Mohammad Shahidullah delivered a speech. On the first day's second session of the conference, essays and articles were

38 *Daily Azad*, 24 April 1954, p. 6.

39 Pratibha Mutsuddi, "Smritite Kobi-Janani Sahasika", *Sufia Kamal Smarakgrantha*, [Ed. Anisuzzaman and others], Sufia Kamal Smarakgrantha Sampadana Parishad, Dhaka, 2011, p.194.

40 *Daily Azad*, 24 April 1954, p.6.

read by Showkat Osman, Munir Chowdhury, Mohammad Hossain, and Jasimuddin. At eight o'clock in the evening, the announcement of the cultural event came from session chair Ajit Guha. The rendition of the song "Ekushe February Ami Ki Bhulite Pari" was the first among other performances. Abdul Latif and his team, along with Chiranjib Sen, led the Chittagong-based Prantik Nabanatya Sangha's artists' group in the cultural event. Sheikh Lutfur Rahman, Malay Ghosh Dastidar, the Agrani artists' group of Dhaka, and the Prantik Nabanatya Sangha of Chittagong presented group songs. Among the artists of the Prantik Nabanatya Sangha, Kalim Sharafi, Chiranjib Das Sharma, Achintya Chakraborty, Haripal, Jahanara Rahman, and Deepti Khashtagir earned praise for their performances in group songs.<sup>41</sup> At the end of the cultural event, the local artists of Prantik presented a dance drama titled "Shilpir Nobojonmo" (The Birth of the Artist).

On the second day, April 24, the first session began at half past eight in the morning. The topic of this session was folk literature and children's literature. Poet Ramesh Shil presided over the session on folk literature, and Bande Ali Mia was the chairman of the session on children's literature. Ahmed Sharif, Alauddin Al Azad, and Habibur Rahman read articles at this session.<sup>42</sup> The second session started at three in the afternoon. Munir Chowdhury presided over the session on contemplative literature. Essays were read by Mofazzal Haider Chaudhuri, Sayed Ali Ahsan, Nazmul Karim, and Kabir Chowdhury. At eight o'clock in the evening, under the chairmanship of Mohammad Barkatullah, the cultural event began. The chief guest at this event was Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani. In his speech, the chief guest encouraged literary figures to unite for the literary movement. At the cultural event, Prantik Nabanatya Sangha performed a new play called 'Bibhaav.' Mani Imam and Kamela Sharafi acted in this play.<sup>43</sup>

On April 25, at half past eight in the morning, the third day's session began. Muhammad Abdul Hye presided over the session on language and literature, and Muhammad Quadrat-i-Khuda was the president of the science branch. Meher Kabir read an article along with others at this session.<sup>44</sup> In the evening session, Zainul Abedin chaired the session on fine arts and handicrafts. Essays were read by Shafiqul Hussain, Quamrul Hassan, Nazir Ahmed and Laila Samad. Laila Samad read an article on literature and women's society (Sahitya o mahila samaj).<sup>45</sup> Kazi Motahar Hossain

41 Rafiqul Islam, *Dhaka Biswabidyalayer 80 Bochor*, Anannya, Dhaka, 2012, p.146.

42 *Daily Azad*, 25 April 1954, p.6.

43 Mahbub Ul Alam Chowdhury, *Smritir Sandhane*, Palok Publishers, Dhaka, 2008, p.412.

44 *Daily Azad*, 26 April 1954, p.2.

45 *Daily Azad*, 28 April 1954, p.1.

chaired the session on contemporary arts and literature. At half past seven o'clock in the evening, Shamsunnahar Mahmud chaired the cultural event. Artists from Dhaka and Chittagong presented Nazrul songs at the cultural event. Alongside others, Mahbuba Hasnat also participated in the Nazrul song performance. Then, the Prantik Nabanatya Sangha of Chittagong performed the 'Nabajiboner Gaan' (Songs of New Life), and Lokosanskriti Parishad (Folk Culture Council) of Chittagong performed the shadow play 'Itihaser Chhera Pata' (Torn Pages of History), which captivated the audience. This shadow play depicted scenes of high price hike of salt, the famine in Khulna, the language movement, and the region's recent general elections. After that, the play 'Kafer' (The Infidel) by Khan Bahadur Aminul Haq, directed by Fazlur Rahman and Laila Samad, was staged.<sup>46</sup>

On the fourth day, April 26 of the East Pakistan Literary Conference, the session began at half past eight in the morning. Abul Mansur Ahmed chaired the session titled 'Our Cultural Crises'. In this session, Laila Samad presented an article on 'Literature and Women's Society.' The delegates' session began at three o'clock the same day. Abdur Gafur Siddiqui chaired the delegates' session. At this meeting, a committee was formed to organise a literary conference every year and to maintain communication and support for various literary and cultural movements in different districts of East Bengal. In the evening, Showkat Osman chaired the cultural event. At the event, artists from Dhaka University Cultural Society presented a portion of Michael Madhusudan Dutt's *Meghnadbadha* under the direction of Shariful Alam. Then, under the direction of Kalim Sharafi, Sanjida Khatun, Farida Bari Malik, and Maleka Aziz participated in Rabindra Sangeet. The play 'Kabar' (The Grave) was staged by the Cultural Society. Afterward, Chittagong artists performed folk dances, and artists from Prantik Nabanatya Sangha performed group songs and a drama titled 'Arunodayer Pothe'. Kamela Sharafi and Mani Imam acted alongside others in the drama.<sup>47</sup>

The main objective of the fifth day's conference, on April 27, was to hold an open discussion among the literary figures of East and West Bengal. They discussed issues and solutions related to poetry-literature, philosophy, and science. Debiprasad Chattopadhyay discussed 'Issues and Solutions of Philosophy and Science' in the conference. Radharani Devi spoke at this meeting. In the evening, the conference concluded with a cultural event featuring poetical songs by Ramesh Shil and his team.<sup>48</sup> In the light of progressive Bengali nationalist consciousness, the East Pakistan Literary

---

46 Ibid.

47 *Daily Azad*, 28 April 1954, p.1.

48 Ibid, p.6.



Conference was a significant step at that time. Women who participated in the literary society and cultural events played an important role in earning the success of this conference.

#### **Pakistan Cultural Conference (Tangail, 1957)**

On the 9th and 10th of February 1957, a two-day Pakistan Cultural Conference was held in Kagmari of Tangail, under the leadership of Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani. This historic conference came to be known as the Kagmari Cultural Conference. At the same time, on the 7th and 8th of February, there was also a council assembly of the Awami League, chaired by Maulana Bhasani. The preparation committee for the conference was chaired by Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, and Abu Jafar Shamsuddin was appointed as the coordinator. To give the Kagmari Conference an international dimension, artists from various countries were invited through various embassies, including renowned intellectuals from all over Pakistan, as well as representatives from Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, India, and Egypt. One of the prominent features of this colorful conference was the creation of memorable and descriptive archways or entry gates bearing the names of notable personalities. Around fifty attractive archways were constructed along the road from Mirzapur to the conference venue at Santosh in Kagmari. An archway for Mrs. Roquiah Sakhawat Hossain was constructed by the organisers.<sup>49</sup>

The cultural conference began on the evening of February 8th. It was inaugurated by the former Chief Minister of East Pakistan, Aaur Rahman Khan. On February 9th and 10th, important articles on literature, culture, economics, philosophy, medicine, science, and technology were presented and discussed in three sessions. In the morning session on February 9th, among others, Begum Jebunnessa Hamidullah participated in article presentations. She presented an article titled 'The Role of Women in the Modern Society'. On February 10th, under the title 'Cultural Relations between East and West Pakistan', Kulsum Huda presented articles. In the 1950s, among the progressive women of East Bengal, Kulsum Huda was one of the most prominent. At that time, she was a student of economics at Dhaka University. Kulsum Huda was the daughter of Speaker Tamijuddin Khan and later became the wife of Professor M. A. Huda, the Finance Minister. In the same session, Madam Azuri presented an article titled 'On the Art of Dance. Shamsunnahar Mahmud of East Bengal and Mrs. Sofia Wadia and Radharani Devi from India participated in oral discussions.<sup>50</sup> On the final day of the conference, in the evening, Ashapura Devi gave a brief speech. Apart from above

49 Syed Abul Maksud, *Kagmari Sammelan*, Prathoma, Dhaka, 2018, pp.107-08.

50 *Daily Sangbad*, 7 February 1982, pp. 6-7.

mentioned names, several other progressive and educated Bengali women of East Bengal also attended the Kagmari conference. Among them were Laila Samad, the editor of the women's magazine *Ananya*, Begum Jibunnessa Ahmed, the editor of the magazine *Khelaghar*, Begum Jebunnessa Khanam, poet Nurunnahar, and political activist and journalist Kamrun Nahar Laili. From the inspiration of the Kagmari conference, a few months later, Kamrun Nahar Laili started a weekly publication for women called *Abaruddha*. One of the patrons of the weekly was Maulana Bhasani. Dr. Nandi and his wife Shanti Nandi joined the conference, along with their two daughters, Indira Nandi and Mandira Nandi.<sup>51</sup>

Women also participated in the overall management of the Kagmari conference. Although many attended voluntarily, Maulana Bhasani personally requested some to be present during the conference. Among them was Begum Fakhru Nesa Chowdhury, the wife of Abdul Matin Chowdhury. Maulana Bhasani invited her through a letter. Alongside Begum Fakhru Nahar Chowdhury, Ittehad editor Kazi Mohammad Idris's wife Aziza Idris also participated in the management of the conference at the request of Maulana Bhasani.<sup>52</sup> Awami League leader Mahmud Ali's wife Hazera Mahmud and Awami League parliamentary member Selina Banu were also appointed to manage the conference. It was through their collective efforts that the conference was organised so meticulously.

At the Kagmari cultural conference, the concluding event of each day featured a cultural programme. Among the participants were Baul artists from Kushtia, Bhawaiya artists from Rangpur, Dhaka's Youth League and Kallol, music team of Chittagong, Karachi's dance artist Madam Azuri and her team, folk dancers from West Pakistan, and Sherpur's Jarigan artists, among others. Notable attractions at the conference's music sessions included performances by Abbasuddin Ahmed, Sohrab Hossain, Shah Abdul Karim, Srikanto Das, Porimal Das, and Ramesh Shil, as well as presentations by Radio Pakistan artists. Local artists from districts like Sylhet, Mymensingh, Rangpur, Cumilla, and Chittagong presented music at the event. Throughout the cultural conference, arrangements were made for film screenings every day, featuring titles like 'Sat Ma' and 'Kanchan Jatra'.<sup>53</sup> In addition to other arrangements at the Kagmari conference, a splendid display of Bengal's cottage industry was organised.

51 Mondira Nandi, Interviewed by the writer, Gulshan, Dhaka, 21 November 2015.

52 Syed Abul Maksud, *Kagmari Sammelan*, Prathoma, Dhaka, 2018, p. 109.

53 Mohsin Shastropani, "Kagmari Sammelan: Pariprekshita o Tatparya", *Kagmari Sammelaner Smarak Grantha*, [Ed. Mohsin Shastropani], Kagmari Sammelane Panchash Barsha Purti Committee, Dhaka, 2011, p.63.

Those who played pivotal roles in the success of the cultural event included Najmi Ara. She was responsible for organizing the cultural program meticulously.<sup>54</sup>

The Kagmari conference deeply influenced the political and cultural struggle of East Bengal. Abu Jafar Shamsuddin, who was actively involved from the announcement to the conclusion of the conference, wrote about the significance of the conference. According to him, The Kagmari cultural conference is one of the three most important and significant historical events in building the foundation of Bengali nationalism and its outcome, the independent Bangladesh. The Bengali nation is the heir to an ancient joint culture. In this culture, there are unique contributions from various communities and castes, including ethnic minorities, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, etc. The Kagmari cultural conference attracted the first attention of the world's political eyes towards the individual status and culture of Bengalis within the Pakistani framework.<sup>55</sup>

Before the Kagmari cultural conference, there had been no such extensive and significant cultural conference in East Bengal. Therefore, this conference is remarkable in the history of the cultural struggle of pre-independent Bengal or Bangladesh. Notable was the substantial presence of women compared to that era at the conference. Women were present in all areas of conference management, essay reading, and cultural events. The conference witnessed the enlightened gathering of progressive and educated Bengali women.

The literary and cultural conferences held in East Bengal from 1948 to 1957 claimed the distinctiveness of its language, literature, and culture. The Dhaka conference in 1948 first reflected independent thought on this matter. In the Chittagong conference of 1951, emphasis was also placed on the importance of Bengalis own literature and culture. This conference succeeded in raising awareness about the preservation of the Bengali language and culture, which had a significant influence on the later part of Language Movement. From this conference, the demand for Bengali to be one of the state languages became louder and gained a broad public base. The participation of women in various segments of the Chittagong conference later inspired them to actively take part in the Language Movement. One of the participants, Farida Hasan, played a pivotal role in the Chittagong Language Movement. In the 1952 Language Movement, women of Chittagong contributed to forming public opinion, writing posters, campaigning, and participating in meetings and processions, all of which accelerated the movement. Moreover, being inspired by this conference, women's

54 Selina Hossain and others [eds.], *Sangrami Nari Yuge Yuge*, Bangladesh Nari Pragati Sangha, Dhaka, 1999, p. 156.

55 *Daily Sangbad*, 7 February 1982, p.6.

participation in numerous cultural events such as New Year celebrations, Rabindra-Nazrul anniversaries, and commemorations of poets Sukanta and Iqbal increased significantly throughout East Bengal. Immediately after the Language Movement, the 1952 conference in Comilla demonstrated the non-communal Bengali consciousness that emerged from the Language Movement. Students from Shaila Rani Girl's School, who had a notable role in the 1952 Language Movement, participated in this conference. Additionally, many women who had taken part in the Language Movement in Chittagong also attended the Comilla conference. Through these literary and cultural conferences, a cultural awakening was observed among contemporary women. Also in the Dhaka conference of 1954, the Bengali nationalism got another level of boost. Many of the women who participated in the Language Movement in various regions of the country joined the Dhaka conferences. The notable activist Pratibha Mutsuddi, who led the Language Movement in Chittagong in 1952 and in Dhaka in 1955, was one of such women participants in the Dhaka conference. The consciousness gained from these literary and cultural conferences gradually spread among many women, leading to an increase in their participation in such events. In the 1957 Kagmari Conference, presence of significant number women was noteworthy, marking an enlightened gathering of progressive and highly educated Bengali women. Through their involvement in these conferences, women became aware of the distinct culture of Bengalis within the framework of the Pakistani state. Furthermore, women's writings in newspapers and magazines on various cultural issues accelerated the cultural movement. Their writings also reflected a nationalist consciousness. The women's participation and activism in these literary and cultural conferences created a sense of courage among them which led to their further involvement in the cultural movement of later days including the cultural front of Bangladesh's Liberation War in 1971.

### **Conclusion**

Pakistan statecraft has seen unprecedented resistance of Bengali nationalist cultural activists against all actions to establish her cultural hegemony. The Bengali women of the East Pakistan, being Albert Camus's 'each' and part of 'union' i.e., member of organisations, joined the 'effort' to preserve Bengali culture. They came forward spontaneously, and contributed as the frontline activist to the cultural resistance movement organised against West Pakistan.

The cultural and literary conferences held in East Pakistan, particularly the East Pakistan Cultural Conference in Chittagong in 1951, the East Pakistan Cultural Conference in Cumilla in 1952, the East Pakistan Literary Conference in Dhaka in 1954, and the notable presence of women at the Kagmari Cultural Conference in

Tangail in 1957, surpassed social conservatism and adversity. These conferences had a profound impact on the cultural activists of East Bengal. Particularly, they created awareness for the protection of the Bengali language, Bengali culture, and heritage. The conferences featured important and illustrious discussions and essays on various aspects of Bengali literature, alongside cultural events every day. Cultural events included folk songs, Rabindra Sangeet, Nazrul Sangeet, dramas, dances, and solo performances.

East Pakistani women participated as chief guests, session chairs of various sessions, creative essayists, musicians, dancers, and actors in literary and cultural conferences. Some women contributed to the conferences as organisers and volunteers. Others were responsible for overall management remaining in the background and less focused. Many more participated as delegates in the conferences from different corners of the country. And needless to say, women's cultural activism was gradually increasing during this time, noticeably after the Language Movement of 1948-1952. At the same time, the non-communal character of Bengali nationalism against communal Pakistani nationalism forged deep roots among the members of society. This phenomenon may very well be attributed to the participation of a good number of women. Their participation and activism from the front certainly influenced and encouraged many more to even experience the authority's reactionary steps against the Bengali non-conformists. These conferences succeeded in transforming some pro-Pakistani people into Bengali nationalists, like Shamsunnahar Mahmud. It happened to prove the famous quote of Badruddin Umar 'Bengali muchholmaner ghore phera' (the return to home of Bengali Muslims). In fact, these conferences heralded a new chapter in the progressive cultural movement of East Pakistan. Women's participation in the overall management of literary and cultural conferences, literary discussions, and cultural events played a significant role in earning the success of the conferences as well as creating some courageous activists of counter-hegemonic culture, i.e., Bengali nationalist culture.

## **Service Quality of Museums for Sustainable Tourism: An Empirical Study of Museums in Bangladesh**

Dilruba Sharmin\* and Farina Haque\*\*

### **Abstract**

Museums are the major cultural resources of a country that emphasize tourism and economic growth. For this, the service quality is important, and should be measured by systematic methods and analysis on a yearly basis. In Bangladesh, due to the lack of knowledge, these cultural resources are not properly utilized and managed, which affects the conservation and preservation of our historical resources as well as national development. This study aims to understand the quality of service of museums in Bangladesh. It helps us understand the concepts prominent among visitors engaging in museum experiences and the barriers for museums to provide a better quality of service to their visitors. The study was conducted on 16 renowned museums across three divisions of Bangladesh: Dhaka, Rajshahi, and Chattogram. Field visits and in-depth interviews are applied as a methodology for data collection. The study suggests that most of the known Bangladeshi museums need help in providing a better quality of service for their visitors due to inadequate and unplanned infrastructure, exhibition style, service provided, and supportive attitude. This article aims to create a service quality measurement database for museums, enhancing their service quality and promoting sustainable tourism. The increased visitor numbers will boost local communities' income, contribute to the country's Sustainable Development goal 8, and protect local culture.

**Key words:** Service Quality, Museums, Cultural Heritage, Tourism, SDG, Bangladesh.

### **1. Background Study**

Museums promote variety and sustainability by being open to the public and easy to get to. They operate ethically, communicate professionally, and involve the community. In addition, they provide various opportunities for learning, enjoyment, reflection, and knowledge sharing. As a result, museums are a valuable asset that helps to build sustainable tourism by utilizing the cultural and historical tourist environment. At the ICOM General Conference in Prague, Czech Republic, on August 24, 2022, the International Council of Museums accepted a new definition for museums. Following an 18-month participation process that involves hundreds of

---

\* Associate Professor, Department of Japanese Studies, University of Dhaka, Dhaka-1000

\*\* Independent Researcher, Graduated from Department of Japanese Studies, University of Dhaka, Dhaka-1000

museum professionals from 126 National ICOM committees worldwide, the idea was adopted in a vote for members. The new museum definition by ICOM reads:

A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.<sup>1</sup>

The updated definition honors the fundamental functions of a museum while also making room for the evolving practices of museums throughout the globe. ICOM Netherlands Chair Caroline Breunese said that "It is a great step forward that the new definition has been adopted, as it now includes elements such as sustainability, inclusiveness and community cooperation in addition to the core tasks. This definition is widely supported by museum professionals worldwide."<sup>2</sup>

Located in the central region of South Asia, Bangladesh is renowned for its abundant historical heritage, diverse cultural traditions, and captivating natural landscapes. The realm of museum tourism in Bangladesh offers a gateway to comprehending the nation's captivating historical background, dynamic contemporary state, and encouraging prospects, presenting many treasures awaiting exploration. These institutions, which range from ancient archaeological wonders to modern art galleries, serve as a guide to the nation's cultural memory, preserving objects, papers, and artworks that tell the stories of generations. Each museum represents a different era in the country's history, demonstrating the progression of its people, customs, and traditions. The history of museums in Bangladesh is more than a hundred years old. Museums are scattered all over the country. Museum tourism has peaked worldwide, though this sector still needs to be fully developed in Bangladesh. As the tourism sector has been mentioned explicitly in the SDG's 2030 planning, it is essential to understand the status of Bangladeshi museums, their service capability, and contemporary challenges.

Museums are more than just receptacles for artifacts and exhibits; they are creators of our collective heritage and invaluable resources for disseminating knowledge and cultural understanding. As international travel and tourism expand, museums play an

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://icom.nl/en/about-icom/museum-definition> (24 August 2022). Retrieved in 29 October, 2024

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

increasingly crucial role in attracting visitors seeking immersive experiences and meaningful encounters with the past. In pursuit of sustainable tourism, museums must prioritize not only the preservation and display of their collections but also the improvement of the services they provide to visitors. The concept of 'Museum Service Quality Measurement for Sustainable Tourism' represents a multifaceted approach that combines the principles of sustainable tourism with the pursuit of exceptional visitor experiences. The term 'quality', originating from the Latin word 'qualis', is commonly used to describe the condition of an item or service, its level of perfectness in specific conditions, and its capacity to fulfill a particular requirement. A considerable number of definitions pertaining to the concept of quality as documented in the academic literature. According to Victor, quality management is still not seen as a top concern in museums and other cultural and artistic organizations, where quality instruments have only been in use for a brief time.<sup>3</sup>

Parasuraman *et al* made a major contribution to service quality conceptualization and measurement by proposing five-dimensional concepts and results by comparing visitors' expectations and perceptions of provided services.<sup>4</sup> Yücelt conducted a study to assess the attitudes of museum visitors about the quality of services. The research result indicates that visitors express high satisfaction with various aspects of the collection and exhibitions, including warning signs, educational and entertainment value, visual and auditory experiences, entrance fees, parking facilities, seating and leisure options, and the availability of direction signage.<sup>5</sup> Yılmaz discovered that the research conducted at the Göreme Open Air Museum unveiled the existence of four distinct factors that identify the visitors' perceptions. These characteristics encompass physical attributes associated with the service, elements of exhibitions, empathy, price, and other service-related components.<sup>6</sup> In the survey, the museum visitors assess the service provided to them across various dimensions at a moderate level. In

---

<sup>3</sup> I. Victor, 'Museums and quality, from the concept of the museum that carries out functions to the museum that provides services', *Cadernos de Sociomuseologia*, 2007, Vol. 27(27), p. 45-61.

<sup>4</sup> A. Parasuraman, L. L. Berry, & V. A. Zeithaml, 'Refinement and reassessment of the SERVQUAL scale', *Journal of retailing*, 67(4), 1991, p. 420.

<sup>5</sup> U. Yucelt, 'Marketing museums: An empirical investigation among museum visitors', *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing*, 8(3), 2001, p. 3-13.

<sup>6</sup> İ. Yılmaz, 'Service quality perceptions of museum visitors: the case of Göreme Open Air Museum. *Anatolia: Journal of Tourism Research*, Vol. 22(2), 2011, p. 183-193.



essence, tourists anticipate receiving a higher standard of service. Empathy emerges as the primary determinant of visitors' perception quality, whereas factors such as pricing and other service components exhibit comparatively lower perception value.

In the modern era, we need to measure the service quality of the existing museums so that tourists and visitors can quickly get access and find the pathway of their interest. The study was conducted in the Dhaka, Rajshahi, and Chattogram divisions, as these three divisions contain many museums. Most of this work was done to find out what services are offered to museum visitors, how good they are, what visitors' hopes are, and how they feel about the quality of museum services in Bangladesh. This study also looks at how to measure service quality for sustainable tourism and how museums could evaluate this field. Throughout this study, the problems with giving tourists better service have been discussed, and policy suggestions have been made to ensure that museums provide the best service possible to meet the SDG's tourism goal.

## **2. Objectives of the study**

This study aims to address a knowledge gap in the existing literature and provide valuable recommendations for scholars and professionals working in museum contexts in Bangladesh regarding the anticipated and perceived quality of services. Present research was carried out in Dhaka, Rajshahi, and Chattogram due to the presence of numerous museums pertinent to the study.

- a) Identifying the service for museum visitors and the quality assessment is the central goal of this study.
- b) To investigate the perceptions and expectations of museum service quality among visitors in Bangladesh.
- c) To analyse the existing challenges associated with delivering exceptional service to visitors.
- d) To offer a policy recommendation to ensure museums' highest service quality to meet the SDG's tourism target.

## **3. Methodology**

The current state of this sector has been depicted by analysing qualitative data obtained from existing literature, journals, books, and reports. Primary data was collected through a survey, while in-depth interviews were conducted with museum

personnel to gain insights into the facts and challenges associated with sustainable museum tourism.

### 3.1 Research Method

- a) The first step involved conducting a comprehensive review of the existing literature and developing a semi-structured questionnaire that would be administered to museum visitors and personnel.
- b) The study used participant information sheets, informed consent forms, and organisational consent forms to follow the research ethics guidelines and interview protocol.
- c) Field visits were conducted to collect quantitative data through a survey.
- d) Field visits have been conducted to collect qualitative data through in-depth interviews (IDIs).
- e) KII (key informant interview) also have been conducted to collect information from a wide range of people including museum directors and professionals.
- f) Transcribing and coding interview data involves converting spoken information into written form, followed by categorising and analysing the transcribed content.
- g) Data analysis and checking have been based on this study's triangulation method of report writing.

### 3.2 Sampling Method, Population and Size

For this study, the survey sampling method has been chosen for the visitors of the selected museums and the sample size is 260. The in-depth interview method has been selected for the personnel of the selected museums and the sample size is 16.

**Table 1:** Sampling Method, Sampling Population and Sample Size of this Study

Sampling Method	Sampling Population	Sample Size
Survey Sampling	Visitors of the Selected Museums	260
In-depth Interview	Personnel of the Selected Museums	16

#### 4. Overview of the Selected Museums

**4.1 Dhaka Division:** In the capital city Dhaka, there are approximately fifty museums of different categories present to provide knowledge of history, science, war memory, technology, art heritage, etc. Including these, nine specific museums were undertaken to obtain data for the present research.

**Table 2:** Overall Characteristics of selected Museums in Dhaka Division

Location and name	Characteristics
Bangladesh Folk Arts and Crafts Foundation, Dhaka	The Foundation, based in Sonargaon, Narayanganj district, was established on May 6, 1998. It preserves historical folk art and crafts, organizes training programs, establishes museums, and promotes traditional values. It also conducts research, encourages study, and publishes findings, promoting the practice of these arts.
Bangladesh National Museum, Dhaka	The Bangladesh National Museum was officially opened on November 17, 1983, is among the most extensive museums in South Asia. It houses a vast collection of archaeological, contemporary art, and historical artifacts, showcasing the country's history, freedom struggle, and the liberation struggle.
Liberation War Museum, Dhaka	The Liberation War Museum in Dhaka houses six galleries and 21,000 objects commemorating Bangladesh's Liberation War, including rare photographs, documents, and materials used by freedom fighters and martyrs.
Museum of Independence, Dhaka	The Museum of Independence was opened to the public on March 25, 2015, Bangladesh's 45th Independence Day. The underground museum in Bangladesh showcases the nation's history from the Mughal era to 1971's independence. It includes a multimedia projection theater, amphitheater, water pools, Shikha Chirantony, mural, auditorium, and over 300 historical photographs. The museum also features terracotta, photographs, and newspaper clippings from the War of Liberation.
National Museum of Science and Technology, Dhaka	The National Museum of Science and Technology initially established in 1966, and finally relocated its permanent residence in 1981. The museum showcases technology, biological, and physical science, showcasing various experiments and inventions. It also showcases Earth's treasures, space travel history, and a dinosaur diorama. Visitors can also explore the diverse marine life in the ocean depths.
National Zoo Museum, Dhaka	The National Zoo Museum opened in June 23, 1974. The museum houses rare and endangered wild animal carcasses, aiming to preserve their diversity. Displays provide introductory notes, detailed descriptions, and accurate labeling to raise awareness.

Bangabandhu Memorial Museum, Dhaka	The museum was located in Dhanmondi, Dhaka, was often referred to as Bangabandhu Bhaban or Dhanmondi 32. It is no longer open for visitors after July-August Revolution 2024.
Nature History Museum, Dhaka	The Nature History Museum, situated in the Bangabandhu Safari Park, officially opened on October 31, 2013. It is one of Asia's largest and largest. It houses a collection of vertebrate and invertebrate carcasses and remains, as well as a butterfly garden.
Bangladesh Currency (Taka) Museum, Dhaka	The first Bangladeshi currency museum, initially set up at Bangladesh Bank in 2009, inaugurated by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, houses nearly 10,100 currency collections from Bangladesh's metal and paper currency to foreign currencies.

**4.2 Chattogram Division:** There are approximately eight museums located in the Chattogram division and five museums were surveyed for research goal purposes.

**Table 3:** Overall Characteristics of selected Museums in Chattogram Division

Name & Location	Characteristics
Anatomy Museum, Chattogram	It was established in 2013, the sub-project 'Establishment of an Anatomy Museum at CVASU, CP-2179' created the country's first anatomy museum. CVASU in Chattogram, Bangladesh, houses a unique anatomy museum with 260 preserved animal and bird carcasses, 120 models, 180 organs, and 2,000 bones.
Ethnological Museum, Chattogram	The Ethnological Museum opened in 1974, exhibit showcases the lifestyles of 29 ethnic groups in the country, including twelve from the Chattogram hill region, using maps, photographs, models, and artificial environments.
Fisheries Museum, Chattogram	Chattogram Veterinary and Animal Sciences University established a fisheries museum in 2013 to educate students and researchers about Bangladesh's fisheries resources, preserve biodiversity, support maritime research, and promote ecological sustainability. The museum features an aquarium and traditional fishing crafts.
Maritime Museum, Chattogram	The Juldia Marine Academy expanded with the Bangladesh Maritime Museum, showcasing marine artifacts donated by the Juldia Marine Academy Alumni Association.
Tribal Cultural Institute Museum, Chattogram	The Tribal Cultural Institute, established in 1978, safeguards and promotes tribal cultures in Rangamati, preserving their traditions, ceremonies, and methodologies through the Tribal Cultural Museum.

**4.3 Rajshahi Division:** In this division, there are approximately five museums present, including these, two museums that are very famous for their ancientness and also popularity among visitors.

**Table 4:** Overall Characteristics of selected Museums in Rajshahi Division

Name & Location	Characteristics
Paharpur Buddhist Vihar Museum, Rajshahi	Paharpur Buddhist Vihar, Bangladesh's second-largest monastery, houses a cruciform-shaped museum showcasing archaeological artifacts from the region, dating back to pre-Pala, Pala, and Islamic periods.
Varendra Research Museum, Rajshahi	Varendra Research Museum, established 1910, houses ancient civilization antiquities, including artifacts, scripts, and sculptures from Indus Valley, Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, and Rajshahi regions.

## 5. Visitors' Perception on the Facilities Provided by the Museums

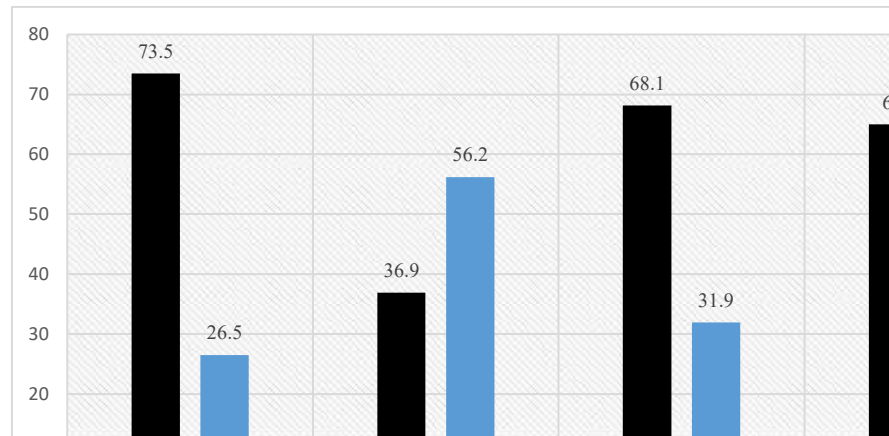
### 5.1. Demographic Information

Demographic information for research typically collects data on age, sex, occupation, income level, race, location, and educational attainment. In order to identify customers, demographic information draws certain generalizations about groups. For this study, demographic information collects data on the age and gender of the museums' visitors. The male respondents constituted 60 percent of the total sample, while the female respondents accounted for 40 percent. The research results indicate that most respondents are 10-29 years old, comprising 63.5 percent of the sample. Additionally, 32.3 percent of the respondents were found to be between the ages of 30-49, while a smaller proportion of 4.2 percent were aged between 50-79 years old.

### 5.2 Services Provided by the Museum

#### 5.2.1. Basic Facilities

The basic facilities encompass the museum authority's tangible services to accommodate all visitors. The facilities include the provision of effective museum navigation through exhibits, appropriate seating arrangements for visitors, sufficient lighting within the museum premises, the upkeep and maintenance of the museum, and the appropriateness of the entrance fee for the museum.



**Figure 1:** Visitors' Opinion on the Basic Facilities Provided by the Museums

The distribution of visitors' opinions regarding the quality of basic museum facilities across five major categories—navigation, seating arrangements, lighting, maintenance, and admission fees is shown in Figure 1. Both the affirmative (or 'Yes') and negative (or 'No') replies are represented by green and blue bars, respectively, in the data, which is shown as percentages.

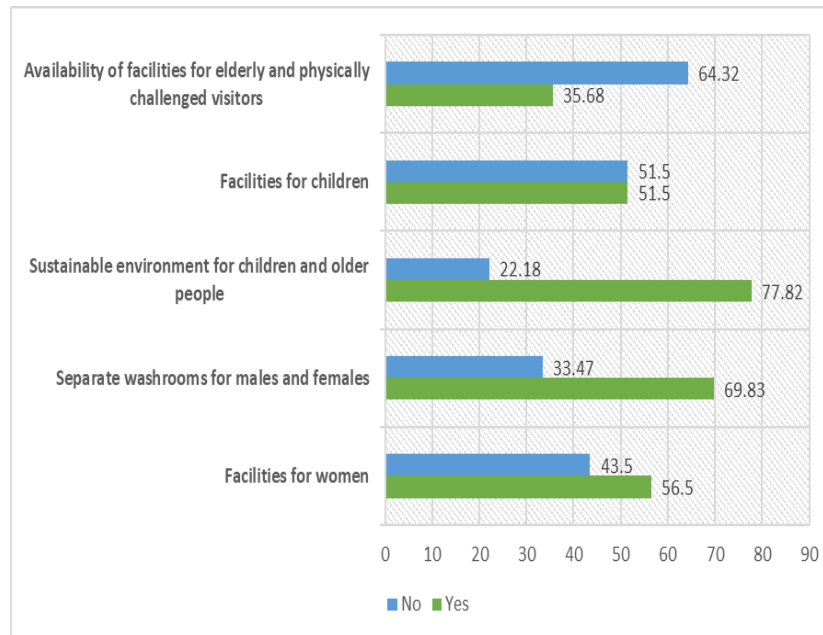
- **Navigation of the Museum through Exhibits:** The vast majority of visitors (73.5%) said they were satisfied with the navigation system, suggesting that most people had little trouble navigating the exhibits. On the other hand, 26.5 percent of visitors said the navigation was inadequate.
- **Sitting Arrangement for Visitors:** The seating arrangements at the museum were deemed unsatisfactory by 39.67 percent of visitors, whilst 60.33 percent thought it was satisfactory. This indicates that while a sizable percentage of guests felt that the seats might be improved, the majority had a favourable experience.
- **Adequacy of Lighting in the Museum:** The museum successfully provided enough illumination for spotting the exhibits, as evidenced by the 68.1 percent of visitors who rated the lighting sufficiency a positive review. Nonetheless, 31.9 percent expressed dissatisfaction, which would imply that some sections need better lighting.
- **Maintenance of the Museum:** The museum's maintenance was criticized by 35 percent of visitors, compared to 65 percent who did not. This response implies that even if upkeep is generally sufficient, a sizable portion of visitors still think additional enhancements may be helpful.

- **Proper Entrance Fee:** Finally, 35.3 percent of tourists thought the entrance price was inappropriate, while 64.7 percent thought it was right. This suggests that although the majority thought the admission charge was reasonable, a sizable minority thought it would be troublesome or out of proportion to the services provided.

Overall, these results highlight that the majority of visitors are generally satisfied with the basic facilities provided by the museum. However, there is a consistent minority of visitors in each category who perceive deficiencies, suggesting areas where museums might consider enhancements to improve the visitor experience further.

### 5.2.2. Specialized Facilities

The museum authority provides a range of specialized facilities, including tangible and intangible services, to cater to the needs of unique museum visitors. The amenities comprise gender-segregated washrooms, a child and elderly-friendly atmosphere, and services tailored for older people and those with physical disabilities at the museum.



**Figure 2:** Visitors' Opinion on the Specialized Facilities Provided by the Museums

The bar chart, labelled as Figure 2: Visitors' Opinion on the Specialized Facilities Provided by the Museums, shows the availability of specific facilities within museums based on visitors' responses. Here's a detailed analysis of each category:

**a) Availability of facilities for elderly and physically challenged visitors:**

- According to the survey, 63 percent of visitors said 'no', suggesting that most people believe museums don't provide enough amenities for the elderly and those with physical disabilities. On the contrary 35.68 percent responded 'Yes', showing that while some facilities are present, there's a notable gap in accessibility for these groups.

**b) Facilities for children:**

- Responses are evenly split, with 51.5 percent answering 'Yes' and 51.5 percent answering 'No'. This balance suggests that while some museums provide facilities for children, this is not consistently the case across all institutions.

**c) Sustainable environment for children and older people:**

- Most museums offer a sustainable setting that can handle both young and old visitors, according to 77.82 percent of visitors who said 'yes'.
- Only 22.18 percent responded 'No', showing that most visitors find this aspect satisfactory in the museums.

**d) Separate washrooms for males and females:**

- Of those who responded, 69.83 percent said 'yes', indicating that museums typically provide separate restrooms.
- Although the majority of museums have separate facilities, 33.47 percent said 'no', indicating that some still do not.

**e) Facilities for women:**

- More than half of the museums had facilities specifically designed for women, as seen by the 56.5 percent of visitors who said 'yes'.
- There is still opportunity for improvement in terms of providing women with suitable facilities, as evidenced by the 43.5 percent who said 'No'.

Overall, this data suggests that while museums have made strides in providing certain specialized facilities, there are still notable areas that require improvement, particularly in terms of accessibility for elderly and physically challenged visitors and facilities dedicated to women. Sustainable environments and separate washrooms are relatively well-covered, but children's facilities show inconsistency across museums.



## **6. Existing Barriers of Museums to Provide Better Services to the Visitors**

As archives of information, history, art, and science, museums are essential cultural organizations that provide the general public with chances for learning, introspection, and pleasure. Nevertheless, despite their significance, museums frequently encounter major obstacles that make it difficult for them to offer tourists top-notch services. These difficulties can include budgetary limitations as well as problems with staffing, accessibility, and integrating new technologies. For museums to continue serving the changing demands of many audiences while carrying out their social, cultural, and educational purposes, these obstacles must be removed. This part examines the current impediments that keep museums from providing their patrons with improved services, giving a thorough grasp of the problems they encounter and possible ways to overcome them. We learned about numerous obstacles to museum development from KII substance gathered through in-person interviews with professionals and museum directors. A brief explanation based on the data analysis is given below.

### **6.1 Insufficient Government Investment**

All museum officials cited a scarcity of government investment as the primary cause of their institutions' difficulties. They require adequate funding to operate their institutions, regardless of the fundamental factors supporting the sector's growth. Admission fees are the primary source of funding for the museums' operations. Again, they must also consider the frequent visits of the guests, so they could only slightly increase the ticket prices.

The director of an ethnological museum stated that he used to organize many cultural events in Rangamati and Dhaka with funding from the Ministry of Finance; however, he no longer does so because the ministry no longer considers these events productive.<sup>7</sup> He also started to arrange for an art competition, in which 20 artists participated, and they stayed in camp for three days. These days, they had to prepare art and give it to the museum, and later they were gifted with twenty thousand takas, and the cost for each artist in three days for the museum was thirty-five thousand takas. Annually, this museum was able to collect 1 or 2 pieces of art, and following the process, they could make a collection of 30 works of art in total. They have collected 150 to 200 more works of art from different sources. And, for the activities mentioned earlier, they do not get any funding from the government. Instead, they are considering arranging art exhibitions as the other activity of the museum to attract visitors and generate revenue. Deputy Chief Conservation Officer of Varendra

---

<sup>7</sup> KII (key informant interview), no 1, interviewed on September, 2022

Research Museum claimed that a lack of funds could be a significant concern for the museum, which will continue to be administered by Rajshahi University.<sup>8</sup>

### **6.2 Inadequate and Unplanned Infrastructure**

Most Bangladeshi museums need help due to inadequate and unplanned infrastructure. The Curator of the Ethnographic Museum of Chittagong believes that the museum's infrastructure has to be more modern and robust. They have significant hurdles in preserving antiquities and other cultural heritage throughout the wet season.<sup>9</sup> The director of the 'Khudra Nri-Gosthi Cultural Institute' in Rangamati, stated that the museum's structure needs to be improved to present all of its resources as user-friendly. The museum's infrastructure dissatisfied the authorities, who thought more major and well-planned buildings might support them and prevent various issues.<sup>10</sup>

The director of the National Zoo Museum in Dhaka stated that the National Zoo Museum contains numerous exhibits. Nonetheless, the space must be enhanced in comparison to that. He believes a significantly larger area is required to add and accommodate contemporary exhibits, which could improve the museum's quality of service.<sup>11</sup> One of the curators of the Bangladesh National Museum in Dhaka stated that the museum needs adequate planning for better service quality.<sup>12</sup>

The museum's infrastructure is new and cutting-edge, with a solid foundation, as Achia Khanom, Curator of the Taka Museum in Dhaka, notes. Although she already needs additional space to exhibit coins from Bengal and global history, she is thinking of creating a new gallery dedicated to Mughal coinage.<sup>13</sup> This museum's new gallery will be divided into sections dedicated to each Mughal emperor. Chattogram Veterinary and Animal Sciences University's Dean of the Faculty of Fisheries, Mohammed Nurul Absar Khan, reveals that the museum needs more space to make it public and to show the different species of fish available in Bangladesh that we still do not recognize properly; other museums have similar plans.<sup>14</sup>

### **6.3 Shortage of Competent Workers**

Another critical challenge in Bangladeshi museums is the need for more competent workers. As they are government-oriented museums, there are positions available.

---

<sup>8</sup> KII, no 6, interviewed on 20 July 2022

<sup>9</sup> KII, no 2, interviewed on 15 September 2022

<sup>10</sup> KII, no 3, interviewed on 15 September 2022

<sup>11</sup> KII, no 8, interviewed on 16 February 2023

<sup>12</sup> KII, no 9, 16 February 2023

<sup>13</sup> KII, no 10, 17 February 2023

<sup>14</sup> KII, no 4, interviewed on 16 September 2022

However, the recruits must still be executed due to various bureaucratic issues. Many responsible personnel stated that a seat for 30 talented people specializing in museum management is available, although the museum only has 13 members.<sup>15</sup> Many positions, including those of interpreter and guide, have been vacant for several years. One of the key personnel of the ethnological museum remarked that they had 25 workers ten years ago and will still have 25 in 2023. There was no new hiring, and four Assistant Directors are also vacant; he is still in charge of five positions as Director.<sup>16</sup>

The additional space and staff requirement is especially problematic during winter or when students from various educational institutions visit these museums. Museums in these predicaments require legislation to help them out. The guests are divided into smaller groups, and museum staff members are assigned to each group to lead them through the exhibition. Some museums even open up additional floors to keep up with the overwhelming number of visitors. Some of these museums have requested security guards but have not received them, despite having positions available for Ansar and Police forces. The museums have hired security guards using money from within the institutions.<sup>17</sup>

#### **6.4 Failing to Ensure Visitor Facilities**

Most museums need to provide adequate visitor services. There must be an improvement to the presentation and layout system to make it more appealing to guests. Most museums would benefit from being digitalized and having a catalog or map available. Museum officials acknowledged that they could only provide limited services for the public and encourage more people to visit. They also mentioned the need for more advertising for these museums due to the large proportion of absent visitors. On the other hand, they argued that enough lighting and ventilation were still required. They could not consider the necessity of facilities exclusively for women, infants, older people, or youngsters with special needs.<sup>18</sup>

#### **6.5 Absence of Comprehensive Exhibits**

Many museums in Bangladesh need a comprehensive collection of exhibits, which indicates a lack of inclusivity in addressing various topics that may interest an informed visitor. The National Science and Technology Museum's Director remarked

---

<sup>15</sup> KII, no 3, interviewed on 17 September, 2022

<sup>16</sup> KII, no 5, interviewed on 18 September, 2022

<sup>17</sup> KII, no 7, interviewed on 21 July, 2022

<sup>18</sup> KII, no 4, interviewed on 18 September 2022

that the museum is in excellent condition. Nonetheless, they continually try to add new displays to their collection as science and technology improve. He also noted that the goal is to introduce more updated exhibitions. The director of the National Zoo Museum stated that the zoo authority as a whole has several policies and plans for the upcoming days. But in general, they hope to add more exhibits to the existing collection.<sup>19</sup> The Bangladesh Folk Arts and Crafts Foundation's Director claimed that this museum foundation is a beautiful emblem of folk arts in our country and precisely depicts it. The only thing that could be improved is the addition of more folk arts and crafts by minorities throughout the country. This will assist the visitor in learning more about our country's minorities. He also stated that their museum aspires to satisfy sustainable tourism criteria, currently their larger goal.<sup>20</sup>

#### **6.6 Lack of Informed Visitors**

An essential concern in enhancing service quality for museums pertains to the requirement for visitors to possess higher knowledge and information when a visitor needs more accurate information regarding the exhibits and optimal utilization of the museum's services. Under such circumstances, uninformed visitors' presence could challenge museums' ability to manage effectively. According to the Head of the Liberation War Museum's research section, the most significant barrier to maintaining quality service is the need for more knowledgeable visitors. Many visitors must know the requirements necessary to maintain the museum's atmosphere. Except for this issue, the museum's quality of service is satisfactory. She also stated that our education sector is working to raise public awareness of the museum and its upkeep. Their moving museum does this. One team was assigned to visit the museum to raise awareness of it.<sup>21</sup>

#### **6.7 Political Influence**

Political influences can exert biased effects on institutions, particularly in the context of museums. According to the Custodian of the Paharpur Buddhist Vihara Museum, local political influences hinder the museum's security measures sometimes, and in many cases, museum authorities have no courage to show a non-supportive attitude to local power.<sup>22</sup>

#### **6.8 Research Work**

Lastly, it is vital to address the concerns pertaining to research conducted within museums. Museums serve a purpose beyond mere repositories for artifacts and displays; they function as custodians of our shared heritage and serve as invaluable

---

<sup>19</sup> KII, no 11, interviewed on 8 February, 2023

<sup>20</sup> KII, no 12, interviewed on 9 February, 2023

<sup>21</sup> KII, no 13, interviewed on 9 February, 2023

<sup>22</sup> KII, no 6, interviewed on 21 July, 2022

conduits for disseminating knowledge and cultural comprehension. Research is an essential component of effectively managing a museum. Achia Khanom stated that one of the museum sector's main issues is research and promotion. She also added that they attempted to publish their research journal on behalf of the Taka Museum; however, she wanted more interest in Taka research.<sup>23</sup> The director of the ethnic museum explained that they used to publish their journals or periodicals annually and acquire high-quality ethnography and culture research papers. However, the authors must demonstrate tremendous enthusiasm for writing to compensate for their low pay. And the other institutions must receive adequate funding and publishing opportunities for their journals. However, they recognize the significance and benefits of publishing journals annually.<sup>24</sup>

## 7. Discussion

Service quality assessment has played a pivotal role in enhancing the competitiveness of service-oriented sectors. The contemporary age of accountability within the museum industry demands that it succeed in augmenting visitor numbers and improving accessibility. As Maher *et. al* said, the approach used to measure public quality can be characterized as the discrepancy between the expectations and perceptions of patrons regarding the services offered by a museum.<sup>25</sup>

The results of this study suggest a greater variety of factors influencing visitors' satisfaction through surveys. According to the findings, 41.2 percent of the respondents said that the quality of the museum service was moderate. It shows that most visitors have a mild perception of the quality of the services provided by the museums in these three regions. It means that the service quality of the museums is average. According to 73.5 percent of respondents, they required assistance navigating the exhibits in museums, and 61.8 percent of the respondents agreed that the lighting system of the museums was adequate. Of the respondents, 56.2 percent were satisfied with the entrance charge, and 41.2 percent thought the cost of the tickets was moderate. According to 67.7 percent of participants, they had no difficulties when they were at the museums. These numbers show the museums are doing quite well with essential quality service management. However, more than 55 percent of the visitors agreed that there were no seating arrangements in the museums, which can impact the visitors' perceptions of the museum's quality of

---

<sup>23</sup> KII, no 14, interviewed on April 2023

<sup>24</sup> KII, no 4 & 5, interviewed on September 2022

<sup>25</sup> J.K. Maher, J. Clark, D.G. Motley, 'Measuring Museum Service Quality in Relationship to Visitor Membership: The Case of a Children's Museum', *Marketing Management*, 13(2), 2011, p. 29-42.

service. There are introductory notes for the contents of the museums, but more is needed. Most of the museums in Bangladesh need guides to navigate eager visitors through the contents of the museums, which make it harder for visitors to understand, learn, and appreciate them. According to 38.1 percent of participants, the service provided by museum staff is mediocre and needs to be improved.

Pop and Borza suggested that, the ability of museums to draw visitors and modify their offerings to simultaneously support the growth of tourism in their local regions and the expansion of social inclusion is the basis for a significant number of indicators used to measure museum sustainability.<sup>26</sup> In the present study, responses suggest enhancing the services offered to improve the overall visitor experience. Institutions like museums, which preserve our culture and heritage, should be appropriately cared for and maintained. The majority of participants (65 percent) agreed that museums are clean and well-maintained; nevertheless, this percentage has to rise, therefore museums should prioritize sanitation and upkeep. Maintaining privacy and hygiene in a public space is also essential, as museums are public institutions crawling with visitors daily. In order to preserve privacy standards and safety concerns, 64.6 percent of participants stated that separate restrooms are provided for men and women, whereas 56.5 percent agreed that facilities are available for women. Museums are great places to learn and absorb knowledge, and people of all ages can enjoy visiting them. According to 70.4 percent of respondents, museums are appropriate for people of all ages. However, 49.6 percent of the respondents said the facilities for bringing and keeping children at the museums could be better. This can impact the frequency of visits, as families with children might not want to visit a museum because of the low facilities for children. Museums should consider the amenities they provide their consumers, considering age, gender, and physical abilities. According to 49.2 percent of the respondents, museums do not offer any particular amenities for elderly or physically disabled visitors.

The museums in these three regions have unique corners or desks to support the elderly or physically challenged visitors, but the facilities are limited. The inadequate facilities for older and physically challenged people create a big gap between the visitors and their perceptions of the museums, and most museums need to understand this to improve the services they provide to their consumers. The study suggests that the visitors had a favorable opinion of the e-ticket option before they visited the museum. E-tickets would be an excellent complement to museum visits, according to 61.5 percent of respondents. To add e-tickets as a purchase option, museums should

---

<sup>26</sup> I. L. Pop, A. Borza, 'Factors Influencing Museum Sustainability and Indicators for Museum Sustainability', *Measurement. Sustainability*, Vol. 8(1), 2016, p. 101.

have updated their websites. It would help visitors enjoy visiting the museums without standing in line and physically purchasing the tickets. This will undoubtedly digitalize the traditional museum concept.

The curators explained several areas where museums need improvement. For example, the National Zoo Museum in Dhaka needs a larger space to accommodate contemporary exhibits and improve the quality of service. The Taka Museum in Dhaka is considering opening a new gallery for Mughal coins. At the same time, Chattogram Veterinary and Animal Sciences University's Dean of the Faculty of Fisheries reveals that the museum needs more space to make it public and show different fish species. The need for competent workers is another critical challenge in Bangladeshi museums. Government-oriented museums have available positions but face bureaucratic issues, such as the need for new hires and legislation to help them. Museums must improve their presentation and layout systems, digitalize their plans, and have a catalog or map available. Museum officials acknowledge that they can only provide limited services for the public and encourage more visitors. They also need more advertising and adequate lighting and ventilation. Government investment is a primary cause of their institutions' difficulties, with admission fees being the primary funding source.

The museum has also started organizing cultural events and art competitions but has yet to receive government funding. The Deputy Chief Conservation Officer of the Varendra Research Museum thinks that a lack of funding could be a severe issue for the museum, which Rajshahi University will continue to run. Bangladesh's museums face challenges addressing inclusivity and various topics that may interest informed visitors. The National Science and Technology Museum, the National Zoo Museum, and the Bangladesh Folk Arts & Crafts Foundation aim to improve their collections. However, the need for knowledgeable visitors and public awareness are significant barriers to maintaining a quality service. The education sector is working to raise public awareness, while political influences can affect museum security measures.

Additionally, research is crucial for effective management, and museums serve as custodians of shared heritage and cultural comprehension. To address these issues, museums should focus on more research and promotion, such as publishing journals or periodicals. Actually, visitors' loyalty stems from their level of satisfaction, which is based on the caliber of the experience they receive from the time they park their cars or choose to call a museum until they leave the building after obtaining the necessary information or the leisure activity they had wanted, said by Rowly.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> J. Rowley, Measuring total customer experience in museums, *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 11(6), 1999, pp. 303-308.

It is also notable that there is a difference in visitors' perceptions of museums located in Dhaka and the other two regions (Chattogram and Rajshahi). Most museums in Chattogram and Rajshahi did not have separate washrooms for males and females, which was different in Dhaka. There were also a higher number of negative responses to the idea of e-tickets for museums. Museums are regarded as exceptional institutions packed with rich cultural and historical significance and capable of furnishing learners with valuable information. Museums in Bangladesh should focus on enhancing their abilities to provide facilities for their visitors to improve their mediocre status and quality of service.

## **8. Policy Recommendations**

It is imperative that legislators adopt proactive measures to support and strengthen museums so they can continue to carry out their mission and adapt to changing socioeconomic, technical, and environmental concerns. Whether they specialize in natural history, science, art, or history, museums need well-considered policy frameworks that tackle important issues like funding, accessibility, sustainability, digital transformation, and diversity. The following policy suggestions are intended to improve museums' long-term sustainability, public involvement, and operational effectiveness. In order to encourage museums' continued growth as essential cultural, educational, and scientific institutions, these guidelines are based on best practices from the museum industry.

**A. Infrastructure Development:** Comprehensive infrastructure development for museums can foster appreciation for the craft, enhance visitor experience, and create a lasting legacy for future generations. Below is a short exploration of the components, benefits, and implementation strategies for developing infrastructure for museums.

- Commence a thorough evaluation of the prevailing museum infrastructure to identify deficiencies, safety issues, and opportunities for enhancement.
- Developing a comprehensive national or regional strategy for advancing museum infrastructure entails delineating key priorities, allocating financial resources, and establishing a timeline for effective implementation.
- It is imperative to foster collaborations among governmental entities, private enterprises, and philanthropic institutions to secure financial resources and assist in advancing infrastructure development initiatives.

**B. Worker Shortage:** Lack of employees is a serious problem at museums, particularly those that focus on specialized cultural fields. This scarcity may make it more difficult for the museum to properly conserve, curate, and market its holdings.



The problem goes beyond simple staffing limitations to include the availability of qualified individuals who can perform a range of tasks, from research and preservation to visitor interaction and administrative administration. In the sections that follow, we examine the various aspects of the museum staffing shortage issue and offer a variety of solutions.

- Implement training programmes and workshops to augment museum personnel's competencies and expertise, encompassing curators, conservators, and educators.
- Engage in partnerships with educational institutions and museum associations to establish internship opportunities and mentorship programmes to attract and nurture young talent.
- In order to effectively retain and attract skilled workers, museums must provide competitive salaries and benefits to professionals in the field.

**C. Government Investment:** The issue of how museum sustainability and excellence are related comes up. It is common knowledge that increased costs are required for every improvement in quality. One could consider this to be a financial disadvantage.<sup>28</sup> Museums are essential organizations that protect cultural heritage, advance education, encourage community involvement, and stimulate local development and tourism to boost the economy. However, significant financial and strategic assistance is needed to sustain and grow these roles. For museums to remain viable and continue to contribute to society, government funding is essential. Governments may protect their historical and cultural assets while tackling contemporary issues and possibilities by giving museums top priority when it comes to funding and resources. The importance, areas of focus, and approaches for government investment in museums are covered in detail below -

- Engage in collaborative efforts with museum associations and cultural organisations to actively promote the pursuit of augmented public funding and enhance societal recognition of the significance of museums.
- Establishing a designated financial allocation is imperative to safeguard and advance cultural heritage, encompassing museums, historical sites, and artefacts.
- Propose the establishment of a national endowment fund dedicated to museums to ensure a consistent and reliable financial resource for their ongoing operations and strategic initiatives.

---

<sup>28</sup> L. Zima, S. Sabou, 'Quality and the consumer', *Studia Universitatis "Vasile Goldiș" Arad, Seria Științe Economice*, 2010, part III, pp. 56-63.

**D. Ensuring Visitor Facilities:** In order to create an atmosphere that caters to a variety of audiences, promotes return visits, and cultivates a deeper engagement with museum collections and programming, it is imperative that high-quality visitor facilities be provided. Providing complete visitor amenities is essential to the contemporary museum experience, from comfort and accessibility to educational resources and technological advancements. An examination of the many elements, advantages, and tactics for guaranteeing first-rate visitor amenities in museums is provided here.

- Regular surveys and feedback collection should be conducted in order to evaluate the needs and expectations of visitors, with the aim of identifying potential areas for improvement in facilities.
- The allocation of funds is recommended to upgrade visitor facilities, encompassing restrooms, seating areas, and visitor information centers, to augment the overall visitor experience.
- To enhance the experience of international visitors and foster inclusivity, it is recommended to implement various measures such as providing multilingual signage, audio guides, and well-trained staff.

**E. Informed Visitors:** Museums are vibrant learning spaces that include a variety of activities aimed at involving guests of all ages, interests, and backgrounds. From interactive tours and practical workshops to special exhibitions, talks, and community gatherings, these programs can cover it all. Making sure that guests are aware of the different activities that are offered is essential to making the most of their time at the museum and encouraging more in-depth interaction with the displays.

- Facilitate communication and cooperation among museums by hosting conferences, seminars, and other networking activities.
- Teaching Museology might help visitors learn more about museums and understand what to expect before they visit a museum.
- Utilize technological advancements to enhance the accessibility of museums, thereby appealing to younger demographics and fostering greater diversity within the sector.
- Museums may create a more engaging and customized experience for every visitor by actively promoting the variety and scheduling of their events.

**F. Education & Research Work:** In order for museums to fulfill their role as active learning and discovery venues rather than merely passive storage of artifacts, education and research are essential to their goal. Visitors are not the only people involved; staff, faculty, and the general public are also involved. By serving as links between the past and present, museums promote lifelong learning and connect the

study of history with current events. An examination of museums' research and teaching initiatives, their significance, and the ways in which they foster knowledge creation, critical thinking, and community involvement is provided below.

- Teaching Museology as a diploma course can help fill the gap for lack of informed visitors and competent workers for the museums in Bangladesh.
- Undertake research endeavors that illustrate the economic advantages of museums for nearby communities, exemplifying their capacity to generate tourism income and foster employment opportunities.

## 9. Conclusion

This study aims to understand the quality of service of museums in Bangladesh, focusing on the concepts prominent among visitors and the barriers for museums to provide better service quality. This topic explores the significance of measuring museum service quality to ensure their long-term viability, social relevance, and contribution to sustainable tourism practices. The result shows that most of the museums in Bangladesh need guides to navigate visitors through the contents of the museums. Without a guide, it is harder for visitors to understand, learn, and appreciate them. Museums have started organizing cultural events and art competitions but have yet to receive government funding in Bangladesh. The need for knowledgeable visitors and public awareness are significant barriers to maintaining quality service. Research is crucial for effective management, and museums serve as custodians of shared heritage and cultural comprehension. To address these issues, museums should focus on more research and promotion, such as publishing journals or periodicals.

***Acknowledgment:*** The research team would like to express its gratitude to University of Dhaka for providing Centennial Research Grant (CRG) for the submitted proposal. We are also thankful to all the museum authority to provide adequate information and unlimited support to collect data. The authors personally want to thanks the student's group of the Department of Japanese Studies, University of Dhaka, who helped in the survey and collect all data. Without their endless effort this study would never end.