Thoughts of Becoming: Negotiating Modernity and Identity in “Bangladeshi Political Thought”, 1947 to 1990

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Abstract:
This dissertation will construct a history and will conduct an analysis of Bangladeshi political thought with the aim to better understand the thought-world and subjectivities in Bangladesh. In doing so, the dissertation hopes to open up spaces for engaging with questions of political theory from the vantage point of post-colonial subjects. The dissertation will argue that political thought in Bangladesh has been profoundly structured by colonial and other encounters with modernity and by concerns about constructing a national identity. Negotiations between the incomplete and continuous projects of modernization and identity formation have produced certain anxieties about becoming that permeates political consciousness and ideas in the country. Though such anxieties of becoming are also shred by other post-colonial countries, the specific, though not necessarily exclusive, character of Bangladeshi thought emerges out of the country’s particular political history of being twice born as nations – first as Pakistan, then as Bangladesh. The dissertation will seek to establish this specific character of Bangladeshi political thought and political subjectivity though investigations into the political and intellectual histories of erstwhile East Pakistan and present day Bangladesh, covering the period from 1947 to 1990.
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**Introduction**

Bangladesh is coming into being in a double sense. On one hand, it is becoming Bangladeshi through forging its singular and individual national identity. On the other hand, as the conventional descriptions of Bangladesh as a “developing,” “democratizing,” and “modernizing” country suggest, the country is also becoming modern. It would be evident to any attentive observer that these dual processes of becoming have significantly impacted political dynamics and discourses in Bangladesh. There are intense debates, struggles, and anxieties in the country regarding what it means to be Bangladeshi and about the prospects of becoming developed, democratic, and modern. An understanding of Bangladeshi politics would be greatly enhanced by understanding the debates, struggles, anxieties, as well as the excitements and hopes that these two processes of becoming have generated. This dissertation project is motivated by the desire to produce such an understanding of Bangladeshi politics. The question at the heart of this dissertation project asks how people in Bangladesh experience and think about the processes of becoming Bangladeshi and modern, which give rise to number of other questions – how do these two processes of becoming relate to and structure each other? What kinds of subjectivities and modes of thinking do these processes of becoming produce? What does it mean to think from a subject position located in a space that is experiencing these two processes of becoming?

I believe that one of the ways to answer these questions would be to focus our analytical lens on the domain of thought, particularly of political thought. The underlying assumption here is that certain historically contingent political dynamics of a particular place generate, enable, and shape the specific character of political thought in that place. Conversely, an examination of political thought of a particular place will yield an understanding of how complex political processes and developments are being experienced, thought through, and theorized within that space. By political thought we should, however, think not merely of a body of thoughts about politics but also of thoughts that themselves are political. Efforts to discern and describe political thought must also involve theorizing “the political.”
To do so, the dissertation must grapple with the question of how politics has been and is being understood in a place like Bangladesh. To what degree are the Western concepts of politics translatable in Bengali? What conceptions of “the political” are contained within the vernacular terminologies associated with politics? In what ways the political may or may not be distinguished from the moral, ethical, or even the economic? These questions cannot be answered a priori. Rather, they must be informed by a reading of Bangladeshi political thought.

Following Sudipta Kaviraj (2010), I want to argue that we should conceptualize political thought in contemporary non-Western settings like Bangladesh through three vectors. First, there are the ideas and thoughts that result from the multiple different ways non-Western subjects have and continue to encounter and respond to modern Western ideas and thoughts. These encounters have been facilitated and shaped, most significantly, by discourses and practices of colonialism. In the post-colonial era these the encounters continue through discourses such as modernization, development, globalization, and, most recently, global war on terror. These encounters have structured political thought in non-Western countries in such ways that they inexorably exhibit engagements Western ideas and schools of thought, liberalism and Marxism being most influential among them. The second vector concerns the pre-modern traditions of political thinking, which in the Bangladeshi context includes but is not limited to both Vedic/Sanskrit and Islamic traditions. Though the colonial encounter has produced major raptures and loss of these traditions, they have not been completely obliterated and, thus, continue to inform contemporary political concerns. Moreover, there have been efforts to rediscover and reimagine these traditions both as sources of national identity and as critical alternatives to modern ideas. The third vector concerns the ideas and thoughts that have been produced in response to the political imperatives and struggles of the day. As suggested earlier, the most important political and intellectual challenge for contemporary Bangladesh has been to imagine the nation; that is, to articulate the identity and boundaries of the sovereign and legitimacy-producing political community.
Perhaps, equally important has been the concern with becoming modern through constructing social, political, and economic structures that have come to define modernity.

These two concerns – imagining the nation and becoming modern – produce particular tensions that are specific to the post-colonial context. Anti-colonial nationalism is often constructed in opposition to colonial modernity and perhaps modernity as such. While modernization is pursued as a strategic choice to survive under colonial modernity, to legitimize claims of self-determination or to overcome “backwardness,” modernity itself is seen to be external to the “essential” self of the emerging nations.¹ The challenge for post-colonial nationalism then is to articulate a particular national identity – to give content to the form of the nation – that is modern yet sufficiently differentiated from Western modernity. Non-Western political thought, thus, imagines the nation through reinvention not only of “tradition” but also of “modernity” and doing so opens up possibilities for recognizing multiple modernities.²

The contestations over and the negotiations between becoming modern and constructing a particular national identity are not unique to Bangladesh; most post-colonial countries go through similar experiences. However, this dissertation will not seek to study Bangladesh as a representative case. Rather, the dissertation will argue that Bangladeshi thought contains and exhibits certain qualities that are specific, if not unique to Bangladesh. This claim rests on the particular political history of the country. Bangladesh is one of the few post-colonial states that emerged not through an anti-colonial struggle against a European power but through a war of secession against another post-colonial state. In a sense, the nation was twice born – first as Pakistan, then as Bangladesh. This double birth occurred within a span of a generation; at times the same people, who fought for Pakistan based on a

¹ Borrowing from Partha Chatterjee’s discussion in Nations and its Fragments (1993). Chatterjee sees the colonized space to be divided into ‘outside’ material world and ‘inner’ spiritual/cultural world. While being outside necessitates modernization, the ‘inner’ is imagined as the “essential marks of cultural identity” and, thus, a foundation of nationalist imagination. See also Kaviraj’s (2010) discussion of how anti colonial “we” or the nation was imagined negatively in relation to the colonizer.

² For arguments in favor of multiple modernities see, for example, the essays collected in Eisenstadt 2002. Devji’s (2007) notion of “apologetic modernity” can also help us think about the ways singularity of modernity have been challenged.
Muslim claims to nationhood, were engaged in the construction of a new national identity based on ethno-linguistic, i.e., Bengali claims to a nation. Yet, the Muslim claims to the nation do not simply disappear; they continue to exasperate the problems of articulating the new nation. Having once been part of India and Pakistan, Bangladeshi nationalism has to articulate an identity that is sufficiently different from both Pakistan and India. In efforts to do so, the dissertation will argue, Bangladeshi nationalism is also producing a political logic that is unprecedented in South Asia; political ideas in Bangladesh are not simply variants of Indian or Pakistani Ideas but exhibit its own identity and character. While Bengali intellectuals were at the forefront of elaborating anti-colonial Indian nationalism, Bengali-Muslim intellectuals’ affinities towards the idea of Pakistan were wavering. Nevertheless, East Bengal became a part of Pakistan and was subjected to systematic program of Pakistani nationalism. It will be insightful to examine the kind of argumentations and forms of reasoning advanced to resist Pakistani nationalism and to eventually advance Bangladeshi nationalism. In what ways Bangladeshi nationalism appealed to the idea of Bengali culture but also distinguished itself from West Bengal and for that matter from India? What role did Muslim identity play in these processes? In Bangladesh’s quest for modernization and development, did it see India as a model? Or, did Bangladesh seek to articulate a different vision of modernity and development out of the imperative to establish a unique national identity? I hope that examining intellectual history and political thought of Bangladesh will advance some fruitful answers to these questions.

A focus on political thought is, of course, only one of the many possible approaches. Investigations of political thought, even when conceived broadly, will necessarily privilege certain modes of inquiry while ignoring or being silent on others. Moreover, it will be foolish to suggest that Bangladeshis are concerned only with the problems of modernity and identity formation or that they are trying to make sense of their experiences through these categories only. It may be possible to construct an entirely different narrative of Bangladeshi intellectual history form what is anticipated in this dissertation proposal. There may exist important thinkers and schools of thoughts that cannot be
arrested within the over-determined categories of modernity, national identity, and politics. The dissertation must be willing to problematize and rethink its narrative in light of such possibilities, especially because we do not want to think of Third World subjects as only perpetual consumers of modernity. Even more importantly we do not want to dismiss the possibilities of discovering original thought by approaching Bangladeshi thought world as a derivative of Western discourses. However, we must also acknowledge how Bangladeshi subjects’ abilities to act and think have been conditioned by specific historical experiences and encounters, where the problems of becoming modern and constructing a national identity constitute dominant themes. In this dissertation I do not seek to provide a definitive or a comprehensive account of the experiences and subjectivities in Bangladesh. However, I hope that my partial account of the experiences of becoming as reflected in Bangladeshi political thought will, nevertheless, provide an insightful account of Bangladeshi experience and will inspire and make possible future investigations that will fill the gap.
Relevance of the Dissertation to Concerns of Various Fields of Studies

This dissertation is informed by and seeks to enter into a dialogue with a body of literature that traverses multiple disciplinary boundaries and fields of studies including political theory, comparative politics, history, and literary criticism. On the theoretical level the dissertation will engage with literature on political theory, postcolonial theories, non-Western political thought, modernity, modernization, and national identity. In order to provide the appropriate context, the dissertation will also engage with studies in South Asian intellectual history, as well with analyses of politics, history, economy, culture, and identity of Bangladesh and in South Asia. I have created an extensive bibliography of relevant literature, divided into thematic categories. Following is a brief discussion of how the dissertation relates to this extensive literature.

As this is a political theory dissertation, it is located within the vibrant discussions and debates about what is or should be political theory or what it means to do political theory.\(^3\) While a significant portion of political theorists have chosen to study history of political thought or intellectual history in general as their vocation, they have differed greatly as to how to read texts, understand contexts, construct history of ideas, or analyze political discourses. The debates and tensions have often proved to be productive and have opened up innovative ways of doing political theory.\(^4\) Over the last few decades postcolonial theories have contributed immensely to this productive tension by advancing critiques of Eurocentrism of modern social and political theories. Postcolonial critiques have deconstructed the ways post-enlightenment European thought have produced the categories of the West and its various others, have claimed universal significance and validity for modern social and political theories despite emanating from the particular and “provincial” experiences and subject-locations of Western thinkers, have denied agency of non-Westerners as thinking subjects, and excluded non-


Western thought form the canons of modern social and political theories. Postcolonial critiques have also advanced ways to analyze how politics, subjectivity, and thought of both the colonized and the colonizer have been structured by colonial encounters and exigencies of imperialism. However, some scholars have deemphasized the centrality of colonial encounters and have focused, instead, on travels, friendship, and other encounters for explaining global circulations of ideas and emergence of cosmopolitan thought-zones and theories. The effects of both the postcolonial critiques and the efforts to theorize cosmopolitan thought, however, have been positive for the study of non-western thought and have inspired number of studies on Arab, Muslim, and Indian thought and intellectual history that break with the orientalist practice of treating non-Western thought either as exotic other or as vestiges of dying past. Some scholars have also intervened in the field of political theory by opening up the question of what it means to theorize form non-Western locations. Many of these scholars have argued that non-Western, particularly post-colonial, settings produce significantly different field of politics and, thus, study of non-Western political thought and action may generate different theoretical insights form those coming out of Western context. This dissertation is informed by and critically engages with the literature that have sought to make room for study of non-Western thought within the filed of political theory and have produced political theory informed by study of post-colonial politics.

By interrogating the possibilities of becoming modern, this dissertation engages with some of the major arguments about modernity and modernization advanced by classic and contemporary texts. Classic texts of 19th and early 20th century philosophy and social theory – exemplified by works of Baudelaire, Tocqueville, Marx, Tonnies, Durkheim, Simmel, Weber, etc. – exercise inescapable

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influence by providing the categories for distinguishing between “old” and the “new,” through which we still continue to think about and theorize the modern. Our conceptions of modernity are also indebted to mid 20th century philosophers like Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno and other Critical Theorists. This dissertation, however, is most directly engaged with discussions about modernity (and post-modernity) carried out by philosophers, historians, sociologists, and cultural critics over the last three decades. Here again, critiques of Eurocentric conceptions of modernity advanced by postcolonial theories and other critics productively problematize the idea of a singular modernity and advance persuasive arguments about alternative and multiple modernities in efforts to capture and theorize experiences of modernity outside the West. Though modernity and modernization have come to occupy different discursive fields within Western academia, in the post-colonial context these distinctions have been less clear, where discussions of modernization and development are inseparable from discussions of modernity. Thus, the dissertation also engages with theories of modernization and development, with particular emphasis on “post-development theories” that have come to challenge the hegemony of development discourses in the Third world and have opened up new possibilities for appreciating the social forms and practices of the so-called “underdeveloped.”

By inquiring about the construction of the particular Bangladeshi identity space, the dissertation engages with the literature regarding nations, nationalism, and identity formation. Though nations have been foundational for modern politics, it had remained relatively under studied and theorized till recently. The burst of scholarship in the 1980s and 1990s has produced differing and provocative

theories about what nations are and how they come about.\textsuperscript{15} Again, postcolonial critiques have been immensely productive by challenging the supposed modular and universal forms of the nation and the process of national identity formation and by arguing that the post-colonial/non-Western nations are imagined and produced much differently than their European counterparts. These critiques, many of them advanced through studies of national identity and nationalist thoughts in South Asia, have produced fruitful theoretical and analytical approaches for thinking about nations and national identity.\textsuperscript{16}

The field of intellectual history of South Asia has come a long way over the last three decades, in part due to the spaces opened up postcolonial critiques. Works of intellectual history have ranged from hermeneutic engagements with texts of prominent intellectuals and thinkers to more complex engagements with the context, social history, and discourse that constitute and express general intellectual tendencies and modes of thought. Many of these studies of intellectual history have been carried out in efforts to analyze and theorize modernity and identity in the non-West, while some have specifically sought to catalog and theorize political thought. This dissertation is informed by and seeks to contribute to this growing body of literature. More specifically, this dissertation engages directly with the studies concerning Muslim identity in South Asia, Pakistani nationalism, and Bengali culture.\textsuperscript{17} These studies are especially relevant for contextualizing the dissertation given Bangladesh’s history of the double birth and the importance of both Bengali and Muslim identities for the formation of modern Bangladeshi identity. However, East Bengal and its people figure marginally in these narratives of Bengali culture or Muslim nation. The few studies that deal with intellectual histories of East Bengal and Bengali Muslims remain focused on the colonial period of 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th}

\textsuperscript{17}Please see the section titled “Intellectual History, History of Political Thought, and Discourse Analysis: Colonial Bengal, Muslims in South Asia, and Pakistan” in the bibliography for relevant literature.
Given the relative lack of focus on East Bengal and on the post-colonial period of the second half of the 20th century, a formative period for Bangladeshi thought world, Bangladeshi subjects remain conspicuously absent in the discussions of South Asian intellectual history.

There have been some very interesting and insightful studies that deal with the thought-world and subjectivities of post 1947 East Bengal/East Pakistan/Bangladesh. However, they do not quite aim to take up the kind of analysis proposed in this dissertation. For example, Alam (2014), Dasgupta (2012), and Sartori (2007) provide analyses of certain texts or aspects of thought of individual authors/thinkers only. Raju (2014), though has a larger canvas and deals with the broader questions of modernity and identity, limits his analysis to cinematic texts only. Murshid (1996), Samaddar (2002), and Uddin (2006) analyze broad range of texts and discourses with specific focus on identity and politics. However, the scopes of their analyses span both colonial and post-colonial periods and much of their primary investigations remain focused on late 19th and early 20th century. Though Hasan’s study (2007) of intellectual practices in East Bengal during the period from 1947 to 1970 is comprehensive and even encyclopedic, it does not extend to post-independent Bangladesh or specifically treat political thought as an object of analysis. The studies mentioned above have certainly informed my thinking about Bangladeshi intellectual history and will be important references for the proposed dissertation. However, they remain limited for various reasons, most notably for their lack of systematic focus on political thought, which the proposed dissertation will seek to overcome.

And finally, a study of intellectual history and analysis of political thought must also be informed by analyses of history and politics. As such, the dissertation will also undertake a close reading of a substantial literature on political and social history of Bangladesh and South Asia.19 Particular emphasis will be placed on the literature that deals with social history of Bengali Muslims.

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19 Please refer to the sections in the bibliography titled “Bangladesh: History, Politics, Economy, Culture, and Identity” and “Bangladesh in the South Asian contexts” for lists of relevant literature.
and formation Bangladeshi identity. Also important will be the literature on the two seminal events of Bangladesh’s political history – the Partition of British India in 1947 and the War of Independence in 1971. Furthermore, the dissertation will be informed by the literature that analyzes the characters of states, societies, political cultures and political movements in both Pakistani and Bangladeshi contexts. These various literature, particularly those coming out of Bangladeshi Academia, will certainly help contextualize the analysis pursued in the dissertation and may even constitute the very object of analysis, as reflections by Bangladeshi academics may be considered as expressions of Bangladeshi political thought.
Proposed Argument for the dissertation

The primary task of the project will be to identify the specific, though not necessarily exclusive, character of Bangladeshi political thought by analyzing the general atmosphere, trends, and dominant concerns and themes in Bangladeshi political thought. In doing so the dissertation will argue that Bangladesh’s thought-world, intellectual tendencies, and political discourses are conditioned by its specific encounters with modernity and by the specific history of nationalism in Bangladesh. Bangladeshi thought-world and political-intellectual discourses are necessarily engaged with modern Western discourses but are neither reducible to nor wholly determined by them. In this space of negotiation between modernity and Bangladeshi identity lays the possibility of recovering Bangladeshi subjectivity and distinct body of political thought. The term “negotiation” is employed here deliberately to capture a process that is different from a simple contestation between Western modernity and some essential notion of Bangladeshi-ness. Rather, the negotiation between modernity and Bangladeshi identity involves adoption, appropriation, and reinvention not only of “Modernity” but also of “tradition” and “identity.” This negotiation, I would like to argue, produce a modernity that is stamped with specific Bangladeshi national identity, which itself is a modern invention.

Research Design

Approach

Thoughts as such cannot be accessed. One may be able to infer thought from their embodiment in “texts”. Conventional approaches to analysis of thought take the form of intellectual history based on textual exegeses of prominent, and sometimes lesser-known, intellectual figures. The emphasis here is on hermeneutic analysis that, on the one hand, seeks to investigate the logical integrity, coherence, and clarity of the texts and, on the other hand, seeks to locate the text and the author in local and global traditions of thinking. This approach will be centrally employed in the proposed dissertation. However, As Quentin Skinner (2002) and others have argued, emergence of certain political questions, debates,
and ideas in a certain place and a time must be analyzed with reference to the specific political life and
the social, historical, and discursive contexts. Moreover, As number of South Asian scholars such as
Parekh (1992), Kaviraj (2010), Guha (2011) and Nigam (2013) have argued, political thought in the
non-Western setting is produced not so much as self-contained object of analysis by specialized
academics or philosophers but more so as practical and normative ideas by statesmen, political activists,
leaders, creative writers, and public intellectuals. Engagements with broader political history and social
history of intellectuals are, thus, necessary in order to not only to contextualize thought but also to
access them in the first place.

**Methodology: Study of Primary and Secondary Texts and Analysis of Ethnographic evidence**

The principle task of the dissertation will be to analyze the thoughts of a few select prominent
and influential political and intellectual personalities by examining a set of “primary texts.” The
primary texts will include published and unpublished writings such as monographs, essays, magazine
and newspaper articles, memoirs, autobiographies, entries in personal diaries etc. The primary texts
will also include public speeches of the selected persons. Various organizational and official
documents produced by the selected persons, such as party programs, manifestos, constitutional
principles, and governmental policy initiatives, will also be examined as primary texts. These texts
may be obtained from libraries, bookstores, archives, and personal collections. Beyond texts, the
investigations will also consider ethnographic evidences such as interview and oral histories. As many
of the subjects of this dissertation are still alive, the research of the dissertation will immensely benefit
from formal interviews designed to address specific questions of the dissertation.

In addition to examining the textual and ethnographic evidences, the dissertation will also
examine a range of “secondary texts” in order to analyze the social and political histories of the period
under consideration. The goal here will be to analyze the general intellectual environment and political
concerns and situate the selected thinkers in the debates, discussions, and in acts of resistance and
participation in the politics of the day. Particular emphasis will be placed on the various intellectual communities, cultural and social organizations, literary societies, study circles, and *addas* in which the persons in consideration had participated. Particular attention will also be paid to the key moments of upheaval, struggle, and transformation. The “secondary texts” that will be examined to carry out these tasks will mostly consist of academic studies of Bangladesh’s history and politics. However, biographies and memoirs of persons contemporaneous of the primary subjects will also be important source materials here. Furthermore, conversations with contemporary Bangladeshi academics and intellectuals will provide not only guidance and feedback regarding my research but also information and insights that may not be available through written texts.

**Temporal and Territorial Boundaries**

Though the last two centuries of social, political, and intellectual history can legitimately claim inclusion in this dissertation project, I have chosen to restrict my primary inquires to a period of 53 years, from 1947 to 1990. Though Bangladesh as an independent state with definite territorial boundaries emerges only in 1971, we may be able to identify a “Bangladeshi” intellectual tradition that precedes the emergence of the state. Arguably, we may start from the second half of the 19th century, when Bengali as cultural identity emerges and Muslims in Bengal begin to think of themselves as Bengali Muslims. Alternatively, we may start from 1905, when we can discern a distinct and organized political interest of the people of East Bengal in the context of the first partition of Bengal. We may also start from the 1920s, which witnessed literary and cultural movements that sought to inaugurate a distinct Bengali-Muslim tradition. Finally, we may start from the early 1940s, when Bengali-Muslim identity was politically mobilized in support of Pakistan. However, I have decided to start from 1947 for two reasons. First, there exists a relatively rich and nuanced body of literature concerning intellectual history of 19th and the early 20th century Bengal. This dissertation seeks to engage with and benefit from this existing scholarship without reproducing the primary research. Instead, in this study I intend to focus on a period that has received little academic attention. Secondly
and more importantly, the partition of British India and emergence of independent Pakistan creates the territorial unit that would eventually become Bangladesh. Also, after 1947, in the context of the partition of Bengal and loosing Calcutta to India, an intellectual and cultural milieu centered around Dhaka began to take from and inaugurated the intellectual and cultural tradition that we can now call Bangladeshi.

Though the investigations of the proposed dissertation may be extended up to the present moment, I have decided on 1990 as the end point. In many ways 1990 marks the beginning of a new era in terms of global and local political developments. Globally, the end of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War marks the beginning of the supposed era of globalization, which has profoundly impacted politics in Third World countries like Bangladesh. For Bangladesh specifically, the period since the 1990s marks a different era characterized by the end of authoritarian rule and the beginning of democratic transition, a changed media landscape precipitated by the coming of satellite television and the advent of the internet, and a different economic logic brought about by the switch to free market economy. This new era, though would be very interesting to study, may require different analytical approaches and may be too proximate to include in the current investigation. Thus, the dissertation will be limited to the period between the years of 1947 and 1990 and examine texts produced in the territorial unit that has been variously called as East Bengal, East Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

**Disaggregating the Archive**

Even after arresting the archive of “Bangladeshi political thought” through territorial and temporal boundaries, we are left with the most crucial of methodological challenges regarding selection thinkers. As eluded to earlier, in Bangladesh, as in most non-Western settings, there exists no tradition of what in Western settings has come to be known as political theory. Looking for self-consciously theoretical texts in places like Bangladesh will not take us very far. On the other hand, as Aditya
Nigam has argued, post-colonial societies are over-burdened with political concerns.\textsuperscript{20} As such, every poet, novelist, playwright, or filmmaker worth the name is also a political thinker. Here, we are faced with a double-edged problem: the scarcity of texts that are ostensibly theoretical and the potentially limitless archive of texts that may be analyzed to read for inscribed political thought. However, in order to design a feasible research project appropriate for a dissertation, it will be necessary to impose certain boundaries and to determine which texts are relevant for our purposes.

After many months of contemplation, I have decided to pursue my investigations by focusing on a selected group of prominent intellectual and political personalities, who have significantly shaped political questions and concerns in the country and have profoundly influenced the thought-world in Bangladesh. In the selection I have included those political leaders, who have shaped thoughts and ideas and also those intellectuals located in the academia and in professional classes, who have influenced politics through their status as public intellectuals or through their political and social activism and interventions. However, the problem here is that formulations such as “prominent,” “significant,” “shape,” and “influence” are somewhat unquantifiable and subjective categories. Nevertheless, I have gained some ideas about how “significant” or “influential” a select thinker is through extensive reading of Bangladeshi literature and history and through my numerous conversations with analysts and observers of Bangladeshi politics and society.

By focusing on the period between 1947 and 1990, this dissertation will in effect cover three generations of thinkers and political actors. The first generation includes those who were intellectually and politically active before the creation of Pakistan and continued to be so in post-colonial Pakistan or even in independent Bangladesh. In this generation we find that many of the prominent intellectual figures were also political leaders or social activists. Many of these intellectuals were the first from

\textsuperscript{20}“It is not just that ‘politics’ becomes the key object of inquiry; rather it is that all inquiry and thought comes to be colonized by it…. in the ‘cramped space’ of colonized life, politics alone provides the space from where a challenge to the colonizers’ knowledge can be mounted…politics becomes the key issue – one that defines the oppositional character of thought of the colonized in relation to that of the colonizer. Politics comes to define not merely issues that are explicitly political but for a subject population, often comes to provide a route to thought in other domains as well – reducing all intellectual questions to questions of justice and power.” (Nigam 2013)
their rural or *mofussil* communities to acquire a “modern” education and were, perhaps, moved by certain sense of responsibilities towards their colonized and “backward” communities. Thus, many of them entered the arena of Politics, hitherto confined to the feudal nobility – the nawabs and the rajas, with ideals of political freedom and social reform. The Second generation includes those who became intellectually and politically mature and active during Pakistan period and continued on in post-independence Bangladesh. Here, we see more specialization as number of professional politicians increased due to the expanded opportunities for political participation brought about by decolonization, partition, and the birth of the state of Pakistan. Though very few of these politicians were engaged in intellectual activities, many of them nevertheless embodied or even personified powerful political ideas through their leadership of political movements and formations. Intellectuals of this generation, though became more specialized and entrenched within the academia, continued to play important public roles through their political and social activism and through providing intellectual foundations for various political movements. Lastly, the third generation includes those who became politically and intellectually active after the emergence of Bangladesh. Here, we notice further specialization as large number of political actors and intellectuals were appropriated by the bourgeoning NGO (non-governmental organizations) sector. In this generation we do not find many politicians with significant intellectual outputs and we find a very few intellectuals with significant influence on political ideas and public life. However, in this generation various NGO leaders have come to play prominent public roles and have come to exercise significant influence on political ideas, despite their ostensive technocratic and apolitical stances.

Experiences of these three generations combined represent the coming into being of modern Bengali/Bangladeshi nation – from mobilizing Bengali-Muslims in support of Pakistan, to encountering all the contradictions post-colonial Pakistan, to articulating of Bengali national identity, to leading a war of national liberation, to setting up political institutions in post-independence Bangladesh, to elaborating and also challenging the ruling ideologies of the new state. Stories of these generations
also reveal a changing political, social, and intellectual landscape and changing political engagements and ideas. However, perhaps concerns about modernity and identity provide continuous thread through which we can stich the narratives of these three generations. In this dissertation I will seek to do so by studying ideas and thoughts of political actors, social reformers, public intellectuals, academics, and NGO leaders across the three generations.

Preliminary list of thinkers and political and social actors:

**Generation 1**
1. Mohammad Akram Khan (1868-1969)
4. Abul Kalam Shamsuddin (1897-1978)
5. **Abul Mansur Ahmed (1898-1979)**
6. Abul Fazal (1903-1983)

**Generation 2**
1. Abu Jafar Samshuddin (1911-1989)
2. Abdur Razzq (1914-1999)
   a. Tajuddin Ahmad (1925 – 1975)
   b. Kamal Hossain (1937 – Present)
5. Sardar Fazlul Karim (1925-2014)
6. **Bodruddin Umar (1931 – Present)**
7. Emajuddin Ahmad (1933 – Present)
8. Sejrajul Islam Chowdhury (1936 - Present)
9. B.K. Jahangir (1936 – Present)
10. Anisuzzman (1937 - Present)
11. Jatin Sarkar (1938 – Present)

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21 Maulana Bhasani represents a special challenge for this project. Though an original and deep thinker, whose ideas and politics have inspired and influenced generations of political actors and intellectuals, his textual output is very limited and fragmentary. Speeches, interviews, and newspapers/bulletins edited by him will the primary source materials for accessing his thoughts.

22 We do not have many texts from Abddur Razzq, though *adidas* at his place and his mentorship have profoundly influenced many thinkers of the latter two generations. Would secondary sources, such as memoirs by others, suffice to capture and analyze his thoughts?

23 Sheikh Mujib presents another special challenge. Though “Mujib-bad” represents the ruling ideology of independent Bangladesh as enshrined in the constitution, it is not very clear how much credit should go to Mujib himself and how much to the Awami league’s intellectual leaders like Tazuddin Ahmed or Kamal Hossain. Also, apart from an unfinished autobiography we have only his speeches, which may have had inputs from party intellectuals and speechwriters. Yet, we cannot ignore Mujib as he has come to personify some of the most important political ideas of the country.
Generation 3:
1. Rehman Sobhan (1935 – Present)
2. Fazle Hasan Abed (1936 – Present)
3. Abdullah Abu Sayeed (1939 – Present)
4. Muhammad Yunus (1940 – Present)
5. Zafrullah Chowdhury (1941 – Present)
8. Farhad Mazhar (1947 – Present)
9. Sultana Kamal (1950 – Present)

Some Unresolved Methodological Problems

- The list is almost exclusively dominated by Bengali Muslim men; women, Hindus, and other minorities are noticeably absent. How can we tackle this problem?
- Does this list miss someone, who should obviously be included?
- The list is too long; it will not be possible to consider each thinker in depth. We will need either a mechanism for omitting some of the names from the list or a mechanism for highlighting some of the thinkers more than the others.
  - Would it make sense to get rid of the entire generation 3 and bring Ahmed Sofa to generation 2 given that his intellectual activities had actually began before 1971?
  - Or, can we some how justify focusing only on the 7 individuals whose name has been highlighted in bold?
- Which of the thinkers should be interviewed? What may be some of the interview questions? What will be the format of the interview?
Chapter Outline

Some notes on the chapter outline

- Of the six substantial chapters after introduction, the first one (Chapter 2) will be based on review and analysis of literature from relevant academic fields. Chapters 3 and 4 will combine both original research and review of secondary literature. Chapters 5 through 7 will be the most original contribution of the project.
- The outlines for the first four chapters are well defined as I have extensively reviewed and engaged with the relevant literature. The actual dissertation will closely follow the outlines.
- The outlines for chapters 5 through 7 are provisional, provided here mostly as place holders and as guide to research and writing. I anticipate that they will substantially change over the course of writing this dissertation.

Chapter 1: Introduction
1. The question/problem of the dissertation; Why pursue such a research?
2. The Argument of the dissertation
3. The design of the study and methodological concerns
4. Preview of the chapters to follow

Chapter 2: Theoretical and Methodological Concerns
1. Political Theory, Intellectual History, Postcolonial Critiques, and Non-Western (Political) Thought
2. Modernity, Modernization, and Development in Post-colonial Contexts
3. Identity, Nation, and Nationalism in the Post-colonies

Chapter 3: Locating Political Thought in Bangladesh
Who are in charge of elaborating ideas, particularly political ideas, for society? What are the different spaces, mediums, and mechanisms through which ideas are elaborated and transmitted? When and how the “intellectual” emerges as an identifiable category? What are their class and other sociological locations? How has the landscape changed within which the intellectual operate? How have the expansions of literacy, higher education, global connectivity, etc. changed the intellectual landscape? These are some of the questions that this chapter will try to answer.

1. Theorizing the Intellectual and the political
   a. The figure of intellectual
   b. Intellectual’s authority to elaborate political visions and to lead political struggles/movements/reforms
      i. Dependent upon nature of “political society”, state, and class composition
   c. Intellectuals = Civil society (?)
      i. Political role of civil society in BD; especially given the rise of NGOs and discovery of “civil society” as the panacea for the challenges of “good governance
   d. Religious Leaders/scholars as political and social theorists (?)

2. Genealogy of “Bangladeshi Political Thought”: 1857 – 1947
   a. Rise of modern Bengali cultural identity – second half of 19th century
   b. Muslim Modernism – second half of 19th century
c. Bengali Muslim Identity – 1905 to 1940
   i. Partition of Bengal and Swadeshi Movement
   ii. Bengali Muslim Modernism of 1920s and 30s
      1. Kazi Nazrul Islam and world of Shamyabadi
      2. Muslim Shahitya Samaj, Budhir Mukki, Shikha etc.
   iii. Dhaka University and new locus of intellectual activity

d. Bengali Muslims in the context of Pakistan Movement
   i. Mobilization for Pakistan - East Pakistan Renaissance Society
   ii. Resistance to Pakistan and Partition – Hashim-Bose Pact; Humayun Kabir, Syed Mujtaba Ali, etc.

e. Left-wing, Radical, and Communist ideas in pre-partition Bengal
   i. Anushilan, Jugantor Etc.
   ii. Communist Party of India – M.N. Roy and Mujjafar Ahmad
   iii. Bengali Muslim Intellectuals and the Communist Party

   a. An outline of political history
   b. Analysis of Social Character – class composition, literacy, urbanization etc.
   c. Some social/cultural/political organizations
   d. Important publications
   e. General intellectual concerns and trends
   iv. Story of three generations

Chapter 4: Intellectual-Political Biography of Select Thinkers

Chapter 5: Forging a national identity

1. Construction of Identity as a major political-intellectual challenge (?)
   a. Which of the thinkers deal with it? Who doesn’t? Who dismisses it?

2. Bengali and Muslim: Crosscutting or competing sources of identity?
   a. Marginalized within both Bengali and Muslim identities
      i. Class and caste origins
      ii. Victims, oppressed, backward OR emerging
   b. Bengali-Muslim as the foundation of Bangladeshi nationalism (?)

3. First Birth: Pakistan
   a. The promise and failure of Pakistan and of the idea of “Pak-Bangla”
   b. Partition of Bengal as a source of identity crisis
      i. Loss and Reconstitution of Bengali Cultural Identity

4. Second Birth: Bangladesh
   a. The problems and possibilities for imaging a Bengali nation
   b. Imagining the “nation as secular” and “secularism” as a source of national identity
   c. Continued presence of Islam as a source of identity
   d. Bengali vs. Bangladeshi debate

5. The “Others” of the Bengali-Muslim Nation
   a. Hindus
b. Indigenous groups as “sub-national” or “tribal
6. Women in the imagination of the nation (?)

Chapter 6: Visions, Aspirations, and Imperatives of Modernity and Modernization
This chapter will deal with the question of what visions of modernity have emerged in Bangladesh. How has the category of modern shaped certain discourses?

1. Modernity as a major political-intellectual challenge (?)
   a. Which of the thinkers deal with it? Who doesn’t? Who dismisses it?

2. Conceptions of Modernity and Modernization
   a. Modernity as alien other/foreign
   b. Modernity as an aspiration
      i. Modern education, rationalist thought, and challenging “tradition”
      ii. Social reform as intellectual and political responsibility
   c. Modernity as an imperative
      i. Economic development, survival

3. Modernization of the post-colonial state and politics
   a. Sovereignty
      i. Independence, Anti-colonial, Anti-imperial
   b. Freedom and Equality
      i. Liberalism and Socialism
   c. Democracy
   d. Secularism

4. Modernization as the raison d’état of the post-colonial State (Governmentality?)
   a. Economic Development
   b. State interventions in society
      i. Education
      ii. Gender relation
      iii. Health
      iv. Population

5. NGOs as agents of economic development, social reform, and modernization
   a. Politics of anti-politics

Chapter 7: Of Becoming: Negotiating Identity and Modernity (Conclusion)

1. On Becoming: Perpetual change and never looking back (Faust) vs. Achieving a teleological end (Hegel)
   a. Conceptions of history and progress

2. Negotiating identity and modernity

3. A frame for approaching contemporary Bangladeshi politics and political subjectivity
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Modernity, Modernization, and Development


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**Nation, Nationalism, Identity, and Difference (in South Asia)**


Intellectual History, History of Political Thought, and Discourse Analysis: Colonial

Bengal, Muslims in South Asia, and Pakistan


Intellectual History, History of Political Thought, and Discourse Analysis: East Bengal, Bengali Muslims, and Bangladesh


Bangladesh: History, Politics, Economy, Culture, and Identity


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Bangladesh in the South Asian (Indian and Pakistani) context


