CANADA 150
CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS
Migration of *Bengalis*

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Editors

Canada 150 Conference Proceedings: Migration of Bengalis

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HABIBA ZAMAN AND SANZIDA HABIB

INTRODUCTION: CANADA 150 CONFERENCE ON MIGRATION OF BENGALIS

1. BACKGROUND

The Canada 150 Conference on Migration of Bengalis was triggered by our academic as well as personal desires to establish broadly the history of migration of Bengalis[1] or *Bangla*-speaking people to Canada. As long-time researchers on Asian immigrants in Canada, and through our involvement in the Metropolis Research Project, we realized that there was hardly any published material on Canadian Bengalis. Therefore, in 2017, on the eve of Canada's 150th anniversary, we took the opportunity to celebrate and document the history and contemporary trends of Bengali immigrants in Canada.

Migration of the streams of Bengalis (those who speak *Bangla* as their native language) to Canada happens mainly from two sources: Bangladesh and West Bengal[2] (India). As will become evident from essays in these conference proceedings, Bengalis have been settling in Canada since at least the 1950s. However, no statistics on Bengali migration to Canada are available even today, because Statistic Canada counts Bengalis under the "South Asian" category, which includes many ethnic and linguistic groups and nationalities. Early migration of Bengalis to Canada in the 1950s was largely from West Bengal. Migration of Bengalis from Bangladesh began following the devastating war and independence of Bangladesh in 1971. In recent years, many Bengalis, particularly from Bangladesh, have made their homes in Canada in major cities such as Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, Calgary, and Vancouver. Of late, Vancouver, British Columbia has become a major destination for Bengali immigrants as it is a major entry point from Asia.

A key objective of the conference was to document the history and settlement patterns of Bengalis in Canada and their contributions, particularly as regards the Bengalis in British Columbia. As we find today, the Bengalis from West Bengal are typically doctors, engineers, professors, IT experts, teachers, and so on. Many of them have been living in the Greater Vancouver area for over 40 years. They are professionals and thus, according to

[1] This term is an anglicized version of *Bangla* used during the British rule, which continues even today. Those who speak *Bangla* as their mother tongue are known as Bengalis.

[2] In August 2016, the West Bengal Legislative Assembly passed a resolution changing the name of West Bengal to "Bangal" in Hindi, "Bengal" in English, and "Bangla" in Bengali.

Canada Immigration and Citizenship (CIC), skilled/economic immigrants. On the other hand, Bengalis from Bangladesh work in diverse professional and service sectors – as engineers, doctors, professors, taxi drivers, chefs, healthcare workers, frontline service providers, small business owners (e.g., ethnic shops/business), and so on – although most of them enter Canada as skilled/economic immigrants.

Despite differences in their nationalities and origins, Bengali as a language binds these two immigrant groups together. They get together for various social and cultural events, and often jointly host and collaborate in celebrating major events, such as the Tagore festival and International Mother Language Day (IMLD), which was promoted by Bangladeshis living in Vancouver and officially proclaimed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1999 to respect and preserve minority languages, including the languages of the Indigenous/First Nations people of Canada. In Vancouver, the Bengalis from Bangladesh and those from West Bengal have their own associations – for example, the Greater Vancouver Bangladesh Cultural Association (GVBCA) and the Lower Mainland Bengali Cultural Association (LMBCA).

2. THE CONFERENCE

The two-day (16-17 September 2017) Conference on Migration of Bengalis to Canada/British Columbia was held at Simon Fraser University (SFU) Harbour Centre in downtown Vancouver and the University of British Columbia (UBC) main campus. Day 1 (16 September 2017) of the conference was held at SFU Harbour Centre. The program included a keynote speech by a guest speaker from Ontario and presentation of papers by invited speakers.[3] Day 2 (17 September 2017) at the UBC Institute of Asian Research began with a keynote speech by a guest speaker from Manitoba, but was largely focused on presentations by second generation Canadian Bengalis. Further, two round table forums were held in the afternoon, where community practitioners, service providers, frontline workers, community leaders, and community members spoke and narrated their experience as immigrants, including opportunities and difficulties encountered in their settlement process. The conference was free of charge and open to the public so that greater community participation could be achieved.

The conference brought together a large number of speakers, participants, and attendees who debated the history of Bengali migration, projected future growth and potential of Canadian Bengalis' settlement in Canada, and shared knowledge as well as personal and collective experiences. The Department of Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies (GSWS)/SFU, and the Centre for India and South Asia Research (CISAR)/UBC jointly sponsored the conference, which was conducted in English, and as a result, it attracted academics, researchers, graduate students, and participants interested in migration/immigration studies. Due to the nature of the topic, the conference was attended not only by Bengali-speaking people living in BC's Lower Mainland and on Vancouver

[3] The full Conference Program can be found in Appendix 2.

Island, but also by Bengali-speaking scholars from the Ottawa Capital Region, Ontario, as well as Manitoba and Saskatchewan. In total, there were more than 160 participants.

The conference was organized around presentations and panels that allowed opportunities for all participants to engage in lively discussions; many shared their personal stories related to migration experience, and discussed the associated social and political contexts and the challenges of adjusting to a new life in Canada. The conference was thus a key platform for growing networks of professionals, scholars, researchers, artists, community members, and others interested in issues pertinent to migration and settlement patterns in Canada. It also facilitated a deeper perspective to look beneath the surface of settlement programs and to learn from the diversity of experiences that participants brought to the conference. Feedback from the conference was very encouraging; participants greatly enjoyed the opportunity to interact with like-minded people, and the chance to network, explore ideas, and learn from each other. Looking back, it seems impossible to summarize the enriching thoughts that were shared over these two days.

3. DAY 1 AT SFU HARBOUR CENTRE

The program for Day 1 began with a short welcoming speech by the conference organizers along with due acknowledgement that the conference was taking place on the ancestral and unceded territory of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. This was followed by opening remarks by Jane Pulkingham, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, SFU. In her remarks, Dean Pulkingham acknowledged the significant role universities and academia play in listening to what communities can reveal about the diversity of experiences in Canada. She further noted that the Social Sciences and Humanities play a particularly important role, as they can provide insights into the root causes of migration as well as the cultural, historical, economic, and social barriers to integration.

The Day 1 program consisted of four sessions. Session I was chaired by Lara Campbell, Chair of the Department of Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies (GSWS)/SFU, who introduced the keynote speaker, Tania Das Gupta of York University. In her speech, Das Gupta addressed the increasing ethnic and racial diversity of migration to Canada, the reality of political, legal, social, and economic mechanisms, and how racialized immigrant communities, and in particular Canadian Bengalis, have become the targets in internal and external disputes about national identity. Through her research-based lecture, Das Gupta demonstrated how the Canadian Bengali community experiences xenophobia that is frequently downplayed and sometimes denied by the Canadian state and society. Racism and xenophobia are distinct phenomena, although they often overlap. While racism generally implies distinction based on difference in physical features, such as skin colour, xenophobia is rooted in the perception that the other is alien or originates from outside the mainstream community or Canadian nation. The session continued with an interactive and fascinating discussion in question and answer (Q&A) format on how Bengali community members see themselves as Canadians as well as how they mobilize collectively toward a common identity and share manifestations of common ancestry upon migration to Canada. Das Gupta's speech sparked a vibrant debate around the official and popular self-

understandings of the Canadian Bengali community as a particular historical, cultural, multi/mono-ethnic, and multi/mono-linguistic as well as multi/mono-national identity. These concepts stand in contradiction to the oppressive policies and practices that exclude or subordinate Bengali ethnic identities, culture, language, tradition, religious faith, and national origin.

Session II started with an opening statement by session-chair John Harris, Professor of the School of International Studies/SFU. Bidisha Ray provided an historical account with respect to transnational migration, which was very thought-provoking. Ray recounted the earliest wave of migration from the British-ruled Indian province of Bengal. The Bengalis were considered to be the original inhabitants of the Bengal region in British India. Despite the fact that the Bengalis have been historically classified as "Indian" or "East Pakistani" as their national identities, the Bengali culture in its rich and diverse way created other cultural/sub-cultural distinctions. In her presentation based on her oral history and interviews of elders in the community, Supriya Bhattacharyya provided a review of the history of Bengali migration to British Columbia from West Bengal. According to her data, professionals were the first to migrate to Canada in the 1960s. Some came to Canada for university education and later stayed and made Canada their home and created a vibrant cultural community in British Columbia. Culturally, Bengalis are indeed attached to their language, and are active in national celebrations and festivals. Narrating her story, Khaleda Banu shared her own experience of migration and settlement that demonstrated intersecting magnitudes of space, age, gender, family, motherhood, parenthood, race, and class. What stood out most was the way in which she highlighted the changes that took place in her life, discussed the roles of power, privilege, and oppression, and responded to the loss of homeland, class, and network without falling into a victimhood mentality. Sanzida Habib addressed the ways in which Bengali immigrant women's health is related to their lived experiences in Canada. With particular attention to breast and cervical cancer screening, Habib suggested that in addition to factors such as age, length of stay in Canada, professional skills, and education status, systemic barriers including socio-economic hardship, unemployment, and racism play a vital role in regard to women's access to healthcare services. The Q&A section highlighted the main points raised during Session II. The floor was opened up to the participants, who raised a number of points, including the fact that we now find ourselves in a new situation – one that is characterized by the need to rethink the meaning of nationalism, long distance nationalism, settlement, resettlement, and integration. Making reference to the idea that migration could be seen as peoples' dreams and ambitions for their future, another participant suggested that community integration is not just about legislation, but also comes along with the building of relationships, trust, and understanding.

Session III was chaired by Charles Greenberg of Capilano University. Four papers were presented. In her paper, Sarika Bose explored the roles of Bengali immigrants' transnationalism and identities in shaping their settlement and integration experience. Bose pointed out that Bengali-Canadian identity was not adequately theorized in the available literature. By challenging homogenizing tendencies related to people of Bengali descent in Canada, Bose examined how Bengali-Canadian immigrant identities are formed. She acknowledged that similarities and differences among Bengalis in Canada regarding their ongoing quest for identity required that additional nuance and profundity be added to the discussion. In his presentation, Tareq Islam provided an engaging narrative about the

socio-cultural dimensions of adaptation as an immigrant student. While many theories could provide suitable frameworks for examining these, Tareq Islam's story revealed that symbolic interactionism could provide an additional valuable framework for exploring the intersections of cultural script, construction of meaning, identities, and the social adaptation of immigrants. Tareq Islam directed attention to how the loss of familiar cultural values and norms as well as the demand to integrate into the new society impacted post-immigration social adaptation, relating how he continued to strive to define an authentic "self" within his new life here in Canada. Marina Hossain's life story showcased how young people can thrive in school, at work, and in the new society despite the many obstacles they encounter. Drawing on her own experience, Marina provided the audience with a positive and engaging view of the kinds of support and resources she received, including peer networks, and strong bonds with her family, friends, and co-workers. Sharing his experience of living in Canada, Mustafa Chowdhury deftly illustrated the difference between identity (how we see ourselves) and identification (how we are perceived by others). The processes of identification and the construction of social identities became a central point in his speech. Chowdhury highlighted the sociocultural dynamics that are significant to racialized migrants by addressing the following questions: What kinds of social ties are constructed and maintained through the processes of transnational migration? Whom do these social networks include and exclude? What kinds of social identities are maintained through these networks? These questions were also addressed by critically examining institutionalized racism surrounding national and political associations.

Session IV was chaired by Bidisha Ray. Ranjan Datta's presentation demonstrated how Indigenous communities could control environmental programs through wisdom and sharing of knowledge. Datta further illustrated why land-based education is essential in creating a sustainable environment for all, and the ways in which we could advance Indigenous rights and culture with particular focus on the social, political, cultural, and environmental impacts of colonization. Iqbal Bhuiyan's paper focused on recognition of credentials and licensing in engineering, which is a highly regulated profession in Canada. Professional licenses are issued by licensing boards, and the criteria for licensing are fairly strict. Further, the costs and time related to licensing pose a significant challenge to many internationally trained engineers, resulting in unemployment and underemployment of this group of highly skilled immigrants. However, Bhuiyan offered a range of job search strategies that foreign-trained professionals could utilize to secure employment and economic stability. In their paper, Mohammad Aminul Islam and Mohammad Zaman displayed the significance of honouring mother languages in relation to peace, harmony, and multiculturalism, and explained how language plays an important role in developing and preserving cultural heritage, cultural traditions, and solidarity based on understanding and dialogue. The paper provided the background and history leading up to the recognition of International Mother Language Day in 1999 by UNESCO. Sanzida Habib and Hafizul Islam made a presentation on the history and activities of the Greater Vancouver Bangladesh Cultural Association (GVBCA) and how it is promoting cultural and linguistic diversity in BC. Finally, Chinmoy Banerjee, in his personal narrative, presented a unique approach to critically analyzing the internal and external conflicts over identity with particular attention to discourses of migration, migrant experiences, and racialized bodies, as well as history and politics of difference. What stood out the most for the audience was the way he

offered a platform to understand the relationship among multiple conflicting racial and national identities.

4. DAY 2 AT THE INSTITUTE OF ASIAN RESEARCH/UBC

Day 2 of the conference was held at UBC. Manakranta Bose, former Director of the Centre for India and South Asia Research (CISAR) and Professor Emeritus, UBC, welcomed the participants and acknowledged that the conference was being held on the traditional, ancestral, unceded territory of the Musqueam First Nation upon which UBC stands. She underscored the fact that this was the first ever conference on Bengali Migration to Canada and its importance in establishing Bengali-Canadian identity for all Bengalis in Canada.

Day 2 at UBC started with Session V chaired by Mohammad Zaman, who introduced the keynote speaker, Emdad Haque. In his speech, Haque focused on how Bengali migration and diaspora fit into the process of nation building in Canada and particularly in Manitoba. Bengali immigrants remain one of the fastest growing diaspora communities in Manitoba. He noted that Canada enjoys a diverse regional identity – including English-Canadian identity, French-Canadian identity, and Indigenous identity. Thus, immigrants' identity is also as diverse. The session continued with an enthusiastic discussion about rethinking ethnic, regional, and national identity. Haque's presentation provided a set of questions that he wanted to answer: Who are Bengalis in Canada? How have these Bengalis changed over time? How do these Bengalis differ from others? What differences exist among the Bengalis in Canada?

Session VI was dedicated to second-generation Canadian Bengalis and their identity and experience at home and beyond. Fariha Khondaker reported her own experiences as well as those of many other young women of the Bengali community in her narrative related to how the youth and second-generation Canadians of the Bengali community are struggling to reconcile their families' cultural practices with life in Canada. Khondaker described how young women like her are in the middle of a complex relationship with Canadian society, their parents, and their community. How do they deal with cultural practices to keep the balance between being independent and at the same time carrying responsibilities and expectations of unquestioning respect to family and community? Bidushy Rahman presented a thoughtful examination of the integration of Bengali youth and the complex interactions between community, language, and Bengali identity. She cited many examples of how second-generation Canadian Bengalis are reconciling their Bengali cultural roots with their lives as Canadians. For instance, they have become increasingly active participants in cultural activities, including even bigger spectacles than those that take place at their point of origin. In many cases, they achieve a stronger level of equivalence between their Canadian and cultural roots at every level – economic, professional, cultural, and linguistic – to build on rather than differentiate themselves from Canadian experience and identity. Drawing on his own experience, Maz Haque noted that although settling in a new country may feel overwhelming for adults, the struggles of children are often unnoticed. Youth face tremendous challenges related to the differences between their cultural background and the new society into which they are trying to integrate. This might create complicated situations. Parents often focus heavily on high academic achievement, and do not realize that their children are struggling socially.

Academic prosperity is obviously essential, but it is not the only factor in terms of success or quality of life in Canada. Rafia Mahzaben explored aspects of Islamic identities in multicultural Canada, arguing that Muslims, and in particular Muslim female youths, face unique challenges. They come from diverse racial, linguistic, ethnic, and national backgrounds, and their experiences of Islamic practices take place in a different setting. These diverse experiences may result in fragmentation or even conflict within their own community and Canadian society as whole. Habiba Zaman moderated the discussion that followed Session VI. Zaman underscored the need for trust and flexibility to understand the needs and struggles of youth at the family and community level. It is further noted that since second-generation Canadian Bengalis are future leaders of Canada, they need to understand how to sustain and transform their integration with respect to the added value of Bengali culture as well as Canadian values.

In addition to the six sessions, the conference organizers conducted two round table discussions with community members, leaders, and frontline workers. The discussion pointed out that prior to the Canada 150 Conference on Migration of Bengalis, there was no recorded history of Bengali migration and settlement in British Columbia. The common themes in the discussions ranged from identity, to discrimination and struggles including lack of proper accreditation and under-employment/unemployment, to barriers to becoming part of mainstream Canadian society and culture. Some coping strategies and ways out were also discussed within the context of multiculturalism, community activism, and social justice.

The conference provided a great opportunity for academic interaction and networking among participants. As the first of its kind, the conference and its proceedings will remain an invaluable source of ideas and references for those seeking to understand the history of Bengali migration in Canada. Finally, we want to express our gratitude to all participants, particularly speakers, moderators, and volunteers.

DAY 1: SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2017

Opening Remarks:

Jane Pulkingham
Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Simon Fraser University

JANE PULKINGHAM

OPENING REMARKS

Hello and good morning to you all.
I welcome you all to the Canada 150 Conference on Migration of Bengalis to Canada. As the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, I welcome all participants, including the invited speakers from York University, the University of Manitoba, the University of Saskatchewan, the University of Victoria, and the Ottawa Capital Region. I am pleased to inform you that six units of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences have sponsored this conference. These include the Departments of Gender, Sexuality and Women Studies; History; Sociology and Anthropology; Humanities; and International Studies; and the David Lam Centre. In addition, the Dean's Office has also funded the conference due to its significance in view of the Canada 150 celebration.

I understand this conference is the first ever effort to document the history, settlement patterns, and contributions of Bengali migrants in Canada. Bengalis are the seventh largest linguistic group in the world, consisting largely of *Bangla*-speaking people from Bangladesh and West Bengal, India. In Canada, unfortunately, the Census as well as academic researchers generally lump this linguistic and cultural group under one umbrella category: South Asians. Consequently, the presence and contributions of Bengalis in Canada are not visible or easily recognized.

One of the most significant markers and contributions of Bengalis in Canada – particularly in BC – is International Mother Language Day (IMLD). A group of Bengalis in Surrey, under the banner of the Mother Language Lovers of the World Society (MLLWS), initiated a move with the UN/UNESCO to establish the 21st of February as IMLD, to commemorate those who lost their lives to protect *Bangla* language and rights in 1952 in Dhaka, in what was then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). UNESCO declared IMLD in 1999 to preserve all languages, including those Indigenous languages under threat of extinction (and we have many in this province of British Columbia), and honour the rights of all people to speak and use their mother tongues. Since then, IMLD has turned into a global event calling for new awareness about linguistic rights and awareness globally. This unique contribution by Bengalis has thus strengthened our Canadian multicultural and linguistic diversity and rights.

The migration of Bengalis to Canada happened largely due to the removal of the racist immigration policies of Canada. The Immigration Act of 1976 removed racial discrimination and established a universal points system regardless of racial or geographic origin. This points system prioritized education, training, and occupational skills for selection and admission of immigrants. Consequently, Bengalis, especially those educated, trained, and skilled in their country of origin, began to migrate to Canada in the 1980s.

However, the documentation of their migration, settlement patterns, and contributions is limited. Thus, this conference will to some extent fill the gaps in the immigration literature in Canada. The publication of the Conference Proceedings in hard copy and their digitization through SFU Library will leave a footprint for this generation and the next generation of Canadians who are keen to investigate their ancestry. The conference is also expected to encourage Canadian Bengali youths to foster relationships with wider Canadian society irrespective of language, religion, race, class, gender, sexuality, age, and country of origin.

Again, I welcome you all to this important meeting of Bengalis in Canada. Enjoy the weekend here in our beautiful British Columbia!

SESSION 1

CHAIR: LARA CAMPBELL

KEYNOTE SPEECH 1:
TANIA DAS GUPTA

TANIA DAS GUPTA

"ARE YOU A BENGALI OR ARE YOU AN INDIAN?" BENGALIS IN CANADA

1. PREAMBLE

I will begin with a small personal anecdote that will explain the title of this paper: "Are you a Bengali or are you an Indian?" My mother is a retired adult educator in Toronto and had students from all ethnic backgrounds in her classes. One student once asked her, "Are you a *Bangali* or are you an Indian? Needless to say, my mother was perplexed with the question, as she was both *Bangali* and an Indian. The student who asked this question was a newcomer from Bangladesh and had assumed that since my mother was not from Bangladesh, she was not a *Bangali*, but was rather an Indian. For the student originally from Bangladesh, her national (or trans-national) identity was synonymous with her ethnic identity based in her mother tongue, *Bangla*. My mother's national identity and her ethnic identity as *Bangali* are not mutually exclusive but rather simultaneous. Which one she allies herself with at any given time depends on the context and who is asking. Among a group of Bengali-speaking people, she would identify herself as a *Bangali*, whereas among a group of people originating in India, she would identify herself as an Indian unless they were curious about her exact origin. In fact, most of the time in a mixed Indian setting, you end up identifying yourself as both a *Bangali* and an Indian.

The encounter between my mother and her student showed that even though they shared a common ethnic origin, common ethnic history up to 1947, a common language and a common culture, there are differences due to their national identities and histories of their respective nations of origin. Although we speak Bengali and trace our ethnic origins to Bengal, we may speak with different dialects; West Bengalis are predominantly Hindus, while Bangladeshis are predominantly Muslims, and this has historically been a significant issue dividing us. Nevertheless, we do have a lot in common, and it is my hope that this conference, which has brought all of us together, will help us to forge a solidarity that can be formed out of acknowledging our differences while building on our commonalities for the future. In this paper, I raise some issues around Bengali identity within the Canadian context based on secondary theoretical literature as well as a few references to Statistics Canada data.

2. WHO IS A BENGALI?

The question of identity is complex because the answer implicates not only how we identify ourselves but also how others identify us. Thus, it is both personal and externally imposed. Moreover, how we identify ourselves is very much influenced by how we see others

identifying us – how they include or exclude us. Thus, the sense of "self" and of "other" are intimately connected. When I refer to "others," I do not refer to one set of people only. "Others" could be "other Bengalis"; it could be "other Canadians"; or, it could be the Canadian/Indian and Bangladeshi states which produce identity documents, such as landed immigration papers and passports. Some states, such as Bangladesh, allow dual citizenship (although limited to certain countries), while others don't. India recognizes dual nationality but not dual citizenship (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004), which means you cannot carry two different passports as an Indian but the OCI (Overseas Citizenship of India) provides some legal and travelling privileges.

Ethnic identities (both subjective and legal) are molded by many factors, such as where our ancestors came from, where we were born, what language we speak and also a sense of imagination. Benedict Anderson (1983) wrote that a nation is an "imaginary community" so that even people who have never met each other but live in a common land share a common bond because of a belief that they share something in common. They share a sense of "being" the same. Ethnic identity can also refer to a sense of shared "beingness," a sense of shared knowledge. When I asked my mother what or who a Bengali is, she said:

Bengalis come from a land of many large rivers. As the turbulent waters rush down through the low lying plains, the water often destroys one bank and creates the other. For ages, the people of these regions have moved from bank to bank, building homes, settling to grow rice in these fertile alluvial plains. Vegetation is lush, so fruits and vegetables can be grown here and rivers yield plenty of sweet water fish. This land of rivers that we imagine in our minds has produced many songs, poetry, philosophical insights, stories and art. These have formed who we are. Apart from the rich *bhatiali* songs sung by boatmen and women, the people in these lands have enjoyed a freedom symbolized by the native culture of *Bauls* and *Boiragis* who sang about the spiritual unity of human beings, life and death, and other common experiences beyond caste and creed. Countless writers, too many to mention here, have written poems, short stories and essays. Our most well-known poets, Kobiguru Rabindranath Thakur and Kazi Nazrul Islam, also wrote about the fundamental unity of all human beings regardless of who they are, what language they speak or what religion they followed. We Bengalis are the lucky people who have inherited this great wealth of beauty, creativity and intellectual tradition.

If we deconstruct how my mother developed this sense of "being Bengali," we can probably connect it to many essays and poems she has read, to geographical and historical texts and to stories she has heard from her ancestors. Indeed, in many Bengali texts, Bengali identity is connected to the riverine geography of the place called Bengal through which flow Ganga (or Ganges) on the west, Bhramaputra on the east and Tista in the centre, all three flowing down from the top of the Himalayas in the north and emptying into the Bay of Bengal in the south. The Ganga flows along the western border of Bangladesh (the eastern border of West Bengal in India) becoming the river Hooghli in the west and the river Padma (or Podda) in the east. In Bangladesh, Bhramaputra joins the Tista River to become Jamuna. The waters of Jamuna eventually meet the Meghna River before emptying into the Bay of Bengal and forming the largest delta in the world, known as the Ganges-Bhramaputra Delta. Our ethnic identity comes from this physical and geographical place.

Academically speaking, identities are related to "being," "feeling" and "doing" (Malhi, Boon and Rogers 2009). Identity as a form of "being" refers to an essentialist or biological given, where one's identity is not questioned and is marked on the body as an

"appearance." On the other hand, "doing" an identity refers to practices associated with one's identity, such as speaking a certain language or maintaining certain food restrictions due to religion or culture, wearing a particular dress and so on. Lastly, "feeling" a certain identity refers to a private identity as opposed to a publicly assigned identity. What my mother expressed was her sense of "being," "feeling" and "doing" Bengali. However, in the context of India, West Bengalis share a sense of "being" and "feeling" Bengali as well as Indian, as my mother's perplexed reaction to her student demonstrated.

As I mentioned before, however, expressing an identity publically is very much influenced by our assigned identity. In our countries of birth, if we are members of dominant classes, castes or groups, we are unequivocally recognized as nationals. On the other hand, if we are minorities or members of subordinate classes or groups, our assigned identity may be questioned. This is true in terms of our identity here in Canada as well. Although socially and legally speaking, we who hold PR (Permanent Resident) cards or Canadian passports are all Canadians, are we seen as such by people on the streets, in our workplaces and in our schools? How does that make us feel? Do we ourselves identify as "Canadian," or do we see ourselves as set apart from "Canadians"? What do race, ethnicity and culture have to do with it? If we were white, would others feel differently about us and would we in turn feel differently about ourselves? Identities are fluid, multiple, contextual, multi-layered, relational and power-based. If I think of my own identity, I would identify myself as "Canadian" on official documents, at the border and internationally if I am travelling. I would identify myself as an Indian among Indians, as a Bengali Canadian in this room, as a South Asian Canadian among a multicultural/multiracial group of Canadians and as a South Asian woman in a multicultural group of women. Thus, the way I identify myself has a lot to do with how I see myself located in relation to others in the room, how I want to present myself to others in the room, who I want to connect with and what I want to tell them about myself. I have often wondered how I would identify myself to an Indigenous Canadian, whether I would introduce myself as "the other Indian," from the other land mass that had been encountered by another European explorer and which had subsequently been colonized by the same European colonizers, or whether I would introduce myself as a newcomer to "his" or "her" country, Canada. How would this Indigenous person view me, as a "guest" or as an "intruder"? Identity is not only "private" and "personal"; it is also social and political.

Our identity as "being" Bengali comes from a shared history. Our knowledge that Bangladeshis and West Bengali Indians have a shared and yet separate history requires us to understand British colonialism in India and the fight against it. We need to know the stories of how Bengalis came together as a group to fight British colonialism and simultaneously developed separate identities on the basis of religion and class during this process. We need to understand that, under a colonial yoke, the British were able to surely but steadily accentuate religious differences and tensions through various policies and actions. When the first Bengal Partition was orchestrated in 1905 by then Viceroy, Lord Curzon, as a central enactment of divide and rule policies, Bengalis of all religions united against it and the British were forced to remove it after six years of Bengalis fighting for freedom from it. The resistance to colonial rule was intense, incessant, complex and bloody; my generation of Indian Bengalis in post-independence India grew up with stories, songs and enactments of this resistance. The people of Bangladesh fought for freedom once again during the independence movement of 1971 and even decades before through the Bengali

language movement. Remembering this history is part of enacting our identity, thereby affirming it.

Our identity as Bengalis is deeply entwined with our mother tongue, *Bangla.* Speaking, writing and reading the Bengali language are some of the most significant ways of performing or "doing" Bengali identity. When we meet another Bengali, we can't wait to break out into speaking *Bangla.* The sound of it is music to our ears. So prized is the Bengali language to the Bengali people that when the state of West Pakistan declared Urdu to be the one and only official language of the state, students of Dhaka University openly defied the law by public protest on February 21, 1952 and got shot by police and became martyrs. Although many were killed, it catalyzed a protracted Bengali language movement until the government was forced to recognize it as an official language in 1956. It had reverberations internationally when UNESCO recognized February 21 as Mother Language Day. In 2015, BC and Manitoba officially designated February 21 as Mother Language Day and it served as a galvanizing point for many members of the Bangladeshi community in these provinces. Edmonton has also recognized the day. The establishment of *Bangla* classes as part of the heritage language programs through Boards of Education has also been important in terms of passing on the Bengali language inter-generationally.

So far, I have mentioned common ancestry in the riverine region of Bengal, a shared history of anti-colonial struggle and a shared mother tongue as being fundamental to our Bengali identity. Yet our relationship to these things is influenced by when we migrated to Canada, how old we were when we came here, whether we were born here, how often we have visited our countries of origin, the degree of transnational ties we possess and so on. Many Bengalis have inter-married with non-Bengalis and non-South Asians and have acquired a much more fluid and hybrid identity. Further, do we still identify as Bengalis if we were born here in Canada? What about if we are of mixed ethnic/racial heritage? Would we identify as Bengalis if we were not fluent in Bengali? It is for this reason that the need to preserve the "doing" of Bengali culture through various practices, most importantly speaking *Bangla,* is often fraught with tensions for parents who are raising children in diaspora. An Indian Bengali mother I was interviewing said that she makes it her business to make sure her children get a daily dose of Bengali culture. She shared:

> I make sure that I listen to Rabindra Sangeet[1] twice a day…expose children to Bengali movies and dances, even if they don't like it, some of it will register. We go to KaliBari[2] regularly…. At home I do Saraswati Puja.[3] We try to give them exposure, but their capacity to take it is limited…. We eat Indian food totally [being against fast food for health reasons], but being a Bengali, the children don't eat fish. They eat Dal-Bhhat.[4] They wear Indian clothes while visiting friends' homes or going to the Puja…. Every two years, we go to India…parents are coming…phone India every week…. We talk to the children about our family, keep them updated. Send e-mails sometimes, although phones are better. Every weekend, we meet our friends, about eight or nine families. We celebrate

[1] Songs of the Nobel prize-winning poet from Bengal, Rabindra Nath Thakur.
[2] Temple of the goddess, Kali, whose following among Bengalis is marked in a big way.
[3] Worshipping the goddess of knowledge, Saraswati.
[4] Rice and lentils, a staple diet in many parts of India and Pakistan.

> important occasions at home with friends…try and do it for them [i.e., the children].

As we can see, considerable work is being performed by this mother to inculcate Bengali Hindu values and cultural practices, i.e., performing Bengali identity and creating a sense of Bengali community for her children. Scholars (Handa 2003; Bannerji 2000; Anthias 1998) have written on how the work of maintaining ethnic identity falls squarely on the shoulders of mothers in immigrant families and adds to their workload, sometimes with negative health effects. Additionally, if the children don't internalize "Bengaliness," it is often seen as the woman's failure. Yet this kind of regimented "Bengali training" often inculcates a formulaic notion of Bengali culture, only emphasizing the performative aspect of it rather than the "feeling" part of it, and can also be exclusionary. What if someone does not "do" any of these things, for instance cannot eat fish because they are scared of the bones, cannot speak or appreciate Rabindra Sangeet and moreover is non-religious? Does that make them a "bad" Bengali? This reminds me of my daughter's experience when she approached a Bengali students' association in university with the intention of joining them. She was rejected as not qualifying for the association. Even though her mother is Bengali-speaking and she herself speaks the language haltingly, she does have a non-Bengali father and a non-Bengali last name. Thus, she did not fulfill the requirements of "being" Bengali. She was excluded.

It is interesting that when Statistics Canada asked Canadians to identify their "ethnic origin," those who marked "Bangladeshi" (a little more than 20,000) did not necessarily mark "Bengali" as an ethnicity since less than 10,000 indicated that. Additionally, it is worth noting that since there were 24,595 Bangladeshi Canadians in 2006, not everyone within the community indicated their "ethnic origin" as Bangladeshi. Presumably, those who are of multiple ethnicities may not have. Nonetheless, most Bangladeshis noted their "national identity" as their "ethnic identity," rather than their linguistic identity. Unfortunately, there is no way of knowing how West Bengalis from India responded to this question because there was no "West Bengali" category provided to tick off; West Bengali Indians are likely to have marked "East Indian" or "South Asian." Thus, the provision of certain categories by statisticians can also skew how individuals fill out Census forms. To a certain extent, it seems that Statistics Canada had conflated "national" and "ethnic identity." The charts on the next page show the results from the 2006 Census.

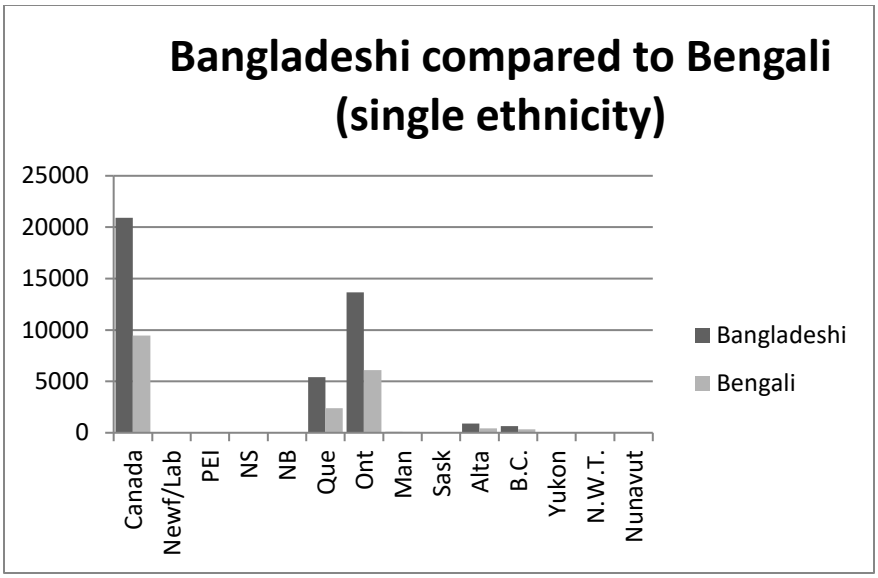

Chart 1: Number of Bengalis and Bangladeshis in Canada
Source: Statistics Canada 2006

These numbers can be contrasted with the number of "Bengali speakers". According to the 2006 Census, there were 48,075 Bengali-speaking people in Canada in that year.[5]

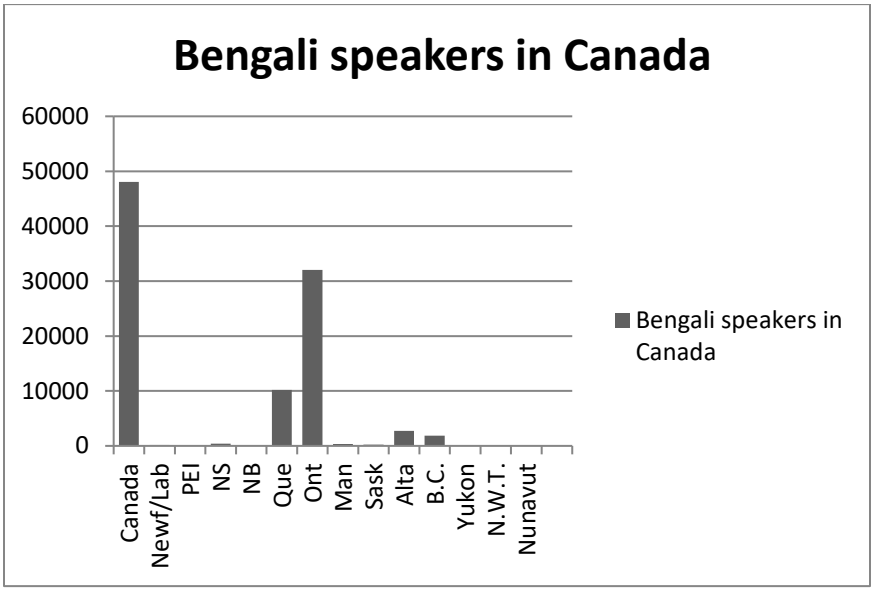

Chart 2: Number of Bengali Speakers in Canada
Source: Statistics Canada 2006

[5] More recent information from 2011 shows that the Bengali-speaking population has increased from 48,075 in 2006 to 58,895 in 2011.

Earlier, I mentioned that our identities are also informed by how we see others viewing us and treating us. Related to that, identity can also form as a reaction or resistance to negative portrayals or actions. We saw how Bengalis came together in 1905 when Lord Curzon attempted to divide Bengal. We saw how Bengalis were galvanized together when the Bengali language was marginalized in what is now Bangladesh. In a multicultural nation such as Canada, we are officially encouraged to preserve and practice our ethnic heritage and practices, but only those aspects that will be "tolerated" by the official mainstream society. In addition, we can continue our practices and speak our languages in private. In other words, they are not "official" languages as English and French are. Moreover, there is the constant saturation of racism in which non-whites are seen as the "other," juxtaposed as outsiders to "Canadians," who are read as "whites." In the post-9/11 period, religion has been added to the equation, so that if you are Muslim, as most Bangladeshis and many Indians are, you are seen not only as the "other" but also as a potential threat to the nation. How do we as non-Christians and as non-whites define ourselves within that context? How is our culture viewed within that kind of mindset?

A number of identity responses have been noted in academic studies when people are marginalized due to race, religion or class. Glick Schiller and Fouron (2001) have shown that long distance nationalism, i.e., "identification with a particular, existing state or the desire to construct a new state" (23), is nurtured when people of colour are subjected to racism abroad. Long distance nationalism was evident among Indian Bengali migrants in North America when India was still under British colonial rule. A number of young Bengali freedom fighters who had become self-exiled, along with their compatriots from other parts of India, notably Punjab, operated long distance in their quest for freedom from foreign rule. Their anti-colonial fervor and long distance nationalism was redoubled when they encountered a virulently racist environment in North America. One example of that was the enactment of the Continuous Journey Stipulation in 1908, according to which Indians (now South Asians) could land in Canada only by continuous journey rather than by touching on any other ports. Since ships did not operate through continuous journey from India to Canada, it was a roundabout way of preventing Indians from landing in Canada. Moreover, they had to pay a landing fee of $200 each, which would have been a fortune in Indian currency at that time, while European immigrants had to pay $25 each (Caron 2016; Sohi 2011).

In defiance of the Continuous Journey Stipulation, a shipload of 376 Indians on board the *Komagatamaru* (KGM),[6] mainly Sikhs, led by Gurdit Singh, arrived in Canada on May 23, 1914 (Sohi 2011) after a month-long sail from Hong Kong, but the ship was prevented from docking at the Vancouver port and its occupants denied food and water. Members from the Canadian Sikh organizations in Vancouver strategized as to how to bring the people onshore, but to no avail. Moreover, the passengers were labeled as anti-British agitators. After two months, they were forced to return back to the port in Budge Budge, near Kolkata, and there was a confrontation there with the British colonial army who had planned to send them off to Punjab. While 62 agreed to be transported to Punjab, the rest, led by Gurdit Singh, confronted the British army resulting in 20 being killed. Some managed to escape and were scattered.

[6] The KGM was one among other challenges to such immigration stipulations (Sohi 2011).

Among others, *Kabiguru* Rabindranath Thakur protested this tragedy by declining several invitations to visit Canada (Mukherjee-Reed 2011; O'Connell and Unsal n.d.). When he did visit much later, in April 1929, to address the Triennial Conference of the National Education Association, he made it a point to deliver a speech at the Gurudwara on 2nd Avenue in Vancouver to express solidarity with the Sikhs who constituted the majority of South Asians in Canada (O'Connell and Unsal n.d.). On that occasion, he said: "Canada must believe in great ideals. She will have to solve…the most difficult of all problems, the race problem" (quoted in Mukerjee-Reed 2011).[7] Sohi (2011) states that when the Indian Bengali exiles saw the racial and class inequalities heaped on the Asian diasporas as well as on African-Americans in the USA, they began to see through the hypocrisy of its stated goal of equality and fraternity.[8] They could see a global system of racism and social injustice operating in different parts of the world in tandem.

Taraknath Das was one such long distance freedom fighter in exile in the USA and, for a while, at the border in Vancouver, Canada. Sohi (2011) writes that Taraknath, originally from Kolkata and educated in what is now Bangladesh, claimed refugee status in the USA and initially worked as a labourer (as laundry assistant and then janitor) and then as a lab assistant at the University of California at Berkeley, where he also enrolled as a special student in Chemistry mentored by a professor of the Medical school (Mukherjee 1997). He also established the Indian Independence League with Sikh labourers in San Francisco and taught them English and American history so that they could pass the naturalization tests. Taraknath subsequently passed the civil service examination and was hired as an American interpreter and posted in Vancouver, BC. He informally coached Indians in Canada on their rights and advocated for those who were detained at the border. Following an anti-Asian riot in 1907, Taraknath started organizing a Hindusthani Association to fight for the rights of Sikh immigrants. It was in Vancouver also that Taraknath edited an English newspaper titled the *Free Hindusthan*, first published in April 1908 (South Asian American Digital Archive 2017). Canadian officials were made aware that exclusion of Indians would result in "revolt in India" (Mukherjee 1997). Although Taraknath was an exemplary employee, he was given a choice by his American employer to either keep his job as an interpreter or stop publishing the newspaper. He chose to quit his job and continued his educational work among Sikh labour camps in lumber mills in BC through what became known as the Millside School, near New Westminster (Mukherjee 1997).

Glick Schiller and Fouron (2001) differentiate "long distance nationalism" from the notion of "diaspora," which is a second type of response to marginalization, in which racialized communities may develop a common bond and a sense of community on the basis of having a common origin and/or being subjected to oppression, marginalization, violence or even exile but there is no desire to build a new state. A prominent theme in the literature on diaspora is that resistance to domination is essential to the development of collectivities that span geographical boundaries, for example the development of the "Black" diaspora during and after the trans-Atlantic slave trade (Gilroy 1987; Clifford 1994;

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[7] Just recently, Justin Trudeau apologized on behalf of the Canadian government to the South Asian community for the blatant act of racial exclusion in the *Komagatamaru* case (Husser 2016).

[8] I have not found any indication of their knowledge about the colonialism perpetrated on the Indigenous Peoples of North America.

Moghissi, Rahnema and Goodman 2009). In Canada, in the face of rampant "Paki bashing" on the streets and public spaces of Toronto in the early 1970s, a "South Asian" diaspora developed, bringing together immigrants whose origins lay in different countries of South Asia. This collective identity went beyond national affiliation and religion and provided an opportunity for collective organizing, creating collective structures for lobbying and for commercial pursuits. However, scholars and practitioners are divided over the contemporary salience of the term. Being "South Asian" may have shifted in recent decades in response to Islamophobia. After 9/11, Moghissi et al. (2009) have suggested a greater adherence to Muslim rather than "South Asian" affiliation among immigrants from Muslim majority countries, including Bangladesh.

Moreover, diasporic identities may silence subordinate groups within communities. Ghosh (2013), in the Canadian context, problematizes the "South Asian" identity as an externally imposed post-colonial product, which overlooks diversity among sub-national groups. Anand (2009) observes the need to hear the silenced voices within the "South Asian" diaspora. Avtar Brah (1996) adds that all diasporas are differentiated, heterogeneous, contested spaces, even as they are implicated in the construction of a common "we." Similarly, Shamita Das Gupta (1998) has pointed to geo-political tensions within the term "South Asia." Sundar (2007) confirms the challenges of building solidarity as "South Asians" in Canada. Chew (2015) refers to racism she faced as a mixed race person within the "South Asian community."

A third response to the experience of racism in an immigrant-receiving country is what Portes (2001) refers to as "reactive ethnicity," which refers to immigrants developing an accentuated ethnic identity. For example, Moghissi et al. (2009) have written about "a new enthusiasm for 'Islam' among some diaspora youth" (14). They write that this enthusiasm comes from a need for support and a sense of belonging in a climate where they are subjected to racialized exclusion and hostility. Nagra (2011) has developed the concept of "reactive identity formation" to explain increased religiosity among young Muslim youth in Canada following 9/11 as a way of responding to discrimination. Despite the great diversity among Muslims, an Islamic diaspora has developed in Canada.

A subordinate "class position" can also produce a reactive identity. Research shows that racialized immigrants who are in marginalized positions in the labour market develop a reactive transnational identity where they lack a sense of belonging in their country of residence (Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002; Leitner and Ehrkamp 2006; Portes 2010). Discrimination faced by racialized immigrants in the Canadian labour market can also contribute to such an identity. Consider some facts on Bangladeshis in the Canadian labour market and ponder whether these might shape identity. According to the 2006 National Household Survey (NHS), about 78% of Bangladeshi Canadian men and women were earning less than $30,000, which was the Low Income Cut-Off (poverty line) for a family of four. Ornstein's (2006) and Ghosh's (2007: 125-131) studies of the Toronto Census Metropolitan Authority (CMA) using 2006 data confirm what the NHS data showed. Bangladeshi men and women are highly represented in accommodation and food services, manufacturing, and retail trade (in which women surpass men), precarious sectors with low incomes and lack of unionization. Men, more than women, are present in professional, scientific and technical services, and transportation and warehousing. Women surpass men in healthcare and social assistance jobs. Overall, we can see that the distribution of occupations and jobs among Bangladeshi men and women are not only gendered but also

racialized. An intriguing finding by Ornstein (2006) is that Bangladeshi men earned an average of "$32,500 even though 19.1% are employed in professional occupations; and their income is much lower than the 'Punjabi and Sikh group,' 41.9% of whose members are in less skilled manual occupations" (53). It could be that even the professional Bangladeshi men are engaged in precarious work, marked by part-time, temporary or contract work, which could account for their low income. Akbar (2016) argues that self-employment, which involves close to 1000 men and women in the Bangladeshi community, is not only a way of coping with downward social mobility but also a place in which women can negotiate identities of gender, race, class and religion.

Some of the Bangladeshis Ghosh (2007) interviewed talked extensively about racism in the labour market, particularly Islamophobia. One person discussed his belief that when prospective employers see his Muslim name, they are apt to discount his applications. The non-recognition of education and professional degrees from Bangladesh, the resulting underemployment of professionals, and requirement for "Canadian experience" at the point of hiring have been corroborated by other studies (Ahmed 1993; Bengali Information and Employment Services 2013) and are indications of systemic racism.

3. CONCLUSION

Although Bengalis in Canada have come a long way from the days of Taraknath Das and the Continuous Journey Stipulation of 1908 in that we are granted landing status and citizenship, we are still way behind white Canadians in the labour market and in society at large due to systemic discrimination and racism. In the post-9/11 age, if you're Muslim, you are vulnerable to Islamophobia. Given this larger context, is it in our interest to see ourselves narrowly as Bengali-speaking, or even more narrowly, as Hindu Bengalis, Muslim Bengalis or Christian Bengalis, or even more narrowly by caste, sub-caste or sect, or do we identify more broadly, connecting with those who may have similar experiences and struggles, beyond the Bengali fold? Halder (2012: 290) notes that Canadian multiculturalism policy as it has been narrowly interpreted has created "'political reserves' for immigrants in Canada," in keeping with its colonial policies regarding Indigenous Peoples. Of course, it must be recognized that as they pertain to Indigenous Peoples in Canada, reserves have most significantly involved land expropriation, forced displacement and containment, whereas for racialized immigrants, "psychic reserves" have been created through the systemic proliferation of separate ethnic enclaves and rigid identities.

On the positive side, Bengali Canadians have developed tremendous cultural capital, networks, resources, skills and knowhow required to accomplish things in their own communities and home-away-from-home here in Canada, as seen in their institutionally complete neighbourhoods such as *Bangla town* in Toronto, or their transnational cultural events such as Annual Bengali conferences and *Durga Pujas,* attracting thousands. Sadly, our "community" participation has largely been on narrow religious and cultural fronts and I fear that forces are afoot globally and locally to make our horizons even narrower. Nurturing our own culture feels good, and creating community, drawing boundaries around ourselves and affirming our ethnic identity is understandable, especially in an often hostile and alienating environment, but it can simultaneously contribute to building

boundaries between ourselves and others based on region, religion, language, race, caste, class, generation and political membership that become rigid, parochial and patriarchal and reproduce inequalities and tensions. The choice is before us: do we want to stay forever as passive "outsiders within," drawing exclusionary boundaries around ourselves and celebrating our cultural lives within narrow confines, or do we want to proceed in the Bengali tradition of Taraknath Das and Rabindranath Thakur who were proud Bengalis but who utilized Bengali traditions of freedom and universalism to join others to achieve dignity and justice? I end with a few of my favorite lines from *Kabiguru* Rabindranath Thakur:

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high
Where knowledge is free
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments
By narrow domestic walls
Where words come out from the depth of truth
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way
Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit
Where the mind is led forward by thee
Into ever-widening thought and action
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

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SESSION 2

Migration and Settlement of Bengalis: History, Demography, Religion, and Health Issues

Session Chair: John Harriss

Bidisha Ray "Migration of Bengalis to Canada: An Historical Account"

Supriya Bhattacharya "Oral History of Bengali Immigrants in BC: 1960 – 2010"

Khaleda Banu "In Pursuit of Dreams"

Sanzida Habib "Bengali Immigrants: Health and Wellbeing"

BIDISHA RAY

MIGRATION OF BENGALIS TO CANADA: AN HISTORICAL ACCOUNT

I looked up at the mass of signs and stars in the night sky and laid myself open for the first time to the benign indifference of the world. (Albert Camus, *The Stranger*)

What do we mean when we say "visible minority"? Are all minorities visible and can indifference ever be benign? Internalizing the most simplified version of reality is as charming and inevitable a feature of infancy as it is toxic and anathema to consciousness in maturity. Canadian public discourse on South Asian migrants has long exhibited a penchant for blinkered simplification that distorts the complex realities of migrants and migrant cultures from the planet's most culturally diverse subcontinent. The result is a simple, ubiquitous and startlingly incorrect notion: "East Indian."

In Canada, this problematic term "East Indian" is made to stand in as shorthand for all brown-skinned migrants of non-Hispanic descent. Within this sweeping conflation of widely divergent groups, the overarching narrative of Canadian immigration from the South Asian subcontinent has been that of Punjabi migration, i.e., South Asians from the once-unified provinces of the Punjab in India and Pakistan. Migrant stories, migrant lives and by extension the legal, policy-making and wider institutional implications of immigration from South Asia to Canada have been almost entirely subsumed by this vexing equation:

South Asian = Punjabi = "East" Indian

Among the many stories lost in this double-barreled misnomer is that of Bengali or *Bangla*-phone migration. *Bangla* is the language-group typically spoken by those of Bengali descent. Thus the native Bengali's first or dominant language is *Bangla* and as a collectivity may be referred to as *Bangla*-phone. Amusingly, Bengalis are the actual "East Indians," as Bengal lies to the east of the subcontinent. A *Bangla*-phone population thus includes those from the erstwhile Bengal province, currently spread over eastern India (West Bengal) and the Republic of Bangladesh (see fig.1). Therefore *Bangla*-phone peoples include Indian and Bangladeshi Muslims and Hindus.

Figure 1: *Bangla*-phone areas in South Asia (www.indmaps.com)

Where does this group figure in the wide space occupied by South Asian immigrants in Canada? Canadian Bengalis, in recent times, have occasionally appeared in limited news coverage such as the *Globe and Mail's* censorious reportage in April 2007 of the Ontario Liberal government's gift of CAD 250,000 to the Bengali Cultural Society of Ontario in partnership with COSTI Immigrant Services, a community-based multicultural agency providing services to immigrant communities and newcomers in the province. Describing the gift as the result of "a laxly administered fund that has doled out millions of dollars to immigrant groups with no formal application process," the article refers to the Ontario recipients as a "relatively unknown" group with Liberal connections.

This paucity of Bengali Canadian visibility is a glaring gap in public knowledge on South Asian migration, especially balanced against the fact that between 2001 and 2011 alone the number of immigrants from Bangladesh to Canada increased by 110%, rising from 21,595 to 45,325 (Canadian Magazine of Immigration 2016). At the same time, however, this must be placed against the fact that Canadian Sikhs – a fraction of the total number of Canadian Punjabi migrants – account for roughly 1.4% of Canada's total population (National Household Survey 2011). The difference in these two South Asian migrant populations is striking, and it leads to a frustrating national narrative that understands migrant experience through the blunt instrumentality of numbers. While the numbers of the Punjabi immigrant community exceed that of the *Bangla*-phone community by an enormous margin, their cultural experiences and history of migration are so significantly different that to employ one category as a synecdoche for the other is

erroneous bordering on dangerous. Centuries ago, British civil servant and historian Sir John Strachey's famous Cambridge lectures warned his audience of new bureaucratic recruits that "India" was merely a label of convenience, that it was a country that contained a "multitude of different countries" and that "Scotland is more like Spain than Bengal is like the Punjab" (Stratchey 1888). The passage of time, if anything, has only heightened the diversity of that multitude.

This paper enters the discursive space of the "relatively unknown" Bengali community in Canada by tracing the history of Bengali migration. It is an early, crude and broad-brush attempt to address some of the most basic historical questions about *Bangla*-phone migrants in Canada. Who are they? Where did they come from? What motivated them? Why should anyone care? It explores the provenance of pioneering migrants from the Bengal province of British India and discusses subsequent waves of Bengali migration. In tracing the history of Bengali migration, this paper also draws out important differences between Bengali migrants and other South Asian migrants, as well as differences within the Bengali community itself. As a whole, this paper is an attempt to highlight the unique history of Bengali migrants and open up a space for more sensitive, flexible and nuanced appreciation of migration and migrants within Canada's multiculturalist framework.

STUDYING CANADIAN MIGRATION

With immigration being a key foundation of the "essence" of the Canadian nation, there is an abundance of literature on migration to Canada. For a young nation founded, problematically, on settler colonialism, being "Canadian" often invites creative logic. Mainstream scholarship is agreed on the fact that the nature of the Canadian nation and its social, economic and cultural development have been shaped by communities of immigrants settling within its vast boundaries. The historical importance of immigration to Canadian nation-building has been well documented by scholars such as Valerie Knowles (1997), Ninette Kelley and Michael Trebilcock (2000) and Gerald Tulchinsky (1994), and the deeply racialized nature of immigration policy and processes has been addressed by Vie Satzewich (1992) and Peter Ward (1978), to name a few.

A major lacuna in current understanding of how immigration has shaped Canadian society has relatively recently been addressed by Cole Harris' (1997, 2001) work on the effects of European migration on Canada's First Nations. More recently, there has been a great amount of attention directed at the shift of immigration from European to "nontraditional" sources, especially Asia (Laquian, Laquian and McGee 1998; Halli and Dreidger 1999). Within the growing scholarship on migration, there has been an expressed trend of dissatisfaction with neoclassical migration theory and its limited ability to convey how migration is shaped by social factors, specifically gender (Willis and Yeoh 2000).

Within this vast body, there is still a tangible dearth of studies of the sub-national geography of immigrant flows, especially ones that employ the now well-known transnational lens, as initially developed by Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Szanton (1992), through which the nature of immigration is placed within its broad geographical and historical context and interpreted as an ongoing and recursive process of connection, not just a singular linear movement. The use of a transnational lens enhances our understanding of the specific nature of various immigration flows to Canada, because it

demands that we contextualize our investigations across multiple spaces as well as across various scales, from national systems of governance to local processes of settlement. In studying the history of Bengali migration to India, the transnational framework becomes an indispensible one, as the very nature of *Bangla*-phone identities has been divided across two contiguous provinces since 1905 and two contiguous nations since 1947, taking on a different dynamic with political events preceding and consequent to the creation of the independent Republic of Bangladesh in 1971. The story of Bengali migration is a story not merely of transnational movement, but indeed of the core of trans-nationalism itself: the formation and interaction of multiple nations. Compared to this, the vast majority of Punjabi migrants in Canada are Jat Sikhs who arrived not just from a single province (Punjab) but from a particular hamlet within that province, the Doaba region (Brij Lal 1976; Walton-Roberts 2009).

A transnational approach emphasizes the social and evolutionary nature of migration, rather than just highlighting the numerical existence of such flows. Scholars interested in the multiple dimensions of immigration are increasingly considering the multiplicity of underlying factors including nations themselves within the story of migrant movements; this is a newer worldview where immigrants "through their daily life activities and social, economic and political relations create social fields that cross national boundaries" (Basch et al. 1994: 27). This is an important trend, since it forces a displacement of long-held unilinear frameworks of migration in light of the connections, circulations and transformations that international migration has introduced into Canada's urban landscape.

In understanding the various waves of Canadian migration, there is now a pressing need to appreciate the fact that immigrant settlement within Western cities has always been shaped by engagement with other, often far-off places. This is critical to understanding the motivations and circuitous journeys often undertaken by Bengalis in Canada. Arjun Appadurai (1996) theorizes the links between nation-states and circulating populations that struggle to re-territorialize their identities across the uneven landscapes of global modernity. This uneven landscape of difference operates at different registers: from the micro-scale of the body/race, gender, class and sexuality, to the regional registers of urban/rural and the national registers of developed/underdeveloped. A historical analysis of all migration to Canada, but particularly that of Bengalis, who have had to adapt multiple times over the past century, even within their places or origin, due to rapidly changing markers of identity produced by experiences of recurring political rupture, might be particularly aided by deploying subtler qualitative frameworks like those imagined by Appadurai (1996). At present, most of such work in migration studies, of which indeed there is only a small sample, seems to emerge from anthropology and human geography. Alison Mountz and Richard Wright's (1996) detailed study of El Salvadorian asylum seekers in New Jersey and Katharyne Mitchell's (1997) study of immigrants from Hong Kong in Vancouver reveal how everyday relations are shaped through engagement with a multiplicity of nations. In varied studies on immigration to Canada, Jennifer Hyndman and Margaret Walton-Roberts (2000), Johanna Waters (2001), Madeleine Wong (2000), Catherine Nolin Hanlon (2001), Thomas Owusu (1998) and Daniel Hiebert (2000) demonstrate the nature of complex transnational linkages that immigrants maintain, and illustrate how these connections play a role in everyday decisions and interactions.

TRANSNATIONALISM, NATIONALISM AND THE BENGAL DIASPORA

The history of movement of *Bangla*-phone peoples is an unusual one. Three partitions, the first in 1905 as British viceroy Curzon partitioned Bengal into east and west, and then two national partitions (1947 and 1971) within 25 years in the densely populated province, sparked off colossal displacements and migrations. However, not all movement crossed national borders. Roughly 20 million Muslims and Hindus – about a third of the region's population in 1947 – sought shelter across new borders in the "right" country, almost all of them resettling in the Bengal delta itself. A similar number were internally displaced within the new national borders, with profound consequences for the region (Chatterji 2011). Comparatively few – about 2% – moved overseas, some to the Middle East and most others to Europe. This is in considerable contrast to Punjabi migration which saw over 5,000 individuals settled just in Canada as early as 1902 (Brij Lal 1975).

Scholars of refugees from South Asia, concentrating chiefly on the Punjab with its stark exchanges of population and spectacular violence, have, for their part, failed to engage comparatively with the wider field of migration studies. As for studies of migration born from the "Partition in the East" (see Samaddar 1999; Bagchi et al. 2005), the focus has been almost exclusively on Hindus – mainly from the upper and middle classes – who moved to the towns and cities of West Bengal (Chakrabarti 1990). In the teeming field of migration studies, poorer migrants and refugees, particularly Muslims, have remained invisible or marginalized, producing a small, insufficiently representative body of knowledge. Within the limited body of research on Bengali migration, the lion's share of viable scholarship belongs to studies of Bengali migration to Britain (see Chatterji, Alexander and Jalais 2013; Allen 2003; Ansari 2004; Choudhury 1993, 1995; Fischer, Lahiri and Thandi 2007; Gardner 1992, 1995; Kabir 200; Islam 1997). This is an understandable tendency given the long and rich historical links of Britain to South Asia in general and Bengal in particular. However, research on the other side of the Partition narrative, that on Punjab, has seen a great efflorescence of interconnected, intersectional and well-funded research on themes ranging from expatriate Punjabi nationalism (Tarling 1993; Kaur 2012) to Punjabi military history (Purewal 2012; Johnson 2011), Punjabi secessionist groups (Knowles 2005; Bowker 2000), Punjabi diasporic culture especially *bhangra* (Dudrah 2008; Gera Roy 2010; Bakrania 2013), Punjabi religiosity (Kau Arora 2009; Tatla 2013) and Punjabi gender norms (Singh and Kirchengast 2011; Jarvis 2011) on either end of the Atlantic. In comparison, Bengali migration to North America is considerably understudied – Vivek Bald's 2013 work on a putative "Bengali Harlem" in the USA is a marvelous exception – and studies on Bengalis in Canada are virtually nonexistent. This has an impact on the paucity of an available historical archive on *Bangla*-phone lives in North America available to the present-day researcher and fuels the lopsided narrative of Punjabis as "East Indians" and vice versa *ad infinitum.*

On a world historical scale, South Asian migration born of moments of extreme political rupture has much in common with other migrations in the developing world. Forged on the anvils of nation-making, they were for the most part self-driven: states had little or no role in helping to settle the new arrivals, and their efforts to control movement across borders had little effect. In many respects, the Bengal diaspora is a typical case of the postcolonial upheavals and mass migrations of the late 20th century, in what Castles and Miller (2009) call an "Age of Migration." By 2013, 213 million people – more than 3 out of

every 100 (OECD-UNDESA 2013) – were international migrants, a number itself dwarfed by migration within national borders. This phenomenon is referred to as "internal migration." In India, almost 1 in 5 of the country's 1.2 billion people is an internal migrant (Abbas and Verma 2013). In Bangladesh, constant migration from countryside to town – at over 3% a year between 1975 and 2009 – has led to one of the highest rates of urbanization in the world (Marshall and Rehman 2013). Internal migration is an experience that needs particular consideration in studies of movement of people from Bengal, and it is also what helps distinguish the nature of Bengali communities in diaspora.

It is unusual for studies on migration to pay careful attention to immobility, to intimate connections that adhere people to places and to the factors that militate against movement. Yet this is indispensible to understanding the nature of *Bangla*-phone diaspora. Why, despite being subjected to the same push factors – such as communal violence, intimidation, social discrimination, and political and economic marginalization – as Punjabis flayed by the arbitrary imposition of the Radcliffe Line along the north-west of India, did so many not move at all?

The study of the history and sociological processes underpinning Bengali migration to the United Kingdom has seen many of these delicate, difficult and nuanced questions addressed, most recently by the findings published by a six-year international project on Bengali Muslim migration undertaken by Claire Alexander, Joya Chatterji and Annu Jalais (2016). Research of such depth is absent in studies of any other South Asian community but Punjabis in North America (see Johnston 1998, 2011). Vivek Bald's (2013) recent work on the Bengali "Harlem" in the USA has been supported by a documentary film by the same name, and sheds light on the multiple axes of community formation by Bengali Muslims in traditional Afro-American geographies. While seeking to historicize the Bengali diaspora, in all its specificity, research efforts like these remind us of the great importance of being mindful of the complex choices, negotiations and constraints that shape the lives of these "relatively unknown" migrants who made history. The startling lack of balance in quantity of studies on Bengalis in Britain and Bengalis in North America is also a forceful reminder of migration scholarship's own need to travel to unaccustomed earth.

COMING TO CANADA

Overseas movement from the Bengal province has a long prehistory. From as early as the 17th century, low-paid ship-hands or *lascars* (from Sylhet, Chittagong and Noakhali districts in Bengal) were employed by the British East India Company (Adams 1987), and regular travel between these provinces and Britain can be traced back to the 19th century. From the 1850s onwards, Bengali lascars were crucial in the workforce of the imperial merchant marine, and soon came to occupy a lowly niche as fire-stokers in the boiler rooms of British merchant ships during the two world wars. This was a tough, oftentimes unbearably demanding life that threatened the wellbeing of this seafaring group. Caroline Adams' 1991 oral history project with former lascars in London was expanded by Ashfaque Hossain's 2014 study of Sylheti seamen in the Age of Empire, and describes first-hand the abject horror of life in the boiler room:

> There were different classes: *coalwallah, telwallah, donkeywallah*. *Telwallah* means engine greaseman, *coalwallah* has to bring up the coal and give it to the fireman to

> get the steam up, *agwallah* is the fireman.... It was dangerous, the engine room goes up and goes down...you had to be careful. It was hot, oh yes it was hot...many people died in that heat inside that room. In my sea life I knew hundreds of people who died. They say in the Navy you see the world, but not true, you only see down inside the ship and water and you can't get out. (Adams 1991)

Not unsurprisingly, a great number of such lascars would oft-times "disappear" upon arrival and many years later be resurrected in the local annals of a distant town in the British Isles (Chatterji 2015; Adams 1991; Hossain 2014). In British ports at London, Southampton and further north, a complex but convivial network of Sylheti hostel owners called *bariwallahs* would seek out and house these young male runaways and help them find employment, charging a steep commission when a job was obtained. This tendency to jump ship is visible among the earliest *Bangla*-phone entrants across the Atlantic too, but there is an important limitation. Ravi Ahuja's (2006) fascinating examination of mobility and containment in the voyages of South Asia seamen in the early 20th century reveals an exploitative troika of *bariwallahs*, port foremen (*ghat serangs*) and ship *serangs* who recruited men for particular shipping lines in return for a share of their future pay. Through this system, many lascars became embroiled in complex relationships of debt and obligation on which they could not easily renege. For their part, ship *serangs* had a strong incentive to closely monitor the lascars they had recruited, since any one of them jumping ship would mean the *serang* would lose his cut from the absconder's future wages. This complex web of bodily control, debt and obligation – as much as the highly punitive shipping and immigration laws that deterred "Asiatics" from breaking their contracts and disembarking at European and American ports – explains why so few lascars jumped ship at London, Vancouver or New York. "Lascar agreements" denied lascars shore leave in North American and African ports, shipmasters could discharge lascars only in Indian ports and England's Merchant Shipping Act of 1894 entitled ship owners to transfer even unwilling lascars to any other vessel so long as it was bound for India (Ahuja 2006; Balachandran 1997: 1-18; Tabili 1994).

One must also consider the life that awaited absconders: at least a couple of years of evading arrest, the challenges of surviving while on the run, growing racism in white seamen's unions against lascars, the long harsh winters of Europe and North America, and the ever-present specter of destitution (Tabili 1994). Those who did jump ship, battle steep odds and stay on were inevitably young, male and able bodied, and even they would return home after a stint abroad making some money (Chatterji 2015; Ahuja 2006). Only a handful stayed on permanently, and sometimes for the most charming of reasons: love. Annu Jalais' interviews with the extended family in Bangladesh of an octogenarian lascar named Mohammed Fazlul Haq recall the delightful story of an uncle, Hamid Khan, in London who was "stopped" from returning by a white woman (*mem*) who was "madly in love (*preme pagol*) with him" (Alexander, Chatterji and Jalais 2016). Other equally personal, but less rosy, explanations for staying on included trouble with family members, creditors and law enforcement authorities back home.

Vivek Bald's (2013) work on what he calls the "Bengali Harlem" of the USA also reinforces the impermanent nature of Bengali migrants to North America in the late 19th and early 20th century. Beginning sometime in the 1880s, Muslim peddlers from a cluster of villages north of Calcutta began travelling to the United States to sell "Oriental goods": embroidered cotton and silks, small rugs, perfume and a range of other items (Bald 2013:

14). Indian demand for their handicrafts had declined under colonial rule as the British imported cheaply-manufactured textiles and established greater control over the subcontinent's internal markets (Chatterji 2013). Yet overseas, middle class consumers in Britain, Australia, Europe and South Africa were in the midst of a fin de siècle fascination for exotic ideas, goods and entertainments of India and "the East." Known as *chikandars* (after the style of embroidery on their products – *chikankari*), these men became a fixture at American leisure spots on the US's eastern seaboard. Other Indian traders had made their way outwards from the subcontinent to sell handicrafts to Mediterranean travelers in North Africa and the Mediterranean (Tambe and Fischer-Tiné 2009; Visram 2002). Bengalis ventured into new territories, establishing an extensive network that stretched through the east coast of the US, into and across the southern states, and as far south as Panama (Markowitz 2000: 122-30). As US immigration laws toughened against a rising tide of racial hatred towards "Asiatics," between 1897 and 1902, peddlers bypassed Ellis Island and made their way into the United States through either Canada or smaller US ports. After 1903, they entered Ellis Island in groups of four or five rather than ten, twelve or twenty, and they came equipped with the names and addresses of relatives or friends who were residents of Atlantic City, Asbury Park, New Orleans or Charleston. Records are not easily available for the interaction and fates of Bengali peddlers in Canada. Did some of them stay behind? Affective networks seem to have stretched south of the Canadian border towards the central American states, but little trace can be found of movement outside of sojourning, which is inherently a temporary exchange.

Many years pass by before we find the historic record specifically reflecting Bengali migration to Canada. In 1914, as almost 400 Indians languished on the Komagata Maru, the term "Bengal," particularly "Calcutta," emerges several times in the ship's record books. However it is a threadbare archive, as "Bengal" is noted in the passenger manifest only as a popular location for boarding the Komagata Maru, in accordance with the legal limits placed by the "Continuous Journey Regulation." This regulation was added as an amendment to the Canadian *Immigration Act* in 1908 prohibiting the landing of any immigrant that did not come to Canada by continuous journey from the country of which they were natives or citizens. Immigrants were now required to purchase a through ticket to Canada from their country of origin or else be denied entry. This ruling most affected immigrants from India and Japan. This was also the notoriously anti-Asian racist phase within Canadian governance, as Deputy Minister of Labour William Lyon Mackenzie King additionally recommended restricting immigration from India. King's report noted that many East Indians in Canada were unemployed and impoverished, attributing their circumstances to an incompatibility with the Canadian climate and way of life (Mackenzie King 1908). However, specific exclusion of Indian immigrants based on their citizenship was impracticable because of their status as British subjects; thus restrictions were cunningly effected through the Continuous Passage corollary. At that time, the only company to provide one continuous journey from India to Canada was the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), and they offered passage from Bengal's ports. Thus, "Calcutta" too features several times in the migration records attached to passenger manifests, but these mentions are attached to the names of North Indian Muslims and Sikhs who passed through the port city on their way to Canada. There is no evidence, to date, of Bengalis themselves undertaking such journeys during this period. For instance, in 1908, 95% of Indian migrants to Canada

were single Sikh males looking for employment in farming, lumber and railroad construction (Dominion Bureau of Statistics 1959).

Racist controls of non-white immigration were a prominent feature of early twentieth century Canadian governance. Chandrasekhar (1986, 17) points out that the availability of Chinese immigration which furnished the bulk of labour in Canada virtually ceased in 1904 with the imposition of a Head Tax of $500. These Canadian companies now flooded the countryside of Punjab with literature that promised jobs and beckoned the overburdened Punjabi peasantry to a new world. This recruitment drive was absent in other parts of India, though the experience of impoverishment under British colonial agricultural laws and land reform could apply perfectly well to the condition of peasants elsewhere including the Bengali *ryots* (see for instance Metcalf 1980; Dutta 2012). So, why singularly target the Punjab? The British colonial stereotype of a "hardy martial race," strategically appended to Punjabi loyalists since the aftermath of the 1857 uprising, was in stark contrast to the labelling of Bengali men – who mostly sided with the 1857 rebels and who, by the late 19th century, were causing much annoyance to British administrators through their anti-colonial nationalist grumblings – as "effete," "corrupt" and "perverse" (Sinha 1989). This widespread institutional valorization of Punjabi masculinity appears to have played a role in the targeting of the province by all forms of Canadian recruiters. From 1909, the Canadian Pacific Rail Company undertook an active advertising campaign in the Punjab provinces – following the passage of the Continuous Journey Regulation – geared to attract more Punjabis to a comfortable life of farming overseas (see fig.2).

Figure 2: Canadian Pacific Railway poster, circa 1908 (Financial Post archive)

Soon after, however, racism trumped the conveniences of private enterprise and the Canadian government issued directives to CPR expressly prohibiting ticket sales to Indians. This heralded a precipitous decline in immigrants from India after 1908, with Census reports in the Canada Year Book showing 29 "East Indians" admitted to Canada between 1909 and 1913 and 88 in 1914. Since then, there is no recorded data of admission until after 1930 (Dominion Bureau of Statistics 1959).

Canadian legal restrictions reduced the supply of new immigrants from British India, and the discrimination faced by Indians in Canada (see Johnson 2011) prompted some to return home. As a result, the Indian population in Canada was unable to grow. In 1921, there were 1,016 "East Indians" while the 1931 Census indicated a population of 1,400. Cumulatively, a little over 5,000 South Asians arrived in Canada between 1904-1909, and the 1911 Census records only 2,342 remaining (Dominion Bureau of Statistics 1959).

The year 1947 was perhaps the best-known moment of explosion in all certainties of South Asian identity, as a newly independent Indian subcontinent cracked into East and West Pakistan and the Republic of India. The same year was a minor milestone in Canada's legislative history as "East Indian" immigrants were given the right to vote in provincial and federal elections; this right was extended by 1948 to municipal elections. In 1948, another discriminatory law requiring fingerprints on legal documents was also revoked. This coincided with a period of renewed but limited migration from South Asia to Canada between 1947 and 1966 (immigration regulations would change in 1967), with Indo-Canadians being recognized as a moderately viable legal category possessing the bare rudiments of citizenship rights, franchise and equality before law.

Relative to the sparseness of the 1930s, the records of the Canadian Departments of Citizenship and Immigration (Annual Reports 1950-66) and Manpower and Immigration (Annual Reports 1950-66) reflect a small change in South Asian migration numbers. However, non-white immigration was not an unrestricted enterprise. In 1952, a quota of 150 from India, 100 from Pakistan and 50 from Ceylon was imposed to check immigration. In 1957, the Indian quota was raised to 300. In addition to the regular quota which applied to primary applicants, South Asians were able, albeit much more restrictively, to enter Canada as sponsored relatives.

From 1962, Canadian immigration regulation started to mention education and skills as criteria of admission into Canada. This tendency became formalized into a comprehensive structure of points-based assessment of all potential immigrants in 1967. Under this new regime, points were allocated to applicants based upon age, education, occupational demand, work experience, knowledge of English/French, and ability to adapt to Canada. The absence of race and nationality as overt filters allowed non-white immigrants who had traditionally faced insurmountable discrimination in seeking admission to Canada to now be allowed consideration on the same footing as European applicants. This is the phase from which we see *Bangla*-phone migration to Canada in a more visible and steady pattern. The story from then onward is one of educated, upper and upper middle-class urban Bengali migrants coming to Canada on work permits, study visas and spousal visas. This is what I will call *bhadralok* migration.

CANADIAN *BHADRALOK*: IMMIGRATION AND COMMUNITY FORMATION

Who are the *bhadralok*? Translated literally from *Bangla*, they are "the respectable people" or "gentle folk," and have dominated the mainstream history of Bengali colonial nationalism, social reform and postcolonial development. Historian John Broomfield's (1968) description of *bhadralok* identity is helpful to recollect here:

> A socially privileged and consciously superior group, economically dependent upon landed rents and professional and clerical employment; keeping its distance from the masses by its acceptance of high-caste proscriptions and its command of education; sharing a pride in its language, its literate culture and its history; and maintaining its communal integration through a fairly complex institutional structure that it had proved remarkably ready to adapt and augment to extend its social power and political opportunities.

This standard understanding of *bhadralok* (see also Chatterjee 1998, 2001; Chakraborty 2006; Banerjee 1989; Ghosh 2005), with its allusions to upper caste *zamindari* sophistication, implies an overwhelmingly elite and male Hindu group. I have argued elsewhere (Ray 2008) that much more basic social experiences of high-school education or non-manual employment are better representative denominators of the Bengali *bhadralok* category and thus it includes Muslims, women and non-landed Hindu males. On a less recognized anthropological footing, self-identification as *bhadra* (respectable) is another prominent feature of this category. In three separate telephone interviews conducted with male Bengali Muslim shopkeepers in the greater Toronto region, without much prompting I was informed about their family's elite roots, college education and formidable property ownership in Dhaka and Rajshahi, reinforcing not just *bhadralok* status but also a strong internalization of the cultural value of this historical category. One or a combination of these three criteria – self-identification as *bhadra*, high-school education and non-manual employment – form the overwhelming demographic characteristics of the *Bangla*-phone migrant community in Canada. This is a very different cultural psychology from that of Canadian Punjabis, whose community pride remains encapsulated and dominated by an aggressively physical, exclusively Sikh-dominant notion of "*Desi"* or "native" identity with links to agricultural labour (Vancouver Sun 2000; see also Johnston 1988).

From 1971 onwards, the search for *Bangla*-phone migrants to Canada takes on an obvious transnational complexion. Canada was one of the first nations to recognize independent Bangladesh in 1972, within a year of its liberation from Pakistan, and in 1973 the Bangladesh High Commission in Canada was established in Ottawa. The Bangladesh High Commission's short online history of Bengalis in Canada, too, reflects the *bhadralok* bias:

> Professionals were the first immigrants from Bangladesh who began to migrate to Canada in the 1960s. Some came to Canada for higher education as well as professional training and then settled down as immigrants. The migration increased over the later decades, and reached its peak in the late 80s. The immigration of Bangladeshis to Canada takes place in two categories namely skilled workers category and family category. (Bangladesh High Commission 2007)

The Indian High Commission website's long list of Indo-Canadian bilateral relations briskly notes the history of the Indian community in Canada in the following words:

> It is estimated that two-thirds of Indo-Canadians are Punjabi speaking, followed by those who speak Gujarati. The community is culturally active and has organized itself in various associations. (High Commission of India 2016)

While India's diplomatic position on the denominators of the diasporic Indian community in Canada is disappointingly limited, the reference to association formation certainly helps highlight the nature of Bengali conviviality in the country. This may very well be true of other South Asian regional communities in Canada marginalized by the Punjabi preoccupation of mainstream scholarship, policy, diplomacy and media. The Indian High Commission's emphasis on Gujarati-phone people (those whose first or dominant language is Gujarati) forming the second largest Indian community after Punjabis is also a political misrepresentation that elides the historically transnational nature of Gujarati-speaking groups. Gujarati-phone, particularly Gujarati-phone Ismaili Muslims from Uganda, Kenya and Fiji, form the most visible community of Gujaratis in Canada (see Tasmin 2014; Rahim 2017).

With a points-based immigration system in play since 1967, a large number of Bengali professionals from India and Bangladesh arrived in Canada, often accompanied by their families (Das Gupta 1988). By the mid-1970s, such families and individuals found each other, and we see a surge in Bengali association formation across numerous Canadian provinces. *Prabasi*, Toronto's Bengali association, was formed in 1976; The Lower Mainland Bengali Cultural Society (LMBCS) was founded in 1977; *Bichitra* in Manitoba and the Bengali Association of Calgary were formed in 1978; and the Edmonton Bengali Association was formed in 1979. By the 1990s, several other Bengali and specifically Bangladeshi associations grew in numerous cities across British Columbia, Ontario, Alberta, Quebec and Saskatchewan. The composition of the pioneering founders of such associations highlights the *bhadralok* complexion of Bengali migration from the 1960s. The LMBCS's first executive body consisted of highly educated Bengali urban professionals with advanced academic degrees, including two Oxonians. Other societies count chartered accountants, bankers, medical professionals and university academics among the ranks of their originators.

A post-1970s slump in the Canadian economy again resulted in an upscaling of restrictions on immigration and the scapegoating of immigrants of colour for contributing to unemployment, reminiscent of xenophobic attitudes against an "Asian menace" in an earlier century (Johnston 1988; Geiger 2011). In 1982, a "Canadians First" program was unveiled (Toronto Star 1982), which resulted in lowering immigration except for those with "essential skills" designated by the government and for those bringing in capital for investment. This orientation, which continues to the present day, further favoured highly skilled *Bangla*-phone migrants originating from India and Bangladesh, often arriving with student visas for advanced university degrees, work permits with eminent Canadian enterprises, or – in the case of technical experts such as engineers and IT professionals – job offers in-hand from major governmental and private companies (Ashutosh 2014; Sodhi 2008).

Bengali and Bangladeshi associations in Canada had, by the early 2000s, developed well beyond first-ports-of-call for new immigrants into specialized cultural, linguistic, religious and even professional collectives. The Dhaka University Alumni Association has

an active chapter in Toronto, as do the Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur and BE College Shibpur (West Bengal). *Bangla*-phone organizations also routinely advertise services to aid all South Asian immigrants irrespective of provincial origin. The Bangladesh Centre and Community Services (BCCS) in Toronto, for instance, which was established in 2010, is one of the best resourced and organized community organizations for *Bangla*-phone immigrants in Canada and extends its services to all new South Asian immigrants in the greater Toronto region.

An enduring love of the great litterateur Rabindranath Tagore forms a particularly poignant axis of community development among the global *Bangla*-phone diaspora, and is reflected in their association-forming activity in Canada. Tagore himself visited Vancouver in 1929 at the invitation of the National Council of Education of Canada to participate in its Triennial International Conference (O'Connell 2008). It was his only visit to Canada, but he arrived during a time when the Bengali presence in Canada was virtually nonexistent. Tagore was shepherded to Vancouver and Victoria by the very dapper x Singh (Johnston 2011). As of 2017, there are over 30 active Tagore-based Bengali community organizations in Canada. Vancouver's Tagore Society is a remarkably cosmopolitan organization which brings together *Bangla*-phone Hindus, Muslims and poetry aficionados with no ethnic connection to South Asia. This Bengali-engineered homage to Tagore's expansive universal humanism is, on a sociological level, indicative again of the cultural sophistication of the *Bangla*-phone immigrant community in Canada. It is also indicative of an absence of isolationist "in-group" paranoia that historically besets most minority communities in the West (see de Jun Kong 2016; Fahmy 2015; Case 2011). The *bhadralok*'s valorization of a life of the mind, sometimes to the detriment of material progress, continues to be a feature of the small but successful *Bangla*-phone community of Canada, a fact which distinguishes this community from the prevalent Punjabi "East Indian" stereotype of welcoming backbreaking physical labour to enable financial success (Began and Chapman 2013; Qureshi, Varghese and Ossella 2013; Nayar 2012). Clearly, even many swallows do not the same spring make.

CONCLUSION

The presence of a Bengali or *Bangla*-phone community in Canada is a relatively recent historical development. Understanding the migration patterns and motivations for migration within this community requires a sophisticated transnational focus in North American migration studies, and demands a sensitive unpacking of the opaque, under-nuanced, sociologically irresponsible equation of "South Asian = Punjabi = East Indian" that plagues discourse on South Asian migration to Canada. Bengalis have been steadily immigrating to Canada from India, Bangladesh and other parts of the world, and have been very successful in community formation in the country. Given Bengalis' close historical association with the British colonial instruments of higher education and bureaucratic employment, and the fact that they have populated the intellectual leadership of nationalist social reform, Bengalis have historically preferred Britain, Western Europe and, much more recently, the USA, as favourable emigration destinations. Canada is both a new country by itself and a new possibility in the story of Bengali migration. Bengalis in Canada are culturally sophisticated and cosmopolitan in mindset. The nature of Bengali conviviality

echoes Veblen's theory of the leisure class in its affinity for "spiritual, aesthetic (and) intellectual," pursuits over those of pure commercial gain or physical labour. This is an important characteristic that distinguishes the Bengali/*Bangla*-phone community from other communities in South Asia, and is echoed in the diaspora. There is much about the Bengali community in North America that merits comprehensive academic research. There have been very few studies on the history of Bengali migration to Canada, or the Canadian Bengali community as a whole. This paper takes a tentative, limited but hopeful step in that direction.

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SUPRIYA BHATTACHARYYA

AN ORAL HISTORY OF BENGALI IMMIGRANTS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA: 1960 – 2017

1. INTRODUCTION

It is common knowledge among Bengalis that the first Bengali to set foot in British Columbia was Swami Vivekananda, a prophet from India who arrived at Vancouver on the Canadian Pacific Liner *Empress of India* on Tuesday July 25, 1893 at 7pm (Vivekananda Vedanta Society of British Columbia 1993). Swami Vivekananda spent 15 hours en route to Chicago to attend the Parliament of Religions. Thirty-six years after Vivekananda's short stay in Vancouver, Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore visited Vancouver in April of 1929. Tagore arrived at Victoria on the SS *Empress of Asia* on April 6, 1929 at 7am (Mahalanobis 1977). This was the beginning of Tagore's only visit to Canada and his penultimate visit to North America. Unlike Vivekananda, who had spent a night in Vancouver in transit, Tagore was invited to participate in the Triennial International Conference organized by the National Council of Education of Canada (O'Connell and Unsal 2014). Prior to his trip to Canada in 1929, Tagore had turned down several invitations to visit this country in protest of the Komagata Maru incident of 1914. Tagore was indignant about the way his countrymen were treated by the Canadian Government (O'Connell and Unsal 2014). After presenting his speech at the Triennial International Conference in Victoria, Tagore took a steamer to Vancouver on April 7, 1929. Tagore gave a second lecture in Vancouver. Thousands of people waited to hear and see him (Mahalanobis1977). For health-related reasons, Tagore restricted himself to limited visits and meetings while he was in Vancouver; however, he visited the Sikh Temple on West 2nd Ave (currently known as the Ross Street Temple) and met with several community leaders (Smith 2013).

In between the visits of Vivekananda and Tagore, Taraknath Das, a Bengali revolutionary and scholar from India, spent some time in the Lower Mainland area during the years 1907-1908. He founded a boarding school for children of Indian immigrants, most of who were illiterate and worked in the lumber mills (Mukherjee1998). Das also united the Indian migrants and made them aware of the freedom movement in India (Saha 2000).

Neither Vivekananda nor Tagore chose to live in British Columbia or anywhere else in Canada. Taraknath Das was expelled from Canada, which many considered a ploy by an immigration officer named Hopkinson (Mukherjee 1998). It is fitting to mention the visits of these three eminent Bengalis as the precursor of Bengali settlement in British Columbia which, according to oral history, started in 1960. This article will discuss the background of migration and the socio-cultural adjustments of Bengali immigrants in British Columbia.

Data for this essay was collected during the period of June 2017 to August 2017. Forty face-to-face interviews were conducted. Twelve interviews were conducted over the phone while three interviews were done through video chat. One interviewee preferred to answer the questions in writing while another was interviewed through e-mail correspondence. In the recent past, the Bengali community in the Lower Mainland has lost a few members to old age. To exclude these members who have died would have been to exclude part of the history of Bengali immigrants in BC; therefore, the adult children and the widow of those who have passed were interviewed.

The other criteria for participation in this study were that participants had to be immigrants from India and be 30 years old or over; participants also had to be residents of BC for at least 10 years. The Lower Mainland Bengali Cultural Society lists 88 members who met these criteria, and 67% of this population took part in this project by agreeing to be interviewed.

2. BACKGROUND OF MIGRATION[1]

The settlement of Bengali immigrants in British Columbia started in 1960. Bengalis who arrived in the 1960s and made the Lower Mainland their home stated that Dr. Asoke Chaklader, who joined the University of British Columbia as a faculty member in the department of Materials Engineering in 1960, was most likely the first Bengali to settle here. Dr. Chaklader is one of the participants who were interviewed for this article. He has agreed to be identified by name.

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, Canadian immigration policies were changed from a discriminatory sponsorship-based policy to a policy based on education and occupational skills (Kelley and Trebilcock 2000). This change in Canadian immigration policy raised curiosity among the Bengali diaspora in Europe and the United States of America (USA). Nine out of fifteen interviewees who migrated to Canada in the 1960s came from Europe or the USA. Obtaining a Canadian immigration visa meant walking into the Canadian Embassy/High Commission and expressing the wish to immigrate to Canada. Not only were these interviewees granted visas within a few days, but they were also offered travel tickets to Canada. The Bengalis who migrated directly from India in the 1960s stated that they were working for multinational companies through which they came into contact with Canadians who encouraged them to come to Canada.

Chart 1 illustrates that within the last 50 years, the highest number of Bengalis came to the Lower Mainland in the 1970s. The reason for the higher number is that the bachelor men who came in the 1960s and early 1970s went to India and got married. Thus, the reason for the higher number of arrivals is mainly the newly wedded brides. It is apparent in Chart 1 that in the 1980s and 1990s only a handful of Bengalis came to the Lower Mainland. Those who came included two retired couples and a couple who emigrated from another part of Canada. This lull can be attributed to the recession in the early 1980s.

[1] For the purposes of this essay, the phrase "Background of Migration" refers to participants' own accounts of why and how they immigrated to Canada.

According to a report by the Business Council of British Columbia (2012), compared to Canada the economic growth in BC was slow in the 1980s and 1990s.
During the years 2000-2010 there is an increase in the number of Bengalis choosing the Lower Mainland as their home. This preference could be attributed to the boom in information technology and wireless sector companies in British Columbia.

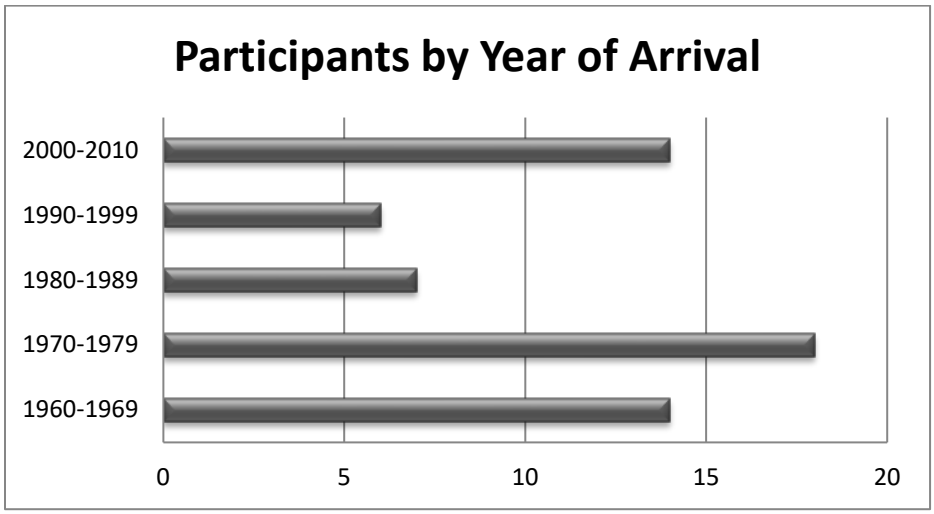

Chart 1: Participants' Year of Arrival in Canada

3. BENGALI IMMIGRANTS OF THE 1960S

Fourteen Bengalis from India who migrated to Canada in the 1960s and made BC their home were interviewed for this essay. The widow of a member who had recently passed away talked about her deceased husband's experience. The 1960s group of Bengali immigrants were mostly bachelors with the exception of one bachelorette. Two other female members came as spouses. The 1960s group can be classified into the following categories:

A. Bengalis who migrated directly from India and made their first trip abroad
B. Bengalis who were working/studying in Europe or the USA
C. Bengalis who had been to Europe, the USA, or Canada as students and had gone back to India but decided to migrate permanently to Canada

When asked about the reason for their migration to Canada, participants gave a variety of responses. None in Group A or B thought that they were going to live in Canada permanently. Migrating to Canada was an adventure for them. The following are a few anecdotes from these participants:

> *I was working for a multinational company and two Canadian consultants were visiting our firm. When they saw my engineering work they said, 'You are way too good for this country, why don't you come to Canada?'.... This is what initiated my wish to come to Canada.*

It was a childhood dream of mine to visit abroad. I was working for an engineering firm when two consultants from Canada told me to come to Canada. I asked them, 'Sahib, we don't know the system to go to Canada.' They ripped two pages from a Yellow Pages directory and handed it to me. Those two pages contained the list of firms. I started to type my resume in aerogrammes and mailed it to different firms and that is how I was offered a job, then I applied for immigration.

You see...I had worked on a problem, the results of which were presented to a conference at MIT in 1956, and it was well received. I had no knowledge that my professor had sent a copy of my thesis to Prof. Bragg [Nobel Laureate in Physics], who was the Director of the Royal Institute at that time. He recommended me for the most prestigious award in England.... The only other Indian to receive this scholarship before me was Dr. H. J. Bhabha. It was the the Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851 Award.... I had job offers from MIT and Berkley but I was determined to go back to India as my younger siblings were dependent on me.... I said the same thing to the professor who was insisting for me to join UBC.... Finally I agreed to come for two years.

Bengalis in Group C stated that, after being exposed to Western work ethics and environment, they were not satisfied with what they were doing when they returned to India.

4. BENGALI IMMIGRANTS OF THE 1970S

The Bengali community in the Lower Mainland saw a boom in numbers of Bengalis in the 1970s. This is because many of the bachelors from the 1960s and early 1970s got married and brought their spouses to BC. Sixteen participants belonged to this group, and the son of a recently deceased couple was interviewed about his parents' experience. 1970s arrivals can also be clustered in the same way as the 1960s group, with a little addition to Group A because this group now had about six wives who were sponsored by their husbands. This group also included two men who were sponsored by their siblings. Unlike the 1960s group, where almost all the members thought that they would go back to India after a few years of stay in Canada, only two members from the 1970s group expressed such a wish. Participants' reasons for migration were also articulated in terms of making an informed choice. The men who were sponsored by their siblings stated that they aspired to better lives than what they had in India. The following are few quotes from these participants:

I came to the US to do my PhD. I had no political notion or concerns when I came...I began to see strong anti-war movement going on at that time. People were very much engaged in opposing the United States' war in Vietnam...so, that people could oppose their own country was a great revelation to me...I had never thought that it was possible to oppose your own country. I gradually became interested...I participated in protests...the National Guards were called into Kent State at a student's protest and they shot students...four students were dead...that was shocking! I had two job offers, including one in the States...the violence that was going on and what we saw on TV...I decided I don't want to be here.

I had a very good job in the UK as an engineer...though there was no overt racism or discrimination, I could sense that there was a glass ceiling...I decided to move to Canada.

In 1977, the Lower Mainland Bengali Cultural Society (LMBCS) was established as the first of its kind. This not-for-profit organization sought to promote Bengali culture within the Greater Vancouver Regional District.

5. BENGALI IMMIGRANTS OF THE 1980S AND 1990S

The Bengali community did not grow much in the 1980s and 1990s. Among all the interviewees, only eight came to the Lower Mainland in this period. However, this small group was anything but homogeneous. The migrants from this period can be grouped as follows:

A. Wives who migrated directly from India and made their first trip abroad
B. Bengalis who were working/studying in Europe or Canada
C. Two retired couples from Hong Kong and South Africa who chose beautiful British Columbia to spend the last chapter of their lives[2]
D. A single female parent with a child

This was the first cohort where none expressed that they wanted to return after a few years of stay in Canada. The following are three excerpts from participants' reasons for migration:

...From India we came to Nigeria and had a very good job.... One day we thought let us try a new continent...a first world country...we chose Vancouver mainly for its weather.

When I was in grade eight back in 1988, I came to Canada to visit my uncle for two months...that actually inspired me to come to Canada...I was young and I loved this country.

...When I finished my PhD in Computer Science at McGill, job prospects in my field were not that good in India whereas here I had several job offers...I decided to stay in Canada.

6. BENGALI IMMIGRANTS OF THE 2000S: A PARADIGM SHIFT

With the turn of the century, a paradigm shift took place among the categories of Bengalis who migrated to BC. Fourteen people (nine women and five men) from this time period were interviewed. The new millennium saw the emergence of female immigrants who were highly trained in technical fields. The number of women who merely followed their husbands to this land decreased in this period. The most significant shift took place in the

[2] Both of these retired couples have passed away in the last two years. Their adult children were interviewed instead.

area of reason for migration, such as same-sex marriage. The grouping of the immigrants of the 2000s looks like this:

a) Couples, with the wives following their husbands
b) Women who were highly trained in technical fields, and their partners

Each woman in the second group mentioned that her career was given equal importance during the decision-making process to migrate to Canada. A couple of these women found employment in their professional fields sooner than their husbands, which is a shift from the past when highly educated women who had a career in India left their jobs and simply moved to Canada because of their husbands. These women were never able to pursue their careers and were either housewives or underemployed.

7. SOCIO-CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT[3] OF BENGALI IMMIGRANTS IN BC INITIAL SETTLEMENT

From 1960 to 2010, none of the Bengalis who participated in this study sought any kind of assistance through any government agency to help them settle in Canada. Their support system involved employers and, eventually, with increasing numbers of Bengalis, connections and help from within the community. This help was limited to assitance related to the search for housing, information as to where to shop for food etc., and emotional support. Discussed below are the aspects of these immigrants' lives which constitute the essence of their identity in Canada.

Educational Background and Employment Status

Traditionally, Bengalis aspire to higher education. The first college in India was established in Kolkata, West Bengal, exactly two hundred years ago. Currently, it is known as the Presidency University. True to its heritage, the Bengali community of BC is comprised of highly educated people. The 59 participants of this study present a snapshot of the educational background of the Bengali diaspora. The specific educational and professional level of the 59 participants is illustrated in Chart 2.

It is important to mention that Bengali immigrants received their higher education mainly abroad. Only two out of seventeen PhDs were obtained in India; the rest were received either in the United Kingdom, the USA, or Canada. Similarly, most of participants' Master's degrees were received outside of India. On the other hand, professionals such as engineers, physicians, and a single lawyer received their training solely in India.

In a recent Canadian study, it was found that Asian immigrants who migrated to Canada with a foreign degree have been marginalized in the labour market as their degrees were not recognized (Zaman 2012). Chart 3 illustrates the employment status of the Bengali diaspora. Of the participants in this study, 62% stated that they are employed according to their training; this includes participants who received higher degrees outside

[3] For the purposes of this study, the term "socio-cultural adjustment" will include participants' initial settlement process including employment, connection to homeland, and sense of ethnic as well as Canadian identity.

of India as well as all engineers and physicians who had Indian degrees. Of participants, 25% stated that they are underemployed because their degrees from India were not accepted as equivalent to a Canadian degree; for example, a trained teacher with a Master's degree from India had to take up a job in the Early Childhood Education field earning significantly less than what a Canadian teacher with an equivalent Master's degree earns. This is in congruence with Zaman's (2012) finding. Unfortunately, among this 25% of Bengali participants, all but two were women, a fact which is also in congruence with previous studies where it was found that foreign-trained immigrant women performed least well when compared with foreign-trained men and Canadian-born women (Zaman 2006).

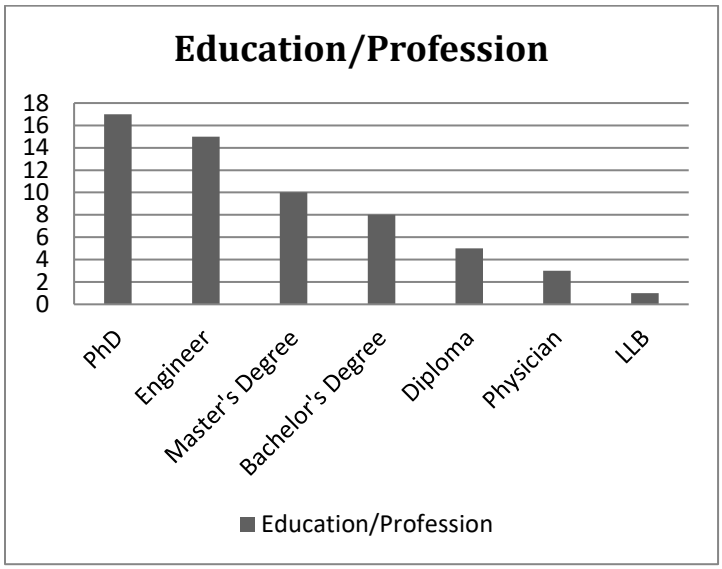

Chart 2: Educational and Professional Status of the Participants

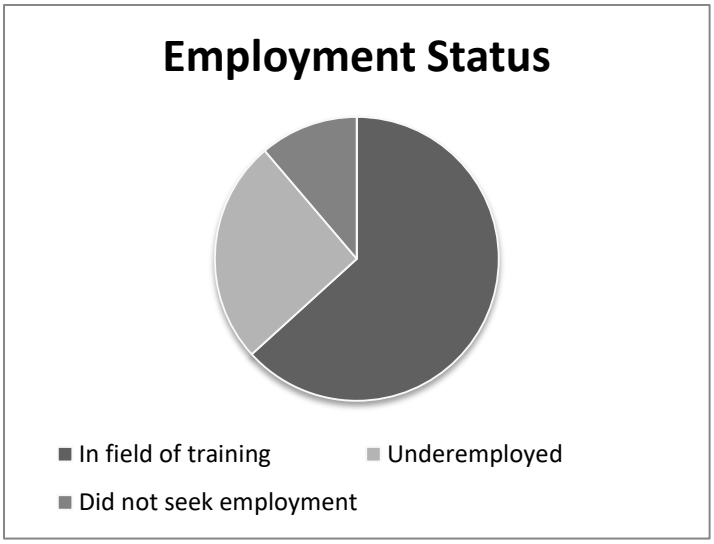

Chart 3: Current Employment Status of the Participants

While narrating their labour market experience, only two women stated dissatisfaction about the fact that they were underemployed. The rest seemed satisfied with what they do, as they saw their employment as an engagement rather than a career. In all these instances, the husbands were well-employed in their field of training. This may also be reflective of Indian culture, wherein the husband's career is given higher priority, and women, most of who were married to their husbands through arranged marriages, are expected to follow their husband. With wives having a less demanding job and in many cases a part-time job, the husbands relied completely on their wives to run the household and raise the children. They did not have to struggle to find a work-life balance. It is during the weekends that the men involved themselves with their children's activities such as taking them to soccer games etc.

Connection to Homeland

Almost all the participants have maintained a strong connection with their family in India. This connection is maintained through communication and frequent visits to the homeland. However, due to the advancement of technology and creation of the internet, the modes of communication have changed over the years. Bengalis who immigrated between the 1960s and the 1990s mainly communicated through hand-written letters that took more than a week to reach their destination. Telephone calls were rare and required the process of booking the call and waiting for hours for one's turn. From the mid-1990s onward, the direct dialing system became available, followed by e-mails and video conferencing. Whereas Bengalis in the 1960s through 1980s communicated with families in India via two letters a month, the current diaspora now not only talk whenever they wish but are also able to share every bit of their life with family in India through video conferencing. With software applications such as WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger, they are in constant touch with family and friends in India. It seems that as communication became frequent and based in real time, the wish for immigrants to return to India to be with family decreased. Whether there is any correlation between these two phenomena needs to be researched.

In addition to communicating frequently, all male participants and a few female participants stated that they were also responsible for the wellbeing of their aged parents in India. Their responsibilities were more like supervising the care that their parents received. Sending remittances remains a common cultural practice, but for most of the families it is not need-based. Sending remittances did not have any significant impact on their financial situation.

Linguistic and Religious Identity

Other than the men and women whose spouses were not Bengalis, all participants said that Bengali is the principle language of communication at home. Several said that they are *Mone-Prane Bangali.*[4] More than 50% of participants mentioned that they feel strongly that

[4] *Mone-Prane Bangali* bears the connotation "Bengali by heart and soul." The exact translation would be "Bengali by mind and heart."

their children need to know how to speak, read, and write Bengali. Many acknowledged that Vancouver Bangla Vidyalaya[5] has played a key role in teaching Bengali to their children. English was the second language of all the Bengalis. Very few knew French.

When asked about the role of religion in their lives, all except for four men said that religion played no role in their lives and they did not practice any religious rituals. Some stated that they believed in spirituality but all were comfortable identifying themselves as Hindus. They acknowledged that their participation in religious festivals such as Durga Puja[6] is mainly for cultural reasons. Three men stated that Hindu religious philosophy (i.e., Vedanta) played a significant role in their lives, and one declared himself to be agnostic. On the other hand, almost all women acknowledged that they performed some religious rituals on a daily basis, and had a *Thakurer Ason*[7] at home. However, all men and women participants unequivocally stated that they respect every religion.

In juxtaposing the responses to the question regarding the role of language versus those regarding the role of religion, it is evident that all participants attributed greater importance to their linguistic identity than their religious identity. They took pride in maintaining, cultivating, and passing this linguistic identity to their offspring. The affiliation with Bengali language went beyond a mode of communication and became a cultural entity, the future of which is uncertain due to the globalization of the English language. One participant stated, *"I am extremely concerned that Bengali language is going to disappear, at least from the Indian side, it is quite evident to me at least...what is seen in the popular culture in Bengal these days...I am very certain that most Bengalis will not be able to write all the alphabets."* Thus, overall, these immigrants felt that prioritizing the Bengali language over their religion was more important in the preservation of their Bengali identity abroad.

Embracing Canada, Its Multicultural Policy, and Its History

Bengali immigrants in the Lower Mainland made a conscious, well-informed decision to migrate to Canada. None of them were refugees or victims of natural calamities such as famine etc. Each of them had their own personal reasons for migration. This highly educated group had little to no difficulty in finding employment, and could purchase their own property within 1-5 years after their arrival in Canada. Therefore, tangible connections to this land were made very easily. However, when asked about their involvement with their local communities, most Bengalis said that they tend to keep their association limited to their professional and Bengali social circles. Among the women who participated, 9 out of 26 said that they were involved with local community organizations as volunteers. Only one male participant had an unique perspective on his involvement with a focus group which was not a cultural group, saying,

> *I know that India has a lot of problems and Bengal has a lot of problems but I also know that it is hypocritical of me to sit here and pass judgment...since this is my adopted country and I have been a Canadian for a long time now, it is right for me*

[5] Vancouver Bangla Vidyalaya was restarted by Supriya Bhattacharyya in 1990 to teach Bengali to children between the ages of 5-12. It is a free program supported by the LMBCS.

[6] Durga Puja is the Bengali festival wherein Bengalis worship the Hindu Goddess Durga.

[7] *Thakurer Ason* refers to a small shrine consisting of small pictures, sculptures of Hindu gods and goddesses, and other religious relics. This is the place at home where people pray.

to get involved in doing what is right for this country...I take my citizenship seriously.

It is also obvious that a highly qualified group such as this represents a pool of highly analytical minds. Though everyone supported Canada's multicultural policies as a theory, they all acknowledged that this theory has yet to be fully realized. None recorded suffering overt racism or discrimination, but they were aware that it existed in Canada. One participant articulated it thusly: "Multiculturalism is a mechanism for discrimination…all human beings should be treated equally...that is a basic humane thing to do.... Government has nothing to do with my culture." Concern regarding the Indigenous people of Canada was genuine, though the level of knowledge about the history of Canadian First Nations people varied among the participants. Some had educated themselves about this history prior to leaving India, and some were not aware of it until recently. One participant wondered why First Nations languages are not taught in the public schools of Canada the way Maori language is taught and promoted in New Zealand. In general, all agreed that raising public awareness through education is the key to lifting the curtain of ignorance that exists related to First Nations history. Bengalis are known for having prolonged discussion sessions on any topic, and the topic of Canadian politics and history was no exception. Through these discussions, their intellectual connection to this land was revealed, but for every participant the emotional connection to this land was solidified through their children, for whom Canada is home. Most from the 1960s cohort have become octogenarians, and they are satisfied with their quality of life and do not experience social isolation. The occasional pull towards their homeland is overshadowed by the pull of their children and grandchildren who are here. They also realize that the country and the family they left years ago are not the same. I will end this section with two comments that are particularly poignant. One participant said, "Once my parents and other relatives started to die one by one of old age…the space that I knew as my home was no more." Another participant, who has been living in Canada for over fifty years, made a follow-up call just to say, "Though I do not want to return back to India to live there anymore, it is my wish that after my death and cremation, my ashes be immersed in the river Mahananda"; this is a river that runs through the city of this participant's childhood.

8. CONCLUSION

The oral history of the Bengali immigrants of BC that was collected for this paper constitutes a treasure trove from which information was gleaned to present the background of their migration and socio-cultural adjustment to their new land. The participants spanned a fifty-year history of immigration, and their oral narratives captured the essence of a community that values higher education and multiculturalism, and identifies themselves more with their language than their religion. At the same time, Bengalis from India have blended themselves into the mosaic of Canadian society at large. Their smooth transition from being members of a visible minority group to being members of the greater community was possible partly due to their high level of educational and professional qualifications, and partly because of the multicultural nature of Canadian society. Participants never saw themselves as being on the receiving end of a charitable country's generosity; rather, they established themselves as contributing members of

Canadian society. In the grand scheme of things, the oral history of these 59 people may not seem significant, but it is the story of the trailblazers of the small but distinct community of Bengali-Canadians in British Columbia.

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KHALEDA BANU

IN PURSUIT OF OUR DREAMS

1. THE DIFFICULT DECISION TO LEAVE

Our decision to immigrate to Canada was made in a very uncontrived, lacklustre manner. There wasn't any strong, sure desire to immigrate. Prior to our immigration, my husband Rabiul and I both had good steady jobs, lived in a desirable part of the capital city in our home country of Bangladesh and were surrounded by a close-knit network of caring family and friends. Our decision to uproot our lives and immigrate to a foreign place grew out of a spontaneous urge to follow the road map of our lives, which led us away from the country where we had been born and had lived and loved.

This road map emerged slowly and stealthily, marked by coincidental happenings beginning with a small newspaper article. A friend of mine showed us a newspaper clipping that her husband had sent from the Middle East, about Canada opening its doors to new immigrants. That clipping from a far-away land stirred within us a sense of curiosity and wonder about a potential life in Canada, and in doing so initiated a series of events that changed the course of our lives.

Almost on a whim, we applied for a Canadian visa, not expecting the immigration process to start or end very soon. To our surprise, our application to immigrate under the individual category was readily accepted. The principal applicant was Rabiul who, being a naval architect, was eligible to apply since Canada had a need for his professional skills. Subsequently, we were called for an interview, did our medical assessments and within a year and half, the immigration visa IMM1000 was in our hands.

It was during this time that we were faced with the daunting question of whether or not to make the big move. To uproot ourselves from a secure and familiar place and transplant ourselves to an unknown, far-away land was a difficult undertaking. The only justifiable reason to immigrate was the future of our two girls, who were only three and four years old at the time. It was hard to imagine raising a family amidst the socio-political unrest and insecurity that plagued our home country at that time.

Bangladesh in the 1980s was going through a growth spurt, and still stabilizing itself after the devastating and wasteful war of 1971, which had decimated human lives and shattered the country's infrastructure. Dhaka, the capital city, was overly crowded, with hordes of people moving in from rural areas and other parts of the country in search of jobs, security and shelter. The country's economic condition and sense of law and order were shrouded in uncertainty. For example, if one ventured out for work or any other reason, returning home safely was always a concern. Being hit by a reckless truck driver or attacked by a hijacker was a common phenomenon. There seemed to be a desire on the part of those who could leave the country to settle elsewhere. We were at a crossroads, and

our decision to immigrate was ultimately made for us by the country's unsettled political and socio-economic condition.

Although the country was experiencing considerable social change and economic uncertainty during this time, both Rabiul and I were fortunate to have stable and fulfilling careers during our early married life in Dhaka. I worked as an Assistant Immigration Officer for the Canadian High Commission in Bangladesh. It was a very interesting, satisfying and well-paying job. I loved the job's intricacies and the application of diplomacy and investigative methods. Being a "people person," I flourished in this job and got glowing evaluations every year. Although to the outside world it seemed like I had a great deal of power and authority as an insider in the immigration department, in reality, the sole authority of granting a visitor or immigration visa was in the hands of the Immigration Officer, who had come from Canada to take the job. Rabiul was likewise flourishing in his job as a naval architect. His job involved designing ships, ordering work, going on inspections and overseeing delivery of ships, tugboats and commercial marine vehicles. He worked for the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA), where he easily moved up the ranks to a senior position after joining the organization soon after graduating from BUET, a reputed engineering university in Bangladesh. With both Rabiul and I working in secure, reputable positions early in our careers, the decision to immigrate was motivated less by the desire to accelerate our own career potential and more by the desire to provide future opportunities abroad for our daughters.

Prior to my marriage, I had experienced life abroad as a Master's student in the United States, when I had lived, worked and studied in Minnesota. After completing my Master's degree at the University of Minnesota, I returned to Bangladesh, got married, had children and began gradually reverting to the Bangladeshi roots I had left behind. My six-year sojourn from home meant I was now required to make many adjustments to conform to the real and imagined pressure of social norms and expectations in my home country. Despite these adjustments, I began to enjoy the comforts of life in Dhaka. Being surrounded by loving family and friends, and having more than one maid for household help and a driver at my beck and call were luxuries that I began to enjoy and get used to after my lonely, sub-standard student life in the USA. The agony of a lonely, hard life in a foreign country, no matter how developed, was still very fresh in my mind, so the thought of immigrating to Canada was not very appealing. However, Rabiul's wish to settle abroad was pretty strong. Most of his friends had either obtained jobs or gained admission to universities and colleges in the USA, Canada or elsewhere, and he too wanted to avail himself of the opportunity to move. Thus, with hope and prayers in our hearts as we faced the uncertainty ahead, we decided to move to Canada in 1988.

2. EARLY EXPERIENCES IN CANADA

To make the moving process more manageable and make sure we entered Canada before the immigration visa expiry date, we decided to go to Montreal for a couple of months and assess the job market. This strategy allowed us to temporarily experience what life in Canada might be like without us having to permanently give up our jobs and dispose of our house, car and other belongings in Bangladesh. Before leaving for Montreal, we got in touch with a Bangladeshi college professor, Dr. Ahmed, whose contact information we got

through a relative. Dr. Ahmed was known for his heart-warming, welcoming attitude towards newcomers, whom he would pick up from the airport, feed and accommodate in his own home, and assist with finding a place to live. He did the same for us.

We rented an apartment in Montreal and stayed there for about two months. This short stay provided a very good glimpse of the sort of lifestyle transformation that would take place once we settled in Canada. Housecleaning, grocery shopping, child-minding, cooking and earning money all had to be done singlehandedly. Life seemed so hectic and unsettled that when my two-year-old cried, so did I. I understood that starting life from scratch would be a monumental task, and that our first and most important job would be to overcome the accompanying sense of isolation and loneliness. Adjusting to the weather, figuring out the government office systems, applying for jobs and coping with a general lack of mobility were just a few of the innumerable issues that overwhelmed us and required courage to tackle properly.

Upon our return to Bangladesh after our short stay in Montreal, it took us a full year to get ourselves prepared to make the final move. The days and months before the actual move to Canada were excruciatingly difficult. Rabiul and I had countless discussions deliberating the pros and cons of such a move. Trying to come to decisions regarding concerns such as when to move and which province to move to, which cities would provide the best career and education opportunities and where we would find other Bangladeshis caused constant fear and anxiety.

In the end, the actual move felt like skydiving. Our landing plan was mapped out in detail. We equipped ourselves with the right gear, harnessed ourselves in securely and made a headlong dive, hoping to make a safe landing. We set foot on Canadian soil on September 21, 1989. The date is deeply etched in my memory. The emotional roller-coaster of thrill and fear as we took our first few steps into unknown territory engulfed both Rabiul and me, resulting in many sleepless nights. It was hard to extricate ourselves from a familiar and settled life with good, steady jobs and loving family and friends. However, the invaluable immigration visa, a once-in-a-life time opportunity to settle in Canada, could not be taken lightly. Thus, the skydive, our leap of faith.

3. THE EVENTUAL MOVE TO CANADA

The preparation for the final move was quite intense. To ascertain Rabiul's job opportunities, we had to research shipbuilding areas in Canada. The distinct areas were Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and Vancouver. We chose the last because of its favourable weather conditions. We also researched universities in case the necessity of upgrading our degrees arose. While going through the University of British Columbia's handbook, we came across the name of Dr. Salahuddin, a Bangladeshi PhD scholar, and contacted him right away. Dr. Salahuddin picked us up from the airport and dropped us at the City Centre Motor Inn on Main Street, where we stayed for a few days before moving into a basement rental suite on Gladstone Street in East Vancouver. Connecting with Dr. Salahuddin was like a godsend, and we will be forever indebted to him for all his help during the time when we knew not a single soul in Vancouver.

Our experience in finding a place to live was very difficult and unwelcoming. Most landlords would perform the screening over the phone and then make us come and see the

place. As soon as we reached the location, we would be told that the place had been rented out. Each of the potential landlords we went to see raised different concerns, for instance that they would not rent to people with children or that we did not possess the references they required. It was obvious that our appearance did not match the unaccented and fluent English they had heard me speak over the phone. When we finally moved into the basement suite of a house, the woman upstairs would stomp on our ceiling or come to our door screaming that my girls were too noisy. It was a difficult start to our life in Vancouver.

4. OUR JOB SEARCH

Our priority after landing in Vancouver was to find jobs that were comparable on an economic and educational level to the positions we had left behind in Bangladesh. Realistically, we knew that this would not happen overnight, and had given ourselves about three years to settle down with suitable jobs. However, despite our qualifications and educational backgrounds, the planned time frame did not pan out the way we had hoped.

Within a month of our arrival, I had found myself a job by walking into an immigration consulting office. It was a brand-new office, and the owner, Mr. Parhar, seemed to be more focused on setting up the office than acquiring or tending to clients. My job was mainly to assist in cleaning and organizing the office. I was willing to settle into this job and make use of my knowledge and experience related to Canadian immigration. However, the job was very short-lived. Unfortunately, Mr. Parhar was not able to pay my salary on time and when he did, the cheques would bounce. I thus had to move on and look for other jobs. I spent hours poring through the classified section of the local newspaper. One of the jobs I applied for was that of an office manager with a non-profit social services organization. It happened to be in the same place where my two daughters went to preschool, which was walking distance from the place where we lived. The job application required a handwritten cover letter. I was quite excited by this requirement since I knew I had fairly good handwriting, having been drilled in cursive writing for years by the nuns at the convent school I had attended during my elementary years. I hoped that, if nothing else, my handwriting would catch the hiring personnel's attention and lead to a job interview. I'm not sure if it was because of my handwriting skills, but I did get a call for an interview and later a job offer.

I started working for Cedar Cottage Neighbourhood House on March 15, 1990, about six months after moving to Canada. My initial plan was to stay in the job for two to three years and then move on to a public service job, an aspiration that my father and I had shared for me since I had completed my undergraduate degree in history. My father, who had been a government official in Bangladesh, had always wanted one of his children, especially a daughter, to follow his lead. After arriving in Canada, I kept this hope alive for quite some time and took all the necessary steps to apply for a federal job including sitting for required daylong exams, on which I managed to do very well. After passing these exams, in which hundreds of applicants had participated, the names were entered into a pool, which was revisited whenever there was a vacancy. However, one had to keep re-applying every six months to stay in the pool. I lost the opportunity to obtain a federal job since I was not able to keep my application updated. Thus my dream of working in a government office never materialized, although my desire to work for such organizations

as Citizenship and Canadian Immigration (CIC), the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) and the Canada Customs and Border Agency remains alive to this day.

Rabiul, on the other hand, faced a very challenging situation with regards to finding a job in his own field. From the very onset of his job search, he realized that to get a foothold in the shipbuilding industry in Vancouver or elsewhere in Canada would be tough without upgrading his naval architecture degree from Bangladesh. Thus, he applied and was admitted to the University of British Columbia where he took a number of individual courses, hoping that upgrading his qualifications with some relevant courses would enable him to obtain a job in his field without doing a full four-year degree. He found it difficult to become a fulltime student and re-do his undergraduate degree while supporting his family. After a year of taking courses, he left the university and decided on a career change. He then took a 10-month course in electronics at Vancouver Community College and found himself a job at an electronic company. The closest he could get to working in shipbuilding was obtaining a job at a marine manufacturing company, where he has worked for over 10 years.

5. MY JOB EXPERIENCE

My job at Cedar Cottage Neighbourhood House lasted over 27 years; I retired from it just recently, in 2017. It was a rewarding and fulfilling position. Through my work with the organization, I met amazing people whose selflessness and generosity inspired me immensely. It is through this job that the word volunteerism has taken on a very profound meaning for me. I learned that not all the work one does is motivated by the exchange of money. So much meaningful work can be done from the goodness of the soul, to benefit one's own life and the lives of those one is serving.

During the three decades I spent at my job, I experienced firsthand the various transformations related to office procedures and equipment, including the gradual digitalization of the whole office. Out went the typewriter and in came the word processor, resulting in the complete takeover of all office work by the computer. As these changes took place in the office, I had to upgrade my skills and take various instructional courses related to software to become more proficient in computer programs such as Pages, FileMaker, ACCPAC, etc. Writing by hand, which had been so important when I had first been hired, had gradually become obsolete. Within my own lifetime, I experienced the advent of computers and the decline of the typewriter and rolodex.

While my job experience in Canada has been positive, my husband's has been less so. For years, he remained relentless in his search for a job in the shipbuilding and engineering field. Doing odd jobs broke his heart and confidence. There were times when he regretted immigrating and wanted to go back to Bangladesh. While his current job does not give him much satisfaction, it provides him with a stable income to support his family. Unfortunately, his story is not different from those of hundreds of other immigrants in Canada whose education and qualifications are not utilized. Neither Rabiul nor I could understand or believe that the educational qualifications and experience of a naval architect – the very things that had made him eligible for an immigration visa in the first place – were not able to land him a job in Canada.

6. BALANCING LIFE

My major challenge in my work life was the commute to work. During the first couple of years when we lived in Vancouver, there was no commute at all. I lived very close to work and would come home during my lunch hour to feed my children and even do some cooking for dinner. However, all that changed when we bought a house in Surrey. This was in the early 90s, and the housing prices in Vancouver were beyond our reach. Even dilapidated, run-down houses were priced above our budget. It had always been part of our Canadian dream to own a home for our family, so with the surging housing prices in Vancouver we were forced to look for housing in Surrey. That's when commuting back and forth from work became quite a challenge. An hour-long or 45-minute drive each way took a toll on me. Public transportation was an option I made use of for many years, but catching buses or the skytrain did not save time or hassle.

Following our early years in Vancouver, our household expanded from four people to seven. After our marriage, Rabiul had to take charge of his two younger siblings, whom we sponsored and brought as immigrants to Canada. In the meantime, our immediate family got larger with the birth of our third daughter. With a household of seven people, a full-time job and an hour-and-a-half commute, every day was like walking a tight rope; I had to be constantly vigilant in order to keep my balance. The biggest challenge when the children were young was arranging childcare. Leaving my daughters in the care of a responsible adult where they would thrive and be happy was a difficult task. Rabiul changed his work hours from morning to evening shifts to tend to the children while I went to work. Our first priority when it came to my three daughters was to provide them with proper care and the best possible educational opportunities while we strove to build a life in Canada.

7. BEING BENGALI IN CANADA

Both Rabiul and I were quite aware of the fact that we had removed our children and ourselves far from our homeland with its cultural and religious norms and practices. Bearing that in mind, we always tried to keep our Bengali culture alive especially for our girls, whether it was through celebrations or festivals, food or attire. We also took them to visit Bangladesh so they could see and appreciate the ancestral roots of their parents and meet relatives they only saw in photos. Although my children liked eating Western food, their comfort food was Bengali cuisine, with their favourite dishes being *bhaat* (rice), *daal* (lentils), and *gosht* (meat). While we embraced Canada as our own homeland, rooting for the Canucks and celebrating Canada's success and achievements, the nostalgia and longing we felt for Bengali songs, poems, drama and movies was very much relevant in our everyday life. Our gradual adaptation to the Canadian way of life, such as taking vacations and enjoying leisure time as a family, had taken place quite unknowingly. When the children were young, our most enjoyable outdoor activity was to go camping with friends, which led us to visit picturesque locations rich with mountains, rivers, parks and forests. The meshing of our Canadian and Bangladeshi lifestyles took place so seamlessly that the two have become inseparable, though in many ways the scale has tipped more towards the Canadian side. This is quite noticeable during our visits to Bangladesh. Orderly conduct,

such as waiting patiently in long queues and refraining from blowing the car horn in traffic, has become so inherent in us that we sometimes feel like misfits in our own birthplace.

Having been born into a Bangladeshi family, we only spoke Bengali at home during my childhood. However, my father, being a liberal-minded person, saw things a little differently and believed in learning different languages for educational purposes. He sent all his children, including his daughters, to English medium schools where we learned Bengali as a second language. Having learned English from the elementary level onward, I had an edge when it came to pursuing higher education abroad and eventually immigrating to Canada; I never suffered from a language barrier. Nonetheless, Bengali language was front and centre in our lives, and Bengali songs, poetry and drama – especially the works of Rabindranath Tagore – occupy a very special place in my heart. After immigrating to Canada, our language at home remained Bengali, even with the children. However, my daughters naturally assumed a stronger affinity for the English language; their proficiency in Bengali lagged, in the sense that they could speak the language, albeit with an accent, but could not read or write in Bengali. They do express their desire to learn the language, and I hope that someday they get to fulfill that wish so that the Bengali language remains alive within the family.

As for French, the other official language of Canada, I do not know it very well except for a few words. Rabiul did take a French conversational course at the French Alliance Centre in Bangladesh before immigrating to Canada, though this was not sufficient to grant him any fluency in the language. My daughters are much more proficient in the French language, having taken it in school as a requirement for high school graduation. Two of my daughters also went to Quebec on a French exchange program to increase their fluency in the language. During one of these exchange programs, my daughter had to stay with a francophone family while their French-speaking daughter came and stayed with us to brush up on her English skills. Within a short time, the French girl spoke clear English and fell in love with Bengali food. She even came to my daughter's wedding, wore a saree and participated in a full-on Bengali wedding. The exchange of culture that took place has had a positive, lasting impact on all of us, making us realize that language barriers cannot impede human connection and shared experience.

8. THE ROLE OF RELIGION

In our religious celebrations too, there is an amalgamation of Canadian and Bangladeshi practices. During the Christmas and Thanksgiving holidays, we hardly miss a chance of getting families and friends together to cook a turkey and enjoy a sumptuous meal of stuffing, mashed potatoes, cranberry sauce and all the rest. Exchanging cards and gifts has become a part of our annual traditions. Going to Christmas parties at my own work and my husband's was an event I looked forward to every year. However, our own religious beliefs as Muslims also play an important role in our lives in Canada. This is largely because we feel the necessity to hold on to these beliefs for fear of losing that connection. However, I strongly believe that religion is a very private matter and should not interfere with my outside world. As parents, we felt the importance of introducing our children to our Muslim faith and providing them the opportunity of studying the Quran, teaching them *namaz* (prayers) and fasting during the month of Ramadan. Leading our lives as Muslims in the

city in which we live has proven to be easy because of the availability of *halal* food and the proximity of mosques for *jumaah* (Friday) prayers or other occasions. We celebrated *iftar* parties during the month-long fasting during Ramadan and enjoyed *Eid* celebrations in our Muslim community. In fact, we celebrate *Eid* just the same way we did in Bangladesh, if not with more pomp and circumstance. On *Eid* day, we all get up early in the morning, dress up in new clothes specially bought for the occasion, and go to the nearby prayer hall for the *Eid* prayers. It is only since coming to Canada that my daughters and I have attended the *Eid* prayers in a public space as this is not the norm for the women in Bangladesh. Every *Eid* we have an open house, and family and friends drop by whenever they can throughout the day. We are joined by work colleagues, non-Muslim neighbours and friends from our community, who come to share lunch or dinner with us on *Eid* days. Indeed, *Eid* for us has truly become a gathering of people, regardless of culture and religion, enjoying traditional Bangladeshi food.

9. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

When we arrived in Vancouver in the late 80s, there were very few Bengalis from Bangladesh in the Lower Mainland, probably about 100 families. It was a close-knit, strong community of people who would find the slightest excuse to get together for a party, be it for a birthday, an anniversary or a long weekend just to chat and catch up. Around this time, the Canada Bangladesh Cultural Association was formed; its founding member was Dr. Salauddin Ahmed, who also wrote the constitution of the Association. This is the very same Dr. Ahmed who had been of such immense help to us when we landed in Canada. My entry into the realm of community involvement began around this time. I joined the Canada Bangladesh Cultural Association as the Cultural Secretary. I remained involved with the Association for quite a few years in various capacities, including serving as the Treasurer, Secretary and Vice-President. In these roles, I helped organize numerous functions and public events like the Bangladeshi Independence Day celebrations, Language Day talks, annual picnics and various other social activities. My recollection of these days still evokes a great sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. Although at times all the hard work behind the scenes remained unnoticed, it did provide me with a great opportunity to learn and practice skills related to leadership, public speaking and management experience. I was also among the very few women who had served in a leadership capacity with the Association at that time. Besides the Cultural Association, I have had the opportunity to participate in various other organizations, namely the Probeen Wellness Society, a seniors' wellness group and the Canada Bangladesh Community Centre project. Taken together, these volunteer experiences have not only helped strengthen my connections to my Bangladeshi heritage but have also provided a sense of belonging and community within my Canadian surroundings.

10. IMMIGRATION AND MULTICULTURALISM

The privilege of upholding one's own culture in a foreign land is a great blessing. Canada's commitment and policy to preserve and enhance the multicultural heritage of Canadians

has made our lives as immigrants from far-away lands a lot easier and more enjoyable. The opportunity to form social and cultural groups that help promote one's own culture also creates a support group that assists with the settlement process in a new country. For almost all immigrants, the nostalgia for indigenous things such as food, language, clothing, customs and rituals is never too far from their minds. Most community groups provide a platform for the expression and enjoyment of all that is left behind halfway across the world. For many of us, practicing and retaining our culture and customs for the sake of our children is very important, so that the next generation can observe, emulate and carry forward this heritage. Canada's multicultural policy helps maintain this rich diversity of race, ethnic origin and religion, and has given new immigrants like us a sense of belonging. I believe that, in doing so, Canada has made great strides in breaking down biases and discrimination and fostered a sense of camaraderie amongst all its citizens.

11. LOVE FOR FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE

I have been in love with First Nations arts and crafts since I first set foot in Canada and saw them on display at the airport. With their blend of nature and human expression, First Nations paintings and carvings are not only beautiful but symbolic in their ability to tell a story. My first association with the First Nations people came during my work at Cedar Cottage Neighbourhood House. There I became close friends with many individuals of First Nations heritage and listened to their heart-wrenching stories of abuse, isolation and resiliency in trying to rise above all their hardship. An interesting community event of the First Nations people is the Pow Wow, a social gathering of Aboriginal people which usually includes competitive dancing. A Pow Wow used to be held annually at Trout Lake Community Centre, in partnership with Cedar Cottage Neighbourhood House. For me, the main attractions of the Pow Wow were the arts and crafts tables, the dancers and the beautiful regalia – special clothing made of buttons and feathers that the elders and the dancers wore. Occasions celebrating the rich cultural heritage of First Nations people, such as the Pow Wow, serve as a continual reminder that the recognition of other ethnic groups, particularly those that first inhabited this land, is an important aspect of understanding Canadian history and our shared identity.

12. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON THE PURSUIT OF OUR DREAMS

Dreaming is a continuous process, and while some dreams get fulfilled, a lot more crowd the space. In retrospect, while we may have realized some of our dreams in Canada, many more need to be accomplished, so the pursuit is still on. However, every little bit of progress that takes place, like my oldest daughter becoming an engineer, my second daughter completing her PhD and my youngest wanting to go to law school, make both my husband and I feel that the main purpose of immigration may have been fulfilled. What we couldn't achieve ourselves in Canada has been achieved by our daughters. Rabiul always says that his daughter holding an engineering job in Canada has fulfilled his own desire, and given him reassurance regarding our decision to immigrate to Canada.

SANZIDA HABIB

BENGALI IMMIGRANT WOMEN: HEALTH AND WELLBEING

> [M]igration constitutes an experience of significant transition, offering new opportunities as well as many potential hardships. The immigration process – from the decision to migrate, to the journey itself, and throughout the settlement process – is a complicated affair…the new opportunities that may be associated with migration to Canada occur in tandem with the challenges of migration. As such, it is imperative that both the opportunities and challenges of migration are factored into the equation of immigrant health outcomes. (Vissandjée, Thurston, Apale and Nahar 2007: 224)

1. BACKGROUND AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Bengalis are an ethnic group most often merged with other subgroups of South Asians in Canada. South Asians are the largest visible minority group in Canada, but the ethnic, linguistic, religious and national or regional diversities within this group are often blanketed in this broad category (Islam, Khanlou and Tamim 2014). Even Bengalis are not a unified group as they can come from Bangladesh, India or elsewhere in the world, and may have Muslim, Hindu or other religious backgrounds, but they speak the common language Bengali, also known as Bangla. Bangladeshis are often referred to as Bengalis in common discourse, and also in some research including health research in Canada, the UK, the USA and some other parts of the world. For the purposes of this paper, the term "Bengali" has been used synonymously with Bangladeshi. The term "immigrant" has been used as a social construct (Li 2003) rather than a legal one as it is used in common discourse in Canada to refer to visible minority people irrespective of their legal status, length of stay or place of birth.

A few health studies have focused on the health experiences of Bengali immigrant women exclusively, especially in Canada. In most health research, however, these women are usually buried under the broader category of South Asian women, ethno-cultural minorities, or visual minority immigrant and racialized women. A search in the Web of Science, a multidisciplinary database of journal articles and conference proceedings, produced only two results when the words "Bengali immigrant women" and "health" were used – only one of those studies was Canadian, while the other was conducted in New York City. A better result was found by searching the same database using the words "Bangladeshi immigrant women" and "health." A total of 19 articles including one letter appeared, but a quick analysis showed that none of these were from Canada. Ten of these studies were from the US, four from the UK, and two each from Australia and Finland. Another search using the terms "Bangladeshi immigrants" and "Canada" yielded six results;

however only one of them was found under "Public Environmental Occupational Health" while the others were under the categories of Sociology, Social Sciences Interdisciplinary, Psychology, Developmental and Geography. A comprehensive review of such literature was beyond the scope of this paper, but this quick search showed a research gap and the relative lack of research on smaller groups like Bengalis or Bangladeshis within the community of South Asian immigrant women in Canada.

Migration, as a determinant of health, tends to intersect with other social determinants, such as poverty, education, food security, employment, housing, racism, social exclusion and neoliberal economic restructuring to shape immigrant women's physical, mental and overall health (Anderson 2006; Islam et al. 2014; Kobayashi and Prus 2012). The challenges immigrant women face in the new host country considerably influence their physical and mental health and access to health care (Islam et al. 2014; Vissandjée et al. 2007). Yet the health effects of migration, especially how women's diverse experiences before, after and during migration shape the relationship between migration and health, still has not been explicitly elucidated in immigration and health research (Vissandjée et al. 2007). Intersectional analysis of migration as a complex social determinant of health and health care access was particularly absent in research about South Asian women's underutilization of cancer screening services (Habib 2008, 2012). Similarly, migration, as it determines the experience of motherhood, has been largely neglected by researchers, and immigrant women's experiences of infant feeding in particular have received little attention (Liamputtong 2006). To fill these gaps, South Asian immigrant women's access to health care services, particularly cancer screening and obstetric and maternal care, was examined in the broader context of their migration and settlement experiences in two different studies in Greater Vancouver. The first one was my PhD research about South Asian immigrant women's access to and experiences with Pap-smears and mammograms, while the second one explored infant feeding practices of immigrant mothers from different parts of Asia, including South Asia. I worked as a Research Assistant on the second project from 2010 to 2011, and I collected the data for the first project between 2008 and 2009. Both qualitative studies aimed to understand women's health practices and access within the broader contexts of their everyday life experiences as shaped by the intersections of gender, migration and resettlement, and socioeconomic policies and processes.

Although the original scope of these projects was South Asian or Asian immigrant women, a few Bengali women participated in both studies. For the purposes of this paper, I have extracted and presented partial data from the Bengali women's narratives about their health experience and use of different health services. This data showed that the experience of migration brought new expectations, opportunities and roles for these women, and also posed new challenges. Women in both studies went through financial and job insecurity and stress caused by un/der/employment, isolation and loss of family ties, support and social status, especially during the first few years following immigration – phenomena commonly found in the literature on racialized immigrant women (Guruge and Khanlou 2004; Vissandjée et al. 2007). These material conditions intersected with gendered ideologies and roles to shape these women's health and wellbeing as well as their experiences of childbearing and parenting. Moreover, the powerful social and moral discourses of "good mothering" influenced their self-care practices so that while expectant and new mothers worked hard to take care of themselves for the best care and health of

their babies, the double duties of paid work and childcare made self-care hard for working mothers. Additionally, while young immigrant mothers including the Bangladeshis in the infant feeding study were inundated with health information and resources about neonatal care and parenting, information about cancer screening services such as Pap-smears and mammograms was not that abundant, as found in the other study, implying that immigrant women need to be viewed not just as "builders of better babies" or "future citizens" but also as entitled to equitable, healthy and fulfilling lives in Canada.

Bengali immigrant women's health in this paper has been understood and analyzed within the social determinants of health framework informed by critical feminist antiracist and intersectionality scholarship. This framework views the health differences among Canadians as the result of social forces such as poverty, education, food security, employment, housing, racism, social exclusion and neoliberal economic restructuring (Anderson 2006; Raphael 2004), and also recognizes "the dynamic interplay between different levels of determinants" (Vissandjée and Hyman 2011: 259) because these factors complicate and intersect with each other. The multiplicity and complexity of the determinants and the multi-dimensional nature of health inequality in vulnerable populations demand that we pay attention to the processes through which the complex intersections of gender, race, class and other social relations operate in everyday interactions to determine women's health and impact their ability to manage health and wellbeing (Anderson 2006; Kobayashi and Prus 2012). An intersectionality framework conceptualizes race, class, gender and sexuality as social constructs, and understands "…gender as inseparable from other forms of social differences" (Varcoe, Hankivsky and Morrow 2007: 9).

Critical feminist antiracist scholars have also critiqued the dominant neoliberal ideologies and understandings related to health care because these view health as an individual issue and as isolated from the socioeconomic policies, systemic inequities and historical processes that shape the differential life opportunities and priorities as well as unequal access to resources and health care for different groups of people. These ideologies largely fail to recognize and redress broader health determinants and public policies pertaining to economic opportunities, poverty, housing, service provision, and political inclusion and exclusion of racialized men and women. They also presume individuals, irrespective of their race, gender, socioeconomic and historical positions, as capable of making healthy choices and taking responsibility for their own health. As a result, those who cannot meet their health needs are viewed as "discredited citizens" (Fiske and Browne 2006: 106). Critical feminist and intersectionality health scholars, driven by the goals of establishing equitable health through removing structural barriers, have opposed neoliberal individualism and emphasized social justice and social determinants approaches to addressing women's health issues and inequities.

2. METHOD AND SAMPLE

Qualitative data for both studies was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews. Purposive or convenience sampling methods were used in both studies through an emergent and inductive process. In the cancer screening study, 5 of the 31 South Asian women were Bangladeshi Bengali (Habib 2012). All the Bangladeshi women were over 40

years old (range: 42-55) at the time of data collection during 2008 and 2009. Two of them had professional degrees but were unemployed at that time, and they had also stayed in Canada for less than three years. The other women had lived in Canada for at least 10 years, and were juggling full-time jobs in the service industry and childcare and household responsibilities at home. Four out of these five women had at least one chronic health condition including high blood pressure, diabetes and mild arthritis, and were taking some medications for these conditions.

In the infant feeding study, there were 16 mothers from China, Iran, The Philippines and South Asia (Chapman and Habib 2017). Data gathered from two Bangladeshi participants has been used in this paper. The women were 24 and 35 years old with an eight-month-old and a one-year-old infant, respectively, at the time of data collection between December 2010 and early 2011; they had lived in Canada for two to four years. Both of them were staying home to take care of their infants; only one had a few months of maternity leave, followed by a part-time job during pregnancy. Out of these seven Bangladeshi women in two studies, all but one had young children, and only one was non-Muslim. All were well-educated with a Bachelor degree at minimum.

All the interviews were conducted and transcribed by the author in both Bengali and English depending on the women's preference; Bengali interviews were instantaneously translated and transcribed. Both studies received ethical approval from the Behavioural Research Ethics Board at the University of British Columbia. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of the participants. Using an iterative and dynamic process, the transcribed texts were categorized according to codes and sub-codes and examined for emerging themes. While the main focus of these two studies were different, namely cancer screening and infant feeding practices, such practices were examined and analyzed against the backdrop of participants' general health and wellbeing as shaped by the process of migration and its intersections with other social, structural and discursive forces in their lives. Much of this general and background data has been brought to the center of analysis in this paper. The analytical themes presented here emerged from the perceived similarities as well as dissimilarities or contrasts in the women's experiences in both studies.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In both studies, women talked about their gender roles, migration experiences and challenges, and how those shaped their health, self-care, parenting, health care practices and experiences with the Canadian health care system. Overall, gendered experience of migration, settlement and parenting in Canada shaped their health and wellbeing as well as their access to different domains of health care.

Gender, Migration, Health and Mothering

Women's experience in the cancer screening study showed that the process of immigration can cause physical, mental and financial stress and can affect health. Financial stress caused by un/der/employment, isolation and loss of social status, family ties and support were some of the common challenges shared by Bangladeshi newcomers. These shaped not only their health and wellbeing, but also their experiences of childbearing and mothering; this

was especially noticed in the infant feeding study. Lack of meaningful employment can create barriers to settlement and successful integration for immigrants, and can impact their health. A newcomer immigrant professional woman from Bangladesh voiced the frustration and mental stress experienced by most immigrants from South Asia due to non-validation of their professional degrees and lack of employment in their desired field of expertise:

> *I'm frustrated for sure! I can't get a job despite all these foreign [Western] degrees in my pocket! All these degrees are in vain! These degrees will give you jobs in other countries but not here! This is very hard to accept…. It's a lot of stress! No matter how hard I think I wouldn't stress out I can't help it!*

Lack of employment or any earnings created not only financial stress but also a feeling of helplessness for Camellia due to her economic dependence on her husband: "If I had a job at least I wouldn't have to ask for money from my husband. Like right now, I have to ask for even pocket money from him. So I definitely feel helpless in that sense!"

Migration to a new country often disrupts people's social and financial status and lifestyle, and creates stress. For example, Gulmohar, another newcomer, was concerned about the high cost of medicine in Canada. She used this strategy: "Even I have some medicine from home so I don't have to buy here…so health care cost is minimized." As a skilled immigrant, she was working on obtaining Canadian accreditation; she shared that she was meagerly sustaining life since immigration by maintaining "a rock bottom lifestyle" and compromising her previous quality of life until she could obtain her qualifications to practice as a health care professional in Canada. She also articulated how the settlement process became more intense due to loss of support and reassurance from family and friends:

> *Mentally, there's lot of stress, like, going through this settlement process, especially the professional upgrading…. Also like, I miss extended family, especially my mother. And also, like, the social life – friends and family over there. Yeah – that is also something I always miss! It would be a source of comfort and pleasure – I miss that!*

Life stress and anxiety disorders were found to be important mental health issues for South Asian immigrant populations in Canada (Islam et al. 2014). Often, despite having knowledge about healthy lifestyle and health promoting behaviours, women from South Asia including Bangladesh may be unable to continue some of these practices as a result of migration, which may interrupt the regular health behaviour or lifestyle practiced back home, and demand special attention and effort to put everything back in order in a new country (Choudhry 1998). Bela, for example, thought that South Asian immigrant women may have increased vulnerability towards certain health conditions and diseases due to the transformation of their "lifestyle and work habits" as a result of migration to a modern Western country like Canada:

> *Women in our [home] country, when they work, like, sit to do something or cook, they often stretch or squat and that's sort of an exercise as you bend your body and knees. Women in our country inadvertently do some kind of physical exercise [just through their daily housework]. So, our women, even though sometimes they may have different problems but they usually don't have many other gynecological problems.*

Bela thought that many "modern-day gynecological problems" may be the by-products of a Western lifestyle – increased dependence on modern appliances and amenities that demand less physical labour. She also elaborated on how the physical stress of her menial

job impacted her overall health, adding that she believed many South Asian women suffer from similar problems:

> *I noticed that after working for a long time standing on my feet for eight hours at a stretch I started having joint pains. And since then I started having swelling legs and feet and many more physical or medical problems related to this. I saw doctors and still taking medication but I know I'm not alone – a lot of South Asian immigrant women I know also have similar complaints because we're required to work standing on our feet for such long hours. For women like us, we're not used to this, so we have problems. And it was really bad for me and that's why I had to change my job.*

Such material conditions of immigrant women's lives can not only impact their health, but also shape their experiences of mothering, which became apparent in the infant feeding study.

The Bangladeshi mothers, along with many other Asian immigrant mothers, experienced a lack of extended family support combined with strong gendered divisions of labour related to childcare; they also often experienced a lack of financial stability (Chapman and Habib 2017). Not having extended family support increased challenges related to infant feeding and childcare, and caused stress. These mothers acknowledged professional support and help received from the Canadian public health system, but still missed the care, comfort and immediate support of close family members and friends. Fariha said, "As a new mom, I was really scared [nervous], because I didn't have any relatives here, so I really – it was scaring me." The transitional status and tight family finances due to migration influenced living conditions and the accessibility of extended family support. For example, Ivy said,

> *We were living in a small one bedroom apartment so having a newborn baby and at the same time having my parents over, it would be quite overwhelming for us…they are old people…they might get sick after they come here, after a long journey…so we later decided that my parents would rather come later than when we were giving birth to baby.*

In fact, post-migration financial hardship limits the ability of most newcomers to sponsor extended family members to come to Canada, despite their need for extra support (Chapman and Habib 2017; Habib 2012; Koehn, Spencer and Hwang 2010).

Migration, Self-Care and 'Good Mothering'

Mothers in both the cancer screening and infant feeding studies provided "family-centric" or "altruistic" rather than personal reasons for self-care (Choudhry 1998; Koehn, Habib, Bukhari and Mills 2013). Many Bangladeshi women tend to put the care of their children and other family members ahead of their own – a tendency also noticed in many other South Asian women, especially the elderly who are inclined to have low priority for self-care (Koehn, Habib and Bukhari 2016) – and the wellbeing of family is central to their understandings of self-care (Koehn et al. 2013). This gendered and cultural notion of self-care, combined with the material conditions produced by migration, especially the double duty of childcare/domestic work and paid work, made it difficult for many mothers in the cancer screening study to make time for self-care. For example, Manju, a mother of three children, was managing full-time paid work as well as household and childcare responsibilities without much support from her husband. She recalled when her children

were younger she did not have any time for self-care although she was not working outside the home at that time. Once she went to a physician who noticed her pink eyes, of which she was completely unaware; the physician asked her, "Don't you even look at yourself in the mirror?" As Manju said, being alone to raise her three children born as a result of shortly spaced pregnancies, she indeed had no time to look in the mirror.

Thus the gendered roles of homemaking and care-giving, along with the challenges of immigration and settlement, did have particular impacts on women's health and access to health care for the mothers in the cancer screening study. They became subjected to time stress, which affected their scope for self-care as well as their access to "non-urgent" and preventative health services such as Pap-smears and mammograms. Henna recollected an incident wherein she faced the challenge of balancing both unpaid and paid work of childminding and self-care:

> *I had something pierced deep into my foot and I'm diabetic. But I couldn't go to the doctor to get [a] tetanus [shot]. I went a day after because there was no one at home at that time and I was babysitting two other kids along with my own at home. So, how could I go?.... When I went on the next day, you know what happened? I went to a walk-in clinic and they made me wait there for three hours! My daughter took a half day off [to babysit the kids] and then she had to leave all three kids with me at the clinic because she had to go to her work!*

Unlike the Punjabi community, where most women live in extended families, most Bangladeshi women do not have the presence and support of relatives or extended family members. This is also the case for other smaller South Asian communities. For example, one Pakistani participant in the cancer screening study said, "Punjabi people bring their families – parents who can handle the kids. But we don't have anyone, right?" Bela, a Bangladeshi mother, narrated her struggle to make time for a doctor's appointment:

> *I have to make or adjust doctor's appointments according to my work schedule and often I can't even make it to a specialist appointment due to work. Or, maybe I need to go for ultra-sound test or to a doctor but I have work at that time, or my son is at home and so I have to stay with him at home as there's no one to take care of him at that time, then I have to cancel the appointment. In case of my family doctor's appointment I still need to check all these stuff to see if I can make it. I have to make cancellations quite often or change the appointment.*

Despite these challenges, some of the South Asian women in the study said they tried to take care of themselves by eating healthy, taking regular medications and going to doctors when needed, doing light exercise and yoga at home and spending time with friends. One Bangladeshi woman said, "I started taking simple short courses like childcare, crafts-making – because that was my hobby and I needed that hobby just to hold myself together – without that I'd have lost my sanity! That was my way out [from stress]!" However, some of the women thought they should stay healthy because sickness can make taking care of family and children even harder and more stressful. This "family-centric" and "altruistic" notion of self-care was even more prominent in the infant feeding study, where expectant and young mothers from Asia often went above and beyond to take care of themselves during pregnancy and postpartum to ensure they would give birth to healthy babies and breastfeed them for the longest possible time (Chapman and Habib 2017). They felt a moral obligation to nourish themselves for the wellbeing of their babies. For example, Fariha, a Bangladeshi mother, said she became extra cautious about her diet, and even

though she felt nauseous while taking vitamin pills, she tried hard to take them because she felt she "should" do this for her baby. Liamputtong (2006: 25) found that Southeast Asian immigrant women in Australia experienced mothering as "a moral transformation of self" and were pressed to perform a "moral career…influenced by an ethic of care and responsibility for others, particularly their children." This is also reflected in the narrative of Ivy:

> *My mom, she was also giving me lots of excellent advice over the phone. I became pregnant, she had started reading lots of resources and it is probably because she has sort of – it is my observation…that she has a guilty conscience. Like when she was pregnant with me and my brother she thinks that she didn't take the best care of herself and she thinks there was a lack of knowledge and lack of awareness from her side, but also the people around her…. So she was really cautious that it wouldn't happen in my case.*

In addition, all the mothers said they maintained breastfeeding or did not even give it a second thought despite the challenges of lack of sleep, physical exhaustion and time demands. The increasing pressure on women in modern societies to be responsible for the nourishment, health and wellbeing of their children is internalized by mothers in the sense of moral and social responsibility for their children (Wall 2001). Mothers regularly participate in the social and moral constructions of "good mothering" through efforts to ensure the best possible self-care by maintaining a healthy diet and lifestyle during pregnancy and breastfeeding. Immigrant mothers' efforts to negotiate with the discourses and expectations of "good mothering" may be further constrained by the challenges and hardships of migration. For example, post-migration financial hardship was raised by a number of immigrant mothers while talking about the expense of healthy foods and vitamin supplements. However, all the women regardless of financial status said that they did not compromise on these items, especially for their children. One Bangladeshi mother explained: "Well, we're living on credit cards! Our financial situation is quite tight now but we're not making any compromise with our food and health and the health of our baby!" Thus, women, irrespective of their migration status or ethnic backgrounds, can be subjected to the ideologies of "good motherhood," but the experiences and difficulties of immigrant mothers can be magnified by the intersection of these ideologies with the economic, social and cultural conditions of their lives as immigrant women (Liamputtong 2006: 49).

Access to Health Information and Health Care Services

While young immigrant mothers in the infant feeding study were inundated with health information and resources related to obstetric and neonatal care and parenting, information about cancer screening services such as Pap-smears and mammograms was not that abundant for the participants in the other study. Although some of the new mothers faced some barriers to accessing these information and services, especially if they did not speak English or experienced time stress due to having older children as well as the newborn, all the mothers unanimously acknowledged the resources and support for pregnant and new mothers and infants under Canada's public health system (Chapman and Habib 2017). Both Bangladeshi mothers in this study received health information and

support from the Community Birth Program in Greater Vancouver. Fariha described how she benefitted from the program she was referred to by her family physician:

> *The support is very, very good in Canada, and Vancouver especially, because I was in the…Community Birth Program, and they really helped me a lot! And even when I was giving birth they sent me a doula, so it was really good, and I was taking nutrition support from the program. So, it was good!*

Ivy, another mother, shared a similar experience: "The Birth Program I was a member of, the midwives, the doctors, the nurses – everybody was so helpful in giving, in helping me through this very tough journey." She particularly recognized the support of a community health nurse:

> *Our baby was crying constantly after she came home and we were wondering what's wrong…I was really thankful to that lady who visited my home, this nurse, because she kind of gave us a crash course just in an hour…she told us the baby needs to have some formula for a while and she taught my husband how to do that while I needed to take some rest. So altogether, I mean, she did a very excellent job. And that was the starting point for us.*

On the other hand, health promotion programs and services for South Asian older adults and seniors are few and far between. The Bangladeshi women in the cancer screening study in particular did not seem to be well connected with community health services. For example, a South Asian Pap Test Clinic has been set up in South Vancouver to provide culturally acceptable services and to increase the participation of immigrant women in screening practices (Grewal, Bottorff and Balneaves 2004); but none of the Bangladeshi women were aware of this. Vissandjée et al. (2007) pointed out that lack of information and familiarity regarding existing services and the challenges of adapting to novel health care practices represent significant barriers to many recent immigrants' access to health care in Canada. The experiences of many newly arrived immigrant women in the cancer screening study also confirmed this, as participants did not have sufficient information, resources and support to help them navigate the Canadian health care system. Gulmohar, a relatively recent immigrant from Bangladesh, was unfamiliar with some aspects of the Canadian health care system, even with the process of getting a family physician. She did not know that a Pap-smear can be done by a family physician, despite being a very health-conscious person with a health care professional background.

In general, new immigrants and older adults with a lack of education/literacy and English language skills coming from rural Punjab in the cancer screening study were likely not to use screening services unless they had some symptoms, a family history of cancer or knowledge of prevention, or they received a recommendation, a referral and/or support from a family physician or community support worker (Habib 2012). In the case of the five Bangladeshi women, a complex set of personal, social and structural issues coexisted and intersected to impact their use or lack of use of cancer screening services – these included: not/having a family history, symptoms or knowledge; not/having information or a recommendation from a physician or community resource provider; not/having familiarity with the Canadian health care system; not/having fear/discomfort/embarrassment about exposing personal body parts; not/having beliefs about God's will and inevitability of illnesses; not/having childminding or extended family support; gender roles and responsibilities along with financial in/stability shaping their self-care and other priorities. Often, lack of transportation and dependence on family members for rides created

additional barriers to accessing cancer screening and other health care and community services for Bangladeshi and other South Asian women. Another study found that many Bangladeshi and Chinese immigrant women encountered difficulties related to obtaining transportation, childcare or time away from work, and language barriers, which led to dependency on family members for accompaniment and interpretation support; all of these impacted their cancer screening behaviour (Hulme et al. 2016).

Overall, there was not sufficient information, resources and support available for the under/never-screened women in the cancer screening study (Habib 2012). Even health literacy programs to educate women about cancer screening through pamphlets published in English or Punjabi tend to have limited success because many South Asian immigrant women, especially the elderly, have limited or no literacy in either English or Punjabi. As an observant and concerned participant, Camellia also pointed out the limitations of such an approach in educating South Asian women of diverse language and educational backgrounds:

> *I doubt that the leaflets or other stuff provided by the system actually can reach South Asian, especially Bengali women. Even if they do make it to the hands of these women, how many women can actually read and understand those! I don't know! And can they really fathom the significance or seriousness of the issue [of cancer screening]? I don't think so. I think either they don't understand or nobody really helps them to understand. Especially within the health care system, in hospitals, the doctors or the nurses – nobody talks to the women to make them realize that this is serious and you got to do it regularly. I don't think anybody takes that time to talk about these to the women.*

Language and cultural barriers make health care services inaccessible for many South Asian immigrant women in Canada. South Asian immigrant older adults and seniors, especially those coming from rural areas of Punjab and conservative religious backgrounds, face multiple intersecting access barriers to health and social services and community programs, including isolation due to language issues, transportation difficulties, lack of knowledge of local resources, and childminding responsibilities (Koehn et al. 2016). Very few resources and community-based health promotion programs are available to address such access barriers and fulfill the unique needs of South Asian subpopulations such as Bengalis. Bangladeshi women in a recent study in Toronto highlighted how the Canadian system is different from the one in their country of origin, and how they used screening for the first time in their host country having had the information in their own language, and support from peers through a community-based project called Cancer Awareness: Ready for Education and Screening (Hulme et al. 2016).

As it has already been mentioned, immigrant mothers in the infant feeding study – in contrast to the women in the cancer screening study – were showered with health information and advice from the Canadian public health care system. Although mothers were generally appreciative of all the resources and support, from a critical feminist perspective, it seems that the Canadian health care system and other public discourses recreate the dominant view of women as mothers, and endorse the gendered ideologies and practices of mothering and parenting (Chapman and Habib 2017). Historically, South Asian women have been viewed as "creators of ethnic communities" and a "threat" to the whiteness of Canada, and were only allowed to come as wives and mothers during the late 19th and early 20th century as a measure of controlling sexual relations between South

Asian men and white women, and to maintain the racial purity of the nation by creating segregated ethnic communities (Dua 2000). These women continue to be viewed and prioritized as mothers, and as Wall (2001: 604) pointed out, mothers in contemporary society are being increasingly viewed and constructed as "builders of better babies." Flooding immigrant mothers with health information and services also seems to serve the neoliberal agenda of health care reform and self-responsibilization for raising future productive citizens. Neoliberal ideals of motherhood expect women to "invest" in their children's health and to generate human capital in the form of their children to meet the neoliberal notion of citizen self-sufficiency (McLaren and Dyck 2004). Immigrant women's participation in the dominant discourses of mothering in Canada also allows them to demonstrate themselves as responsible parents and citizens, as "ideal" immigrants (McLaren and Dyck 2004) who are in charge of their own and their children's health and can contribute to the project of producing an efficient future work force and healthy Canadian citizens (Chapman and Habib 2017). Within the same ideology, women, especially the older adults and seniors who are sponsored by or "dependent" on family members for support and care due to language, cultural and other structural barriers, are constructed as "deficient," a "burden" or the "other" (Habib 2012).

4. CONCLUSION

Using the social determinants of health and intersectionality approach, narratives of Bangladeshi women from two different studies were combined and compared to explore how gendered experience of migration and settlement in Canada shape their experiences of health and wellbeing. The data showed that migration to a new country magnified the impact of gendered roles and ideologies of childcare and mothering. Discourses of "good mothering" also intersected with the material conditions of their lives and impacted their experiences of mothering and priorities for self-care. New immigrant women's sense of wellbeing was shaped by a lack of accreditation of foreign education and work experience, un/der/employment, financial instability and lack of support from extended families. The differential experiences of women in the different domains of health care, namely cancer screening in comparison to obstetric and neonatal care, indicate that immigrant child-bearing women and new mothers tend to receive a lot more attention and priority from Canada's public health system. This is a positive matter; however, older Bengali immigrant women from Bangladesh did not receive as much information and support for cancer screening. Health promotion services for South Asian older adults and seniors are generally not that abundant, but Bengali immigrant women in the cancer screening study were not connected to any. Similarly, much research has shown that many older South Asian immigrant women face many coexisting and intersecting barriers in accessing the limited health promoting programs and resources available for them.

Although the data and analyses presented here came from very small samples of Bengali immigrant women from Bangladesh, this paper constitutes an attempt to fill in a major research gap. Further research with bigger and more heterogeneous samples of this subpopulation of South Asians is needed. The timeframe of the two different studies in two different areas of health care was also slightly different, and this made the comparison of participants' experiences difficult. Yet a few Bengali women's voices represented here

(congruent with the general findings and voices of other immigrant women in the two main studies) show the need for tailored health promotion and other social services to alleviate health care access barriers and also for policy reforms to address social inequities leading to health inequities. Health information and service providers need to understand the internal diversity within South Asian communities and the variations of experience among these women, as well as the broader social, cultural, structural and systemic barriers that shape their health and wellbeing and access to health care and other services. Community-based approaches are needed to inform and educate Bengali and other South Asian older adults about cancer screening and other preventative care in Canada. More health promotion programs and community services with culturally specific outreach strategies are needed to serve Bengali newcomers, especially to help them deal with post-migration stress and hardship, and to support their self-care. Childminding services and transportation support need to be an integral part of such programs. In short, such programs and services need to address the diverse and unique needs and challenges of different groups of South Asian immigrants including Bengali women.

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SESSION 3

Gender, Culture, Family, and Work: Stories of Migration

Session Chair: Charles Greenberg

Sarika Bose "Multicultural: Straddling Continents, Straddling Identities"

Tareq Islam "Adaptation and Acceptance in Canada: A Story of a Student, Immigrant, and Citizen"

Marina Hossain "Making My Path in Canada"

Mustafa Chowdury "Fulfillment of My Hopes and Aspirations in Canada: The Country I Call My Home"

SARIKA BOSE

"MULTI-CULTURAL": STRADDLING CONTINENTS, STRADDLING IDENTITIES

This paper will attempt to unpack the meanings of identity in the context of culture and belonging in more than one place. My experience of what life means in India and in Canada is absolutely personal and therefore limited; in the words of Stuart Hall (1990), what I will say "is always 'in context,' *positioned*" (222). The limits of those experiences formed me, and the accident of my experiences is hardly likely to provide a fair or representative experience. My account of my life and identity is subjective, because it is framed by memory. As French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (2004: 7) noted,

> The constant danger of confusing remembering and imagining, resulting from memories becoming images…affects the goal of faithfulness corresponding to the truth claim of memory. And yet…And yet we have nothing better than memory to guarantee that something has taken place before we call to mind a memory of it.

Thus, Ricoeur (2004) asks us to accept that memory is a valid path towards the search for truth (55).

In *Fallible Man*, Ricoeur (1965/1986) said, "Man is this plural and collective unity in which the unity of destination and the differences of destinies are to be understood through each other" (138). I wish to examine Bengali-Canadian identity partially through my own positioning within the Bengali immigrant community and in contrast with other Bengali immigrants I have met, and partially through comparisons with dual/immigrant identities in other immigrant groups, whether in Canada or in other countries. In this paper, "Bengali" refers to those who come from India rather than from Bangladesh. The Bengali community that I have known in Vancouver is diverse, so for the sake of clarity, I have divided it into groups of graduate students, recent permanent residents or immigrants (arriving within the last 10 years), and long-term immigrants. I have also aimed to chart a short account of my experiences with these communities. This is neither a psychological, sociological, historical, cultural nor human geography study, though it may contain characteristics of all these; rather, it is mainly an attempt at auto-ethnography.

Despite a great deal of research on immigrant/diasporic experiences and multiculturalism by sociologists, cultural and social historians, and human geographers – such as Stuart Hall, Homi Bhabha, Charles Taylor, Paul Gilroy, Arjun Appadurai, Alison Blunt, Judith M. Brown, Will Kymlicka, Harald Bauder, John Shields, Taniya Gupta and Sutama Ghosh, to name a few – there has been little scholarly work done on specifically Bengali immigrant experiences, particularly in British Columbia. In the larger society of Canada, there is little or no awareness of Bengali presence or culture; Ghosh, whose research is mainly on Toronto Bengalis, reminds us that any individual Indian culture group gets subsumed within the popular image of India as a colourful, exotic place. The

many multicultural festivals (such as the Diwali festival put on by the City of Vancouver) focus on Bollywood and other non-Bengali representations of India, ascribing a homogenous identity that produces "*a* 'South Asian' culture (Ghosh 2013: 38). Ghosh's (2013) study finds that Toronto's South Asian youths themselves consider Bollywood and Bhangra to be at the core of Indian culture; for many Bengalis, the spring festival of "dol" is now "holi," and "Diwali" is celebrated instead of "Kali Puja." In Vancouver, stereotyping is perpetuated even within the South Asian community, when Bengali women are represented as a static presence from the past, wearing a red-bordered white sari, and alta on their feet. This trivializing of Indian and Bengali identity results in a kind of "disappearing" of Bengali culture. Even within an active cultural association like the Lower Mainland Bengali Cultural Association (LMBCS), younger community members often prefer performances of Bollywood and sometimes Punjabi music and dance styles, and attempts at maintaining any kind of distinct culture appear to be relegated to a nostalgic past (most commonly represented by Tagore). Some of my Bengali contemporaries who grew up in Canada frequently refer to their own ethnic cultural practices, especially connected to food, clothes and entertainment, not as Bengali, but as "desi" (roughly translated to "from one's country"), a word that used to be identified only with non-Bengali Indian cultures. Charles Taylor (1994) points to the harm of both "non-recognition" and "misrecognition," noting that multicultural theories argue that "our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its *absence* [emphasis mine]" (23). Not being recognized can thus work towards erasing a significant component of the Bengali-Canadian's identity. This paper hopes to add to the record of Bengali-Canadian experience in Canada.

Why do people move from one country to another, however accidentally, reluctantly or enthusiastically? In a study for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), an Uzbek migrant to Russia explains simply: "If things were better there, I wouldn't be here" (Keeley 2009: 36). International undergraduate students making a short film about their choice to come to Canada said that they were looking for "security and happiness" (Kaur 2017). Brian Keeley's (2009) analysis of immigration patterns and narratives suggests that what drives people to move to another country is the "push" of economics and general state of things at home (macro-structures) and the "pull" of the new

country's economics, general situation and social networks (microstructures) (36).[1] The reasons for the Bengali migration to Vancouver are fairly standard: job transfers and education and/or employment opportunities for people and their children. Canada's reputation as an open-minded society that accepts diverse lifestyles has also influenced the decision to move here. Unless they have been living in politically unstable countries outside India, Bengalis continue to choose Canada for the above reasons.[2]

Once in a country that is not the origin country, an individual is immediately transformed, at first superficially. Difference is constantly brought to the individual's attention, both by others and by the individual him/herself. For example, there is a

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[1] We will not be considering the meso-structures, which apply to recruiting agencies or illegal activities.

[2] Despite a significant jump in American and other international student applications to Canadian universities since the 2016 US election, as reported by the Government of Canada's Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), the data is too recent to be able to see an effect on the Bengali population in particular (see CIC News 2017).

tendency to respond to the new land through the framework of contrasts – "they do this, we do that" – and some individuals never overcome this kind of oppositional, and implicitly moral, framing of identity in which "we," of course, would be superior. "They" become the lens through which to recognize self. Not surprisingly, children tend to make the shift much more quickly than adults, and whatever dissonance they feel tends to come from the ways in which their parents hold on to their culture of origin, than from their own experiences in India. For example, one Bengali child who came into the Vancouver school system felt she was in a paradise, because the pressure to study was so much less, and she was encouraged to develop more aspects of life than academics. When she had to return to India after a few years, her trauma really resonated with me, as I had had the same journey as a teenager, and had felt as traumatized. I was fortunate to be able to return after two years of high school in Kolkata; she was not.

External impositions of racial and cultural identity constitute the other piece of the transformation from the mono-national identity to the hybrid identity that I discuss below. According to Stuart Hall (1995: 8), it is inescapable:

> Far from only coming from the still small point of truth inside us, identities actually come from outside, they are the way in which we are recognized and then come to step into the place of the recognitions which others give us. Without the others there is no self, there is no self-recognition.

Toshio Takemoto (2015) confirms that the accidents of race and culture create a "social, rather than individual identity" (177). From a single national identity, one becomes two, and begins to enter Homi Bhabha's (1994: 38) "third space," which

> may open the way to conceptualizing an *inter*national culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*. To that end we should remember that it is the "inter" – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture.

That in-between space can, for some, create a fragmented, confusing and ultimately diminishing structure in their lives, though for others, such as human geographers Sutama Ghosh and Lu Wang (2003), it can be a positive framework that is seen as an expansion of selfhood. A common narrative thread in many stories about growing up in more than one culture is that first or second generation youth feel torn between loyalty to their parents' culture and attraction to the culture of the present country – the "burden of culture" is then deeply felt. Teenagers already find the process of developing towards adulthood difficult; the demands of double or triple cultural norms make the process even more challenging. In my own case, perhaps because my own parents did not insist on a Bengali-centred existence, there was no need to fight for a Canadian existence or identity. I was never stopped from listening to music I liked, or forbidden to socialize with or date non-South Asians.

Ghosh and Wang (2003) have written about the process of moving from a culturally homogenous identity to a hybrid one, from one to many selves, becoming the hybrid Canadian. Like many of my contemporaries from Kolkata, Ghosh was anxious to maintain her Bengali identity, particularly while far away. Her method of maintaining it was to wear "national dress," eat Bengali food and listen to Bengali music. This way of retaining the origin culture within herself was private, however, and only occasionally displayed for others, such as at international student potlucks where students wore their national dress

and shared a dish from their countries. In contrast, Wang's response to the invitation to display identity through culture of origin was puzzlement, as she felt that in the modern world, any attempt to wear "national dress" would require her to look to historical models, rather than present practice. In this case, the international students were demanding a commitment to certain stereotypes to make identity readable to others. Looking back at their initial encounters with Canadian culture, Ghosh and Wang (2003: 276-277) write:

> Both of us have metamorphosed over time into multiple, hyphenated selves, and the phase of transition from a "single" identity to "hybrid" identities is still continuing…. Upon reflection, we feel that we have created several hybrid identities and often switch positions between those hyphenated identities in accordance with the demands of the context (place and time).

A documentary by Samah Ali and Jenny Jay (2017), student film-makers at Western University, called *hyphen-nation*, which won an award from the Canadian Association of University Teachers in May 2017, speaks to this insistence on at least a *dual* identity in people of colour, by both observers and those who come to this identity experientially. A single or integrated identity does not seem to be an option for people who see physical difference as the most significant indicator of identity. The difference is, of course, between the "norm" and what is outside it. It is never "Canadian" first, but "Bengali-Canadian," "Indo-Canadian" and so on. This hyphenated label imagines identity in Canada as fragmented, as if a person cannot be whole if he or she looks different from what is still the implied "real" identity of the Canadian: a person of English/Scottish/Irish origin. Even Quebecers are called French-Canadians, and though that may be a way for them to claim the primacy of French culture and identity, it is still a label that makes the English-speaking Canadian of British origin the norm against which all other Canadian identities are measured.

The hyphenated identity seems to operate on the same terms as "mixed race," a space that has seen its own and separate share of scholarly attention. The vocabulary of that "mixed race" discourse can be usefully applied to the hyphenated identity as well. Again, the binary of belonging/not belonging becomes the framework; traditionally, the "mixed race" individual is seen as an outsider to all recognizable – i.e., homogenous – communities. From a point at which this "half-caste" is a repulsive figure who is an aberration, belonging nowhere and being almost unnameable (to influential writers like Kipling), "mixed race" has become "interracial," and, as David Parker and Miri Song have commented, ironically a marker of "inherent biological superiority" (Blunt 2005: 11). Within the Bengali community, the negative implications of this mixed race identity are imposed upon those Bengalis who are regarded as insufficiently committed to the performance of a Bengali identity. They perpetuate the practice within ethnic communities of using racial slurs to signal that community members don't meet their standards for ethnic identity, such as calling Chinese people in North America "bananas" and black people "oreos"; sometimes new Bengalis in Canada will call long-time settlers such as me "ice-cream bars" – chocolate on the outside and vanilla on the inside. What political philosopher Will Kymlicka (2001: 55) calls the importation of "illiberal ideas" attempts to replicate hierarchies, and the attempt to replicate values from "back home" can result in marginalization or full rejection of community members seen to violate them (e.g., divorced women). An intensive commitment to "Indian" identity through particular interpretations of religious practice can lead to conservative movements like the Hindutva movement (Lele 2003).

A common word used by both Indians and Canadians to describe me is "exotic." It is another way to say I don't belong where I happen to be. In "Constructing the Self in Megumu Sagisawa and Miri Yu's Travelogues: A Case Study of Two Japan-Based Female Writers of Korean Origin," Takemoto (2015) says that the idea of the "other country," where I always belong in the eyes of my examiners, "is not an obvious natural category, but an arbitrary concept that serves to create a sense of belonging to one's own country by means of contrast with the foreign" (175). Where I'm from – which inevitably seems to imply I don't belong wherever I'm being encountered – is a question interminably asked when I go to India and when visitors come from India, and it is also a tedious commonplace when I encounter older Canadians, who patronizingly tell me that my English is very good. Jonathan Rutherford (1990) explains that once culture is commodified, what was once terrifying because of its alienness becomes an entertainment, a spectacle: "Otherness is sought after for its exchange value, its exoticism and the pleasures, thrills and adventures it can offer" (11). In this context, my interrogators are seeing exoticization as a positive action. To be fair, exoticization can go both ways. Especially in the 1970s, I saw how excited community members were to dress up the non-South Asian spouses of Bengalis in saris and kurtas, and how delighted to take on the roles of guides into Bengali cultures by translating what was happening at pujas and explaining what the food was. It allowed community members a path towards being recognized as having some kind of cultural authority.

The differentiating process continues through other categories of questioners. In an account by Amita Handa (2003), Handa speaks of the delicate negotiation that occurs in a conversation with a South-Asian taxi driver, as they both work towards acknowledging a common identity. She calls it the "uncle or auntie phenomenon" (11). Once the bond of cultural inheritance is established, the taxi driver assumes the identity of a benevolent community member looking out for the reputation and character of a younger member. In this case, the questioning has a different purpose and response from the person being questioned. Handa begins by explaining she has hailed a cab.

> Though we begin chatting in English, by his accent I am immediately able to place him as someone from India or Pakistan, a speaker of Hindi, Urdu, or Punjabi. While at first we both avoid acknowledging and placing each other as part of the same collectivity, inevitably the conversation turns to "Where are you from?" This question does not carry the same weight or sting as the "Where are you from?" I receive so often from white Canadians. In this context, it is more of a ritualistic marking and mutual acknowledgement of something shared, a confirmation of inclusion rather than a disclaimer and verification that "you are not from here." As the cab driver and I establish that our roots go back to a similar region, the style of our interaction changes. We no longer perform and construct ourselves around the rules and regulations of separation between driver and passenger specific to living in the West, and Canada in particular. At this point, I slip into Hindi, as a gesture that I have retained the language, which many have assumed I had lost. The language here becomes part of a shared text and in some ways allows certain kinds of conversations that usually do not happen in English. (Handa 2003: 12)

This incident is interesting in several ways. I find the term "inevitable" to frame the original question does not match my own attitudes. I am torn between needing to establish the connection and the need to be private and independent in my identity.

When I meet new people of Indian origin in Canada, or people who have newly arrived in Canada, they insist on asking probing questions until I just give up and answer their core question: where am I from? Yet the answers that follow this revelation appear to be a betrayal of my Indian origins, as I neither watch Bollywood movies nor know what the best Indian restaurants are. When Handa (2003) speaks with the taxi driver in the above conversation, she slips into Hindi "as a gesture that I have retained the language" (12). Why is it necessary to make such a gesture? There appears to be a desperate desire to be worthy of approval, even from a stranger; Handa's ability to speak Hindi presumably signals a certain level of virtue only attainable by maintaining connections with her "real" country. As Handa recognizes, she constructs "a narrative and representation of self in relation to uncle that is congruent with racial and cultural loyalty" (13), with loyalty to the non-Canadian identity being the signifier of virtue. To her, the instinct is to cooperate with the stranger's need to construct a particular narrative about her; not cooperating would brand her a "cultural renegade" (13). Stakes become high in an initially innocent encounter between two people – concepts like virtue and betrayal become the underpinnings of the symbolic relationship between them.

Bengalis' skill at either learning the language of their parents or retaining their mother tongue in a foreign land is not commonly tested in a taxi driver scenario, but rather within social situations within the community. As in Handa's (2003) case, this skill is praised if the language is spoken well, but the ability to speak as fluently as Bengalis in India and Bangladesh seems to be attached to underlying judgments of virtue. In other words, the approval granted to second- or third-generation Bengalis who can speak Bengali fluently implies a satisfactory commitment to and respect for their cultural origins. Second-generation Bengalis are often reluctant to speak Bengali, and if they do, it is spoken haltingly, with limited vocabulary and a strong Canadian accent. Their parents speak of their own decisions to guide their children towards mastery of English at the expense of being able to speak both languages. To them, the choice to move their children away from acquiring or retaining fluency in Bengali enables greater integration into Canadian society and thus broader opportunities. As I think of Handa's experiences, I consider my own. In the script I follow in such conversations, if we can get on to what I do for a living, there is a great deal of pride and approval from these strangers, with some implying I have successfully infiltrated Canadian culture – teaching English to white folks!

Such questions speak to the uncertainty and unreadability of my identity in the eyes of others, and my status as a traveller of sorts, rather than a citizen of wherever I am. These questions are demanding access to an "authentic" self, one that is clearly not visible to them via my appearance in terms of dress, language or behaviour. The questions do not stop until I can offer a satisfactory commitment to one identity, or to one that is more X than Y. Thus, even though there is an insistence on dual identity by many non-South Asian Canadians (with racial identity clearly dominating under the guise of respectful cultural acknowledgment), there is more of an insistence on a mono-national identity connected with the country of origin within the South Asian community.

This kind of thinking appears to satisfy some need for ordering the world into readable pieces. One way to order one's world and control one's identity is to locate it in the home. Alison Blunt says that home is "a place/site, a set of feelings/cultural meanings, and the relations between the two" (Blunt and Dowling 2006: 2-3). Gabrielle Bendiner-Viani and Seth Low's (2003: 1073) summary of the concept of place identity explains that

> The concept of place identity – the sense of belonging to emotionally, socially, and culturally significant places – is an important facet of people's self-identity. Place identity situates psychological development in the life spaces, home spaces, neighbourhood spaces, and national/transnational/global spaces where people live and work. As a psychological construct, it highlights the significance of understanding residents' conceptions of themselves as located in a particular space and time and as members of a social community and cultural group.

For Ghosh and Wang (2003), the significance of place is that it "has also made us more aware of 'who we are'" (276). By making domestic spaces into markers of a national identity, Bengali immigrants announce and affirm their conceptions of themselves, as well as their social and community affiliations. It is not that there is any attempt at a faithful reproduction of a Bengali home in every detail. Yet – student housing or not – our homes in the 1970s were similar in their attempts to superimpose India onto the wall-to-wall shag carpet and wooden walls, often with reproductions of similar paintings, portraits of Tagore and generic objects (the brass peacock, the wooden dhol player). Though our home had (and continues to have) more books than others, most homes had at least a copy of the *Gitanjali*, even if they had nothing else. The organization of these homes created an "India in Canada" (Navarro-Tejero and Gupta 2013). Bengali homes of recent immigrants and students I have visited have greater variety than in the past, but signifiers of Bengali culture are certainly as present as in the homes of long-time Bengali settlers.

We hosted and attended dinner parties where everyone competed to provide large numbers of dishes. At the puja celebrations, community members got together and enthusiastically cooked for everyone. The most admired cooks continue to be those who can recreate at home the Bengali sweets that most people in Bengal buy in shops. Though Indian groceries that are readily available in supermarkets today required a trip to the other side of town for many of us, it was worth the effort. People ate mostly Bengali food at home, and even the children who preferred fried chicken and hamburgers seem to have grown up to be nostalgic about the Bengali food they ate when they were growing up. Food became the medium through which we could "signal collective identity, allowing us to express our affiliations," and it also influenced "how others perceive us" (Koç, Soo and Liu 2015: 295). In his study of food practices within immigrant communities, Ajay Bailey (2016) adapts Arjun Appadurai's (1996) concept of the 5 "scapes" of the cultural imaginary, adding "foodscapes" to describe the immigrant's attempts to build community. Through our "immigrant foodscapes," the Bengali community found and continues to find ways of belonging (Bailey 2016: 52).

The Bengali immigrant community tended to live its Bengali existence within private spaces of homes and the borrowed spaces in which the community could meet. We attended the pujas that the small Bengali community bravely organized in the face of the dominant non-Bengali Indo-Canadian cultures, despite having no dedicated space of their own. They made others' temple spaces their own, however temporarily, yet the converted churches and other buildings clearly built for a different purpose would highlight the "foreignness" of Bengali community within them. In the 1970s, there was a great deal of community enthusiasm in working together to make a puja the best it could be, even if it was in a borrowed space. After a hiatus in that energetic involvement during the 1990s, a new wave of Bengali immigrants have injected excitement into the celebrations again, compelled perhaps by missing "home" more immediately than the long-time settlers and

the second generation. Even if the spaces are still borrowed, they are more heavily occupied by larger numbers of Bengali participants, and the spaces more successfully overlaid by Bengali cultural artifacts (e.g., décor by community members).

The core of the community was ethnicity, and the attendant assumptions about shared values and cultural tastes. It is not that members of the community stayed away from "Canadian" activities like camping and community barbeques (with tandoori chicken, rather than chicken with barbeque sauce), but that we did not take part as a community in the other kinds of activities we did in the university community. Today there have been some changes, as sometimes we see an organized attempt at acknowledging environmental responsibilities (with a signature line in every LMBCS email communication reminding us not to print out memos), or at taking part in charitable activities like volunteering at a food bank. When I speak with recent immigrants, I hear about some of the ways they have changed since coming to Canada: sometimes habits (e.g., of politeness to bus drivers) become values, while at other times, values become habits (e.g., volunteering for a charity). At other times, practical changes might include changes to meal times – though when asked, recent immigrants still feel more comfortable with the contemporary Bengali trend of eating very late (9pm or after).

Here, I would like to return to the idea of home as a set of values and actions, rather than a space, and to its connection with transformation towards a different way of being. For this, I will first have to travel backwards to the start of my own journey to Canada, as the significance of changing places is that it "has also made us more aware of 'who we are'" (Ghosh and Wang 2003: 276). My own journey has taken me back and forth between three countries that have been of particular significance: India, Canada and England. Each crossing of the ocean has built the layers of my "place identity," so that I experience my Canadian (primary) identity through the lens of both an insider and outsider.

Charles Taylor (1994) asks us to "consider what we mean by *identity.* It is who we are, 'where we're coming from'" (27). Taylor is not being as literal as the less sophisticated interrogators whom I have discussed already. Yet where we're coming from and where we are going both lead to the idea of "home." I will start with an answer to that literal question. Where am I "really" from? If place of birth is the only satisfactory answer, I will provide it. Born in Kolkata, I spent my childhood, until the age of ten, in Kolkata, Burdwan in West Bengal and briefly, Udaipur in Rajasthan.

In my moves from a small university town to a big city to a less dense city, I realized that wherever my home was, it had to be urban. I was brought up in a cultured and educated family that regularly went to "high culture" events, such as theatre, art exhibitions, poetry readings, classical dance performances and of course, Rabindrasangeet and dance performances choreographed to Tagore's songs. All these events were formalized and contained within "culture" spaces specifically built for them, and I did not encounter Indian folk culture – of the sort replicated in Punjabi performances – until I was in Vancouver. Any Bengali "folk" dance or music was mediated through the interpretations of "high culture" artists like Tagore. Our 1960s Kolkata home was literally adapted to fit around books (my grandfather claimed we owned 12,000), and my memory of this home includes the bookshelves inserted into every nook, built above doors and along staircases and mezzanine floors. Having lived as students in England, my grandfather and parents were very familiar with various aspects of Western culture, including foods, literature and music, all of which we consumed regularly. My English language Catholic school also made

me fluent in English, so I had no problems adjusting to these aspects of Canadian life when I moved to Vancouver at the age of ten. The cold, the lack of uniforms and the complete lack of interest in cultural activities by my peers at school was another matter, and the focus on sports and outdoor activities – rather than an inability to speak or read the language – remain factors in the alienation from Canadian culture that still exists in me.

My progress and transformation into a child who nevertheless felt more comfortable in Canada than in India were not brought about, however, through the path of cultural consumption, even if I liked rock music more than Rabindrasangeet. My transformation was influenced by the university community in which we lived while my parents were graduate students at the University of British Columbia. Although my elementary and high schools were fairly homogenized so that I was very much a visible minority, the university community at home was very different.

The 1970s were still seeing the last of the hippie generation, which embraced diversity in culture and community, and their easygoing habits and activist attitudes modelled acceptance of difference. It was truly multicultural. I never felt exoticized or alienated in this particular community, as both children and parents simply forged relationships based on common interests and personalities; race as either a positive or negative component was not a significant aspect of conversation, though in hindsight, some of their actions were evidence of conscious attempts to create authentic relationships with people of other nations. John Shields and Harald Bauder (2015) note, "those Canadians with the strongest sense of nationalism are also the strongest supporters of immigration and see multiculturalism and diversity as a core defining feature of Canada" (24). Many of these neighbours were also activists who regularly went to demonstrations or protests, tried to make environmentally responsible choices, supported local farmers and so on. There were regular communal dinners, potlucks complete with folk singing and conversations around a fire afterwards. There were not many Bengali children of my age in Vancouver in these years, though there were some who were my younger brother's age. Consequently, I didn't have Bengali friends, and my closest friends came from the community in which I lived. Even when some when some Bengalis my age moved to Vancouver in my teenage years, physical distance and different temperaments kept us from forming close friendships. The university neighbours are still friends, and by now, we call ourselves an extended family. They were a great influence on my own ways of being Canadian, and with them I felt at home. In other words, it was when I was around people who were committed to certain ideals that I was at home.

Where I learned from my non-Bengali neighbours the value of acceptance and openness to different cultures and lifestyles, and a life that was firmly located in the present time and place, what I learned from the Bengali community was a need to hold on to a culture and identity that were not where we were. Canada prides itself on being multicultural, but if multiculturalism implies inclusiveness and respect for other cultures, this was not really practiced within the graduate student Bengali community, whose determination to hold on to and focus on an idea of how to perform Bengali identity tended towards isolationism, and continues to do so. Canada was just a place to occupy temporarily. Even though temporary commitment to space is inherent in the graduate student's life, this sense of not belonging was amplified by cultural differences. It is important, however, to acknowledge that the Bengali community, whether within the immigrant or graduate student community, was not monolithic, and that there were

degrees of being "Bengali" within these communities. It is also important to acknowledge that the instinct to stay within closed communities as much as possible was also influenced by a very recent colonial past in which Indians and their non-Indian rulers were hyper-aware of racial difference, as well as by consistent identification of the Indian body as "other" in Canadian society at a time when Indo-Canadian culture was not as mainstream as it is today. The Bengali community of the 1970s was naturally different from the community today. To begin with, the size of the community has more than doubled, and advances in technology mean regular and immediate connections with "home" are possible in a way they were not before the 1990s. Instead of having to save up to pay $10 for a minute or two of phone time with loved ones (which generally only allowed enough time to ask whether everyone was well), with the advent of cheap or free phone plans, newer immigrants can speak to loved ones every day for hours at a time. Somewhat more affordable flights allow people to fly to India more frequently; even students can often manage a return in the middle of doing their degrees. The connection with the community at "home" is thus not as fully located in nostalgia and the memory of a long gone India, but rather is grounded in contemporary life. Canadian media outlets and free websites provide access to Indian television stations. Indian news can be followed online in real time, and recent Bengali immigrants, more regularly than long-term immigrants, read Indian newspapers easily through the Internet. With the larger Bengali population, many recent immigrants can choose not to socialize outside the community; as some community members have said, not having to reach beyond the community for meaningful friendships makes life easier.

Building on Erin Tolley's (2011) work, Shields and Bauder (2015: 15) suggest that the concept of integration includes the following:

> 1) [immigrants] identify with the receiving country rather than anchoring their identity in the country of origin; 2) participate with the institutions of broader society; 3) learn the official or dominant language(s) and communicate on an ongoing basis with it; and 4) build friendships and networks that extend beyond one's ethno-specific group.

Certainly within the graduate student community there was a determined commitment not to where we were, but to where we were not, with attempts to replicate India in home and habits, and to convert the unfamiliar (such as vegetables) to the familiar (as British colonialists had done in India). More graduate students today expect to get jobs in North America and move here permanently, but also seek Bengalis for their primary community. Intimate relationships between Bengalis and non-South Asians are rare, because it is easier to socialize with Bengalis when there is a choice. When I read of the experiences of other North American Bengalis, I think of Jhumpa Lahiri's (2008) words in an NPR interview, in which she spoke of having parents who didn't mix with her friends' parents, saying that there was "a fear, an unwillingness on both sides."

Though decades have passed since I arrived in this country, the "us" and "them" narrative continues to perpetuate the separateness of Canadian and Bengali/South Asian lives in an existence that occupies Canada for its opportunities and modern conveniences, and appreciates it as a tourist might, for its scenic attractions. This way of responding to life in a new country is hardly unusual, but it was not my response, probably because my encounter with the culture began in childhood. I feel connected to the land itself, and feel a deep sense of belonging. When I speak to the other Bengali children of my or my brother's

generation who were either born in Canada or who moved here and have lived here for most of their lives, they are certainly more distanced from Bengali culture than their parents are. I too have grown into this distance. I have not visited India in over 10 years, and I attend Bengali community and cultural events infrequently. This does not mean I do not value and respect Bengali culture or many of the values related to family and community support for each other. Values modeled by my parents and many family members, and by schoolteachers in Kolkata, whether Mothers Paul and Theresa and Sister Frances at Loreto House, or former Freedom Fighters like Mrs. Uma Shehenapush at Patha Bhawan, are foundational to my character. Yet where I belong is a question I answered for myself long ago: it is the globe. I feel now my deepest roots are in a country where I wasn't born, and the roots in the country of my birth are as fragile as the roots of annual herbs. This does not mean I'm fully detached from my birth roots, but simply that those roots are entwined with newer ones that have become stronger.

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TAREQ ISLAM

ADAPTATION AND ACCEPTANCE IN CANADA: A STORY OF A STUDENT, IMMIGRANT, AND CITIZEN

1. INTRODUCTION

Let's start with a bit of the backdrop of my life. Growing up on three other continents – Asia, Europe, and Africa – I came to Canada as a foreign student to study Engineering at the University of New Brunswick. After my graduation in the mid-90s, I had a fantastic opportunity to remain in Canada through a temporary job offer. What follows next is history.

2. ASIA, EUROPE, AFRICA, AND THEN NORTH AMERICA

The question of where I come from gets a bit convoluted. Both of my parents were originally from Bangladesh, but moved to Pakistan where my father worked as a geologist for the Government of Pakistan and my mother was a homemaker. I was born in Karachi, Pakistan along with my twin brother. We already had an older sister who was just a year older. When we were still infants, my father received a scholarship to enrol in a PhD program in Geochemistry at the University of Manchester in the United Kingdom. We all moved to the UK and remained there for the next four and a half years while my father completed his PhD. We then moved back to Pakistan, and then within six months we moved to Bangladesh. We remained in Dhaka, Bangladesh where my father initially worked as the Director of Geological Survey of Bangladesh and then took an academic position with the University of Dhaka. In the mid-1970's, my father joined Rajshahi University and we moved to that city in Bangladesh. In 1980, when I was in junior school in Rajshahi, we moved to Nigeria, as my father took a faculty position at the University of Maiduguri. After completing high school in Nigeria, I went back to Bangladesh for about a year and then moved back to Nigeria where I was enrolled in the Bachelor of Civil Engineering program. However, in 1989, after completing my first year, I had the opportunity to come to Canada as a foreign student and joined the Bachelor of Science in Engineering (BScE - Civil Engineering) program at the University of New Brunswick (UNB) in Fredericton, New Brunswick.

3. THE BEGINNING

Back in the days when I was a foreign student coming to Canada, we did not have the technology we have today, therefore I did not have the opportunity to see the campus ahead of time or comprehend how it would be to live and study there. I did not have any

prior knowledge of what a Canadian university campus would look like. However, it was really important for me to know what kind of living environment I was about to enter, and whether or not to live on campus wasn't the easiest decision to make. On-campus housing often varies widely, and can include dorms and upperclassmen houses. Most of the dorms at UNB were occupied by freshmen. This is probably true for most universities in Canada even now. I chose to live in the dorms for various reasons. One of main ones was that living in a dorm made it easier for me to integrate into campus life. It gave me an opportunity to meet and befriend other dorm residents. I was surrounded by people of my own age who were making the same adjustments to school and dealing with some of the same pressures I faced, even though the context was totally different. I knew that I would need to change so that I could adapt to this brand new environment. I was brought up in a different educational system which valued more strict and rigid guidelines for communication in an academic environment – especially with regards to student-teacher relationships – which did not apply to the more flexible and, to some extent, liberal methods in most contemporary educational institutes in the West. It was a totally different dynamic.

I want to talk a bit more about my early time in Fredericton. I believe that period of time was quite important for me in terms of defining the Canadian in me. The first year was somewhat tough for me. However, from my first day on campus, I was taken by surprise by how polite and welcoming people were. They acknowledged that I was from a different country and patiently helped me understand some of the nuances of things that had never occurred to me. I was surprised at how much comfort I received from people in my faculty and my dorm. I treasure the resources that I got from UNB. The teaching faculty on campus were extremely helpful, and the professors really devoted their time and effort to helping me succeed. Their interactions with me went beyond merely explaining the learning materials or going through teaching slides; they also offered me a great deal of advice, such as how to approach things in a professional manner. Additionally, I received a lot of help from the UNB International Student Advisor's Office as well as from the Dean of Students Office. The support I received made my transition to Canada easier; moreover, the kindness and unaffectedness I encountered in others are values I carried with me, and these values have definitely helped me become who I am today. Canadian values such as equal access to wellbeing and opportunities, civility and mutual respect, compassion, empathy and generosity of spirit, and multiculturalism and respect for diversity were perhaps the seeds that inspired me to consider Canada as my new home.

4. MY PROFESSION

After my graduation in 1995, I worked briefly with the International Development Research Center in Ottawa on a project in Peru. After my project was completed, I worked with several consulting firms including Washburn & Gillis Associates Ltd. and The Civil Engineers Ltd. for a brief period of time. While in Canada, I applied for immigration under the independent immigrant category and immigrated to Canada in 1998. I joined Sperling Hansen Associates in North Vancouver in 1998, working as a Civil Engineer. In 2003, I took up a position as Manager of Solid Waste Management in the Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen. I also worked there as the Acting Manager of Engineering Services in 2004. In October of 2004, an opportunity came along to join the Fraser Valley Regional District as

the Manager of Environmental Services & Operations. In December 2004, I also assumed the position of Acting Manager of Utilities. In 2006, I became the Director of Engineering, and after the restructuring of FVRD departments in 2011, I became the Director of Engineering and Community Services. I am presently employed with the Regional District in that same capacity. I'm a professional Engineer and a member of the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of BC.

5. MY FAMILY

My family is an important part of my life in Canada. I married my soulmate Rezwana in Vancouver in 1999. She is originally from Bangladesh as well and I met her here in Vancouver. Our beloved son Ayman was born in Vancouver in 2001. We moved to Penticton in 2003 and then moved to Chilliwack in 2004, where we lived until 2013. We presently reside in Langley.

6. THE ESSENCE OF THE MULTICULTURALISM EXPERIENCE

My experience as a foreign student in Canada was ambivalent at first. When I arrived in Fredericton, New Brunswick, I was very enthusiastic about my new life. I was thrilled, firstly because it was my first time in Canada, and secondly because I was going to have an opportunity to live on my own, which is probably quite typical for that age. However, as reality set in, I initially found myself to be in an exacting situation as I struggled to adapt to this new way of life, including academic pressures (mainly due to unfamiliar educational methods), and cultural differences, especially living in a dormitory environment. In the dorms, I encountered a swirl of cultures along with diverging values and morals. I had fruitful encounters with Canadian and international students and listened to their stories about their lives and growing up in their hometowns and cities. I developed a deep appreciation for them. This brought about a profound sense of insight, and brought me closer to different points of view amid my own struggles. Along with the support I received from various sources, these experiences helped to elevate my spirit. I should mention that I did not suffer from a language barrier *per se*, but English is not my mother tongue and I grew up with various other languages as well. Initially, I didn't feel that living in Canada I could identify myself as multilingual apart from knowing both French and English. However, my feelings have changed over the years, knowing that multilingualism enables us to share real cultures of various places around the world including Canada.

Understanding a new culture that is different from mine has always enthralled me. I found that effective communication is one of the key factors in adapting to a new setting and gaining acceptance. In my experience, I found that in cross-cultural communication not everyone acts in a particular cultural display. I sense that most people want to understand each other and to succeed in communication and understanding. I see adaptation as just one of the tools to attain that.

I perceive that, in a general sense, to succeed in Canada as a newcomer it is essential to focus on improving communication skills. Yet, to me, those communication skills are not just about grammar and vocabulary. Effective communication goes beyond adapting to a

new language. It also involves recognizing that different world views and cultures come along with different perspectives, and that's where cross-cultural understanding and etiquette come into play. One encounters and is enriched through exposure to other languages and various forms of writing. This deep involvement questions our assumptions, confronts our biases, and challenges our ignorance.

As immigrants to Canada, it is ultimately the responsibility of all of us in the society to fit in and learn the ways that are accepted here, while at the same time teaching others about new values and ideas related to social and cultural impressions. The way I perceived settlement in Canada for myself, as an immigrant, was to adapt to the new culture while keeping the original one as my primary identity. If I didn't see it that way, I would have become alienated from both, since the original one has become too distant and the new one did not represent my identity.

I find that conversing about the cultural contrasts and dilemmas faced by immigrants are important, especially when focusing on newcomers coming to Canada who are planning on calling it their home. It is a situation to which most of us can relate, being either an international student like me who is considering staying in Canada given the opportunity, or a Canadian with a history of immigrant ancestors.

I am part of the fortunate minority of immigrants in the world who have the freedom to choose the place they want to live and work. Yet with that freedom came the decision as to where to set down my new roots. It is important to clarify that this decision was not a matter of one place being better than another, but of how well each place fit with my background and provided an atmosphere of multiculturalism where I could adapt and be accepted in my personal and business life. In terms of my personal life, I chose to stay close to my own Bangladeshi culture and uphold cross-cultural values including Bangladeshi tradition, language, and religion. In terms of my professional career, I chose to adapt more to the Canadian culture I found when I came to Canada, while at the same time sharing my cultural background with my colleagues and associates. I always felt and kept in mind that I am a new Canadian, and I needed to prove that I am an important part of this country. This impetus allowed me to work hard and get where I am today, particularly in terms of the development of my own leadership and motivational skills.

To me, like most immigrants, it is important to raise a family with some heritage and background of my country of origin. There is a difference between the way we grew up in Bangladesh and the way my son is growing up in Canada. Both cultures have some distinctions and drawbacks. Bangladeshi culture places more emphasis on norms, rituals, values, and traditions that are greatly inspired by cultures from the Indian subcontinent and Islamic religion (for Muslims). On the other hand, Canadian Western culture is quite open. Its norms, beliefs, values, traditions, customs, and practices are greatly inspired by European culture. Moreover, Western Culture includes British culture and French culture, and is greatly influenced by American culture. My family and I found that a balance of both was more acceptable for our son, and this works well with him. We mark most of the Bengali/Islamic cultural and religious celebrations with him. At the same time, we honor, celebrate, and participate in more mainstream Canadian traditions such as Thanksgiving, Halloween, and Christmas.

Over the past 28 years, I have learned a lot about Canada's Indigenous people, including their culture and their struggles in Canada. The learning is still ongoing. In my own professional life, I have had and continue to have the opportunity to work with First

Nations communities directly. This has given me the opportunity to understand and share cultural values and traditions as well as understand some gaps, cultural dissonances, and misconstructions which lead to intolerance and inequity. I think most of the time we associate multiculturalism in Canada with people of different cultures, customs, religions, and languages – not to mention the luscious cuisines of people who come from around the world to make Canada their home. However, when we think of Indigenous people, we often think of them as coming from one culture or a variation thereof. I think there is often a misconception that Indigenous people here have a homogeneous culture. In my personal experience working with various First Nations communities, I have found that – in this province alone – different nations have distinct differences in their cultures.

I personally believe that it is imperative to maintain Canadian identity as a world model of multiculturalism by openly and honestly embracing diversity and working together. This necessitates the recognition of cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity, and the acknowledgment of the freedom of all Canadians to preserve their cultural heritage. I think our actions must match our attitudes and our Charter, which call for justice, fairness, and social warmth. We must communicate these values by making multiculturalism not trivial but central to our national identity, striving for a cosmopolitan instead of a neo-colonial society, and never giving in to the fear and coercive persuasion of irrational politics.

MARINA HOSSAIN

MAKING MY PATH IN CANADA: MY MEMOIR

As a child, the best part of moving from one place to another was the flight experience, the toys I used to get on the plane and the hotels we stayed in. I was only three years old when we first left our homeland and migrated to Baghdad, Iraq. After living for a few years in Baghdad, we moved to different parts of the country and lived in three other cities in Iraq. Our migration continued until we came to Canada in 2000. It was such a common thing for our family that after a few years of living in one place, we, the children, would start wondering where we would be going next, which school we would be going to, the language we would learn, and the culture we would embrace! For all of my father's life, his job was such that every 2-3 years he would move to a new place with a new job. As a structural and civil engineer specialising in bridge design, he worked in many countries on a contract basis, and thus after completing work on one bridge design, he would look for another contract elsewhere.

We got so used to the travel that soon after settling in one place we would start looking forward to the next adventure, and would wait for our father to tell us the name of the place we would be going to next. We have lived in four cities in Bangladesh and three in Iraq, and then spent a few years living in Zimbabwe, Zambia, Botswana, and South Africa. After travelling to and living in so many different places and migrating so often, I realised that travelling naturally robs you of all the façade and ego of the materialistic world. When you travel so much, you can only take a couple of things with you that are the most precious things of all, and you learn to let go of the rest, which in return makes your journey more enjoyable as you feel light in your mind. By displacing yourself from the attraction of the weight of the material world, you feel weightless both literally and mentally, and this helps in purifying your mind and soul; only then are you able to immerse yourself in the adventure of exploring new places, meeting new people, and accepting a new life with an open mind and heart. Every place we travelled enriched our knowledge about the people, culture, and customs of the place. These experiences helped us learn to live for the moment and enjoy the present life, concentrating on our surroundings and exploring the unknown without any inhibition, fear, or prejudice. This helped us channel our minds to focus solely on the new culture we moved into, rather than on what we had left behind. This life lesson from my father is imprinted in my mind forever.

When my brother first told me that we will be leaving for Vancouver, Canada, I didn't think much about it as I didn't really understand exactly where we were going and didn't think much about the move itself. I only thought that it would be nice to be on a plane again and enjoy the hotel stay and the delicious foods, and then come back home again after some time. I didn't really believe that we would be leaving Africa permanently. At that time of my life, I was quite happy living in Gaborone. I had a job with an IT company and was running my side business of painting ostrich egg shells and supplying the finished

product to three craft stores in Gaborone. I was very busy and very content with everything in my life. I loved our little apartment, especially my room and the window through which I could see the mountains. I loved the hot summer days and thunderstorms that followed in the evening; I loved the beautiful sunrises in the morning, and the vibrant blend of orange and red that lit the sky as I watched the sunset from my window. I loved everything about Gaborone – the simple life, the simple, innocent people, the local markets and flea markets on the weekends, and the mini-buses called "Combi" that would stop anywhere to pick up passengers. It was the place that I called my home. I had no desire to leave that place.

I guess my father was seeing life through a different set of eyes. As he got older, he realised he was nearing his retirement age and needed stability, which he couldn't have in Botswana or South Africa or any other country we had lived in, since we had never lived in one place long enough to apply for citizenship of that country. All the reasons for leaving again were too complicated for me to understand at the age I was then. All I knew was I really didn't want to move from Botswana at all. I had made many friends at university, and I didn't want to part with them at all. My life was so content that I didn't want to break up that rhythm again. I was very determined to stay behind in Botswana and let my parents come to Canada on their own. I soon realised, however, that my parents would need my help. It would not be nice for me to let them go on their own; I needed to be with them to take care of them. Besides, I had the option of coming back if I really didn't like the place. So, I agreed to come to Canada.

We had an interview at the Canadian embassy in Johannesburg, South Africa. I was to be interviewed in French, as I had learned French in high school as a mandatory course. I was told by my father that we were coming to Canada as skilled workers through the points system; we got points due to our qualifications and literacy in French, plus we had a relative (my sister) in Canada, which also gave us points for the immigration application. I had a degree in Computer Science, and my father was an engineer. I didn't really understand how the points system worked, but followed what I was told to do by my father and brother. I agreed to go for the interview at the Canadian embassy with a very heavy heart. Even though I had agreed to come to Canada, my heart wasn't in it. I was actually in tears, thinking, this is really serious – we will be leaving Botswana, leaving my friends. I was trying to hide my tears at the Canadian embassy office as I was waiting to be called for the interview. I was prepared to say to the interviewer that I was only going because I needed to accompany my parents. I was so depressed that I didn't want to talk to anyone, really. As I sat waiting far from my parents and brother, I looked around the office and noticed a display board stacked with various colourful brochures. Idly, I picked up some brochures on Vancouver, Calgary, and Toronto. The brochures were so attractive, showing pictures of restaurants and shopping complexes, busy streets, parks, sports, and so many things to do in Vancouver that for the first time I started feeling happy that I would be going to Canada, to these places shown in the brochures. When at last I was called into the interview room, I went in with a smile on my face. The interview went very well, and my parents and brother were very happy that I didn't say anything against their plan. Our immigration application was approved within weeks after that interview –all thanks to those brochures!

We arrived in Canada on the evening of April 22, 2000. After arriving at the Vancouver airport, we stayed for one night at a nearby hotel and then the next day we had

to fly to Prince George to stay with my sister's family in Fraser Lake – a city about one hour's drive north of Prince George. When we first came out of the Vancouver airport to take the shuttle bus to the hotel, we felt the chill air penetrating our skin. I hadn't been prepared for this kind of cold. No one had, really. The cold was different from the cold air in Botswana or South Africa. We were shivering to the bones while we were waiting outside for the shuttle bus to the hotel. It was so cold and windy! All of us were freezing to death. Since then, whenever I go to the airport to pick up or drop off someone, I remember that evening and can almost feel that cold air that we felt on our first night in Canada biting through my bones! It was a night that I will never forget – feeling exhausted from the travel, feeling lost in a new place with no one to receive us at the airport and no one to talk to.

That first night, we stayed at the Holiday Inn by the airport. I usually loved staying at hotels, but it wasn't fun that night. By the time we checked in, the restaurant was already closed, and there was no room service. We were so hungry that I ordered pizza, lasagne, and few soft drinks from a number listed on the brochures I found in our hotel room, and we paid a bill of $80 USD.

We reached Prince George at 10pm the next evening, and my brother-in-law came to pick us up at the airport. It was -28°C that night – so cold that I thought I was going to die in the car. I saw snow for the first time in my life that night! We drove for about two hours at night, and it snowed throughout the trip. None of us had any leggings, gloves, or caps. We had jackets that seemed like they didn't do anything. It was the coldest night of my life. The next day, when I woke up and looked outside, I couldn't believe my eyes. It was white everywhere! The trees, yard, and streets were all covered with snow. It was so pretty to see it from inside the house. We couldn't go out of the house, however, as the temperature outside was -25°C!

Within a few days, my parents and I caught a severe flu. We felt horrible, and were so miserable in that house that I just wanted to buy a plane ticket and fly back home to Botswana. I was not happy in Fraser Lake, staying at my sister's place with nothing to do. My dad was also quite depressed. His diabetes was bad and his legs were hurting a lot. My father loved walking, so he went outside for a walk every day after lunch, even though he didn't have proper clothing for the winter weather. As a result, he developed arthritis pain in his legs.

We needed to get to Vancouver and start our life as soon as we could, since there wasn't much to do in Fraser Lake. We moved to Vancouver after three weeks. My brother-in-law organised a place for us to stay for two weeks, in someone's basement suite. We then moved to an apartment in Burnaby, in July 2000. We got a lot of help from someone from our community who showed us the nearby shopping malls, banks, colleges, and bus stops, and drove us around Burnaby, Coquitlam, Richmond, and Vancouver showing us many places of interest. We are forever grateful to him for his support and kindness.

When we moved to a one bedroom apartment in July of that year, we had nothing but our suitcases and a bed to sleep in. Within the first week after we moved, my father went out with our new Bangalee friend and bought everything that we needed: desks, a dining set, sofas, a TV, an extra bed, and chairs. I was so angry with my father at first for spending so much money, but later realised we needed all these things that he got for us. It was because of my father's big, caring heart that he wanted to make us feel comfortable and happy right from the beginning of our life in Canada.

My father and I both started looking for job in our professions, and while applying for professional work we also looked for any odd jobs we could do to start earning money. We both found jobs at a telemarketing agency selling lottery tickets. It wasn't work we wanted to do, but we both took the job as we needed the money. This was the first job I got in Canada, but neither my father nor I lasted long in that job; we left within a few weeks, and I took a job as a junior programmer with a company in Richmond while my dad was still looking for work. My mother wasn't looking for work at that time, as she had never worked outside the home in her entire life and didn't think she could work here in Canada.

I didn't like Canada at all when I first came here. I didn't have any friends and didn't know anyone here. Everything was so different and depressing. I felt low and homesick all the time, and missed my friends back in South Africa and Botswana. I saved up the money I earned for a plane ticket, deciding that I would return to South Africa when I had enough for the fare. In mid-2001, after just 11 months in Canada, I decided to go back to South Africa. I found a job in my field in Johannesburg and took an IT training course as well, all the time knowing I would have to leave everything and return to Canada within six months or lose my citizenship. My mother kept reminding me of this. At the end of 2001, therefore, I returned to Canada after six months of staying in South Africa. Another six months later, in mid-2002, I left for South Africa again. This time, I didn't want to come back to Canada. After hearing that both of my parents were sick, however, I knew I had to return to see my family and be there for them. I moved back to Canada at the end of 2002. The second time I came back, I realised I had to make Canada my home. I wanted to get to know people, make friends, and get to know the communities for myself and for my parents. I needed to stay here to make my path in Canada.

I wanted to meet the local Indians, and to meet the local musicians and performers as I love music and performing. I decided that organising a music program could help me connect with many people in the community. With that thought in mind (or without much thought, really), I hastily posted an ad on Craigslist in early 2003, calling for local Indian (East Asian) singers and musicians for a music show. I felt a little crazy doing this, as I didn't know anything about this place or the people or anything! I didn't really expect much from that ad, but to my surprise I got a few responses and connected with a few local Indian musicians and singers within weeks. I got various ideas from them and met many other musicians through them. I found some sponsors among the local businesses, and organised a community music show with a live band in February 2004 at the Michael J. Fox Theatre in Burnaby that attracted 350 people! That was a milestone in my life in Canada; through the show, and through the organising of the music program, I got to know many people in the community and made a lot of friends who are still in my life today.

Meanwhile, at home, nothing was different. Four years passed by, and my father still couldn't find a job in his field. He looked sad, depressed, and frail. It was so heartbreaking to see him at home every day in that state. I told my father to talk to some employment agencies, and we both went to a few agencies together. However, none of them was able to secure a job for my father. After four years of not finding a job as an engineer, he found a night job at a 7-11 which he took very reluctantly. It was the most heartbreaking thing to watch my dad, once a highly qualified engineer who had worked for so many large corporations and designed such high stature bridges, now working at 7-11 on the night shift. His duties were to work at the cash register and clean the place, including the washroom. This job didn't last more than two weeks or so, as one night while doing this

work, my father slipped and fell in the store and severely injured his leg. He was bedridden for several months due to this injury, and could never really walk normally again after that accident.

At this point, I was the sole person working to support my family financially. I had two jobs, one as a teacher at a school and one in the evening at Safeway. I could hardly see my parents, as they were at home while I was working day and night. When I left for work in the morning, I would go to my father's bedside and see my father sleeping, and when I came home, I would see him lying in bed. We hardly talked, and on the weekends he would hardly say anything to anyone. He would stay very quiet and watch TV or study at his desk. Some people from the community would visit us, but my father would show so much anger to everyone that we hardly had any visitors. My parents' relationship started falling apart. I took them to a counsellor who suggested that they should divorce and live apart, something I had not imagined even in my worst nightmares. I thought it would be best if I moved out of the one bedroom apartment to give my parents some space, so I rented another apartment next to my parents' to give some space to all of us. My parents had arguments all the time, and because I was away the whole day until late in the evening, I couldn't help them much. My mom started staying at my place most of the time, as my father was always in a bad mood and didn't want to see anyone. He couldn't walk much due to his legs, and he didn't want to socialise with anyone. I started feeling depressed seeing my parents so depressed. I wanted to help my father but I didn't know how. He wasn't getting a job, and I didn't know how to help him. It was killing me inside. I was busy with my job, and I had also registered at BCIT to gain further knowledge. I didn't know how to help my dad. Without realising it would happen or getting ready for it, I had suddenly assumed full responsibility for managing our family. I had to work two jobs and study at the same time, while my highly educated and highly experienced engineer father was suffering at home. Neither I nor nobody else knew how to help him as he shut down completely, isolating himself from everyone and succumbing to his mental and physical fragility.

I got my dad a computer and internet service at home, but my dad was used to finding work traditionally through newspapers and didn't really know how to use the internet. Since I was out all day working, I couldn't help him much. He subscribed to the *Vancouver Sun* and the *Vancouver Province* newspapers, and applied to all the jobs he found listed there. However, there weren't many jobs listed in those newspapers. Most of the jobs were on the internet. Seeing his desperation and having met a few people who were also struggling to find professional work after coming to Canada, I decided to start a newspaper for professional career listings only, which would have a website component as well. I called it the *JobLineCanada Career Paper*, and it listed jobs at various levels, particularly focusing on professional and senior level jobs. I wanted to help my dad and all the other professional skilled workers who came to Canada and were going through similar problems finding professional work. I worked day and night on the website and newspaper, collecting ads and designing, editing, proofreading, printing, and distributing the paper all over the Lower Mainland while at the same time working a full-time job to meet my family's household expenses. I hired a few people to help me with marketing and sales for the paper on a commission basis, and signed up with a distributor who would distribute the papers.

While collecting job ads for the paper from local businesses, I constantly looked for an opportunity for my father, but I couldn't find any job suitable for him. My father's health was deteriorating; he developed severe pain in his legs, and it got to the point where he could hardly walk without support and needed surgery. Doctors suggested amputation to release him from the chronic pain he was experiencing as the arteries in his legs shrank. He had the choice of amputation or waiting 10 years for surgery. My father chose to wait 10 years for the surgery.

While I was still running the newspaper and website, working, and studying at BCIT to upgrade my skills, my handsome, daring, ambitious, adventurous father continued to suffer from pain, depression, and mental illness, and he dived into writing to pass the time. He wrote thousands of pages of English words along with their meanings and synonyms. He kept to himself, and wrote four volumes of a dictionary with thousands of pages in each. I tried many times to take him out of the house, but he always told me that he was busy. I knew he was just trying to hide from the world because of depression. It was so heartbreaking to see my father, who had once upon a time been the most intelligent, confident, daring explorer who could build his own empire, not be able to work anymore at his profession. He had come to Canada with so many dreams and hopes for a better life, so many plans to design bridges and work as a structural engineer in Canada, but instead everything in his life had shattered.

In an effort to promote my newspaper as well as my IT skills to get contract work on the side, I joined the Burnaby and Vancouver business boards and attended various business networking and meet-up events. Through one of these business networking events, I met a person who needed some help with software for his company. After I helped him with his software program, he offered me a full-time job in his department, which happened to be the exploration department of a Canadian diamond mining company.

Along with managing my full-time job, maintaining the website, and producing 20,000 copies of the newspaper on a monthly basis, I started organising job fairs to promote professional career development and help connect job seekers with recruiting companies. I organised three job fairs per year – two in Burnaby and one in Vancouver. From 2004 to 2009, I maintained this hectic schedule, but I was losing heart as my father's health went from bad to worse and he was scheduled for surgeries. I closed my newspaper business in 2009 as I couldn't focus on it while my father was so ill, and my mother needed help to take care of him.

The year 2009 was a turning point for me. It was the most difficult time of my life. My father had four by-pass surgeries, which caused him multiple strokes. The diamond mining company I worked for closed down, and I decided to shut down the newspaper. My mother's health wasn't good either, and father needed constant care, so I concentrated on looking after my father and enrolled for another degree program in Computer Crime with the goal of switching my career to the field of fraud data analysis. I was helping my parents with everyday housework while taking four to six courses per term and working part-time.

One evening in February of 2010, while travelling back home from downtown Vancouver after my last class at BCIT, I saw a huge sign saying applicants were needed for jobs related to the upcoming Vancouver Olympics. I immediately called a friend who I knew was looking for a job to inform her about the opportunity. She asked me to go down to the hiring office and check it out for her. So, I got off the train and went to the office, cutting through a long line of people who were waiting to apply. As I walked up to the front desk to

ask about the job for my friend, someone came out from the inner office and, seeing me at the front desk, called me in and asked me few questions about my current status and qualifications. Right away, they offered me a job for the Olympics! It was a moment I will never forget. I accepted the part-time job on the spot. Sadly, my friend never got a chance to apply as applications closed that night. I had a great experience working for the Olympics on Cypress Mountain. I worked the night shift, as I already had work during the day and classes in the evenings.

After a few months of very little sleep or rest and so much work, my own health started to decline. It wasn't long before I ended up in hospital. While I was trying to recover from my own health issues, I sent my father to my eldest sister's place in Perth, Australia so that she could look after him while I recovered from my illness. My father didn't like Perth, and stayed for only three weeks before returning to Vancouver.

I recovered quickly, and took full charge of my life again. I found contract work as a data analyst and continued with my studies while I looked for a permanent job. I received an email regarding a job with the federal government. I didn't think much about it and went for the interview. After the initial interview, there were exams to write and further interviews and security checks. The process took almost a year, and finally I received an offer letter to join the federal government. It was a dream come true for me, as I had been looking for a permanent job for the longest time. I learned a lot about Canada's heritage and history – about the country's Indigenous people and how Canada was born – from various trainings I received as part of my new job. I also took a few law courses at BCIT as part of the degree program in Computer Crime, where I learned about Canadian law and how the country's judicial system was formed. The job and the training enriched my mind with so much knowledge about Canada that I had never had before. After working for two years at my permanent job with the government, I decided to buy a property so my family could live together in the same place, and I could look after my father more closely.

We had some land back home in Bangladesh which my parents managed to sell, and with the profits from that sale along with my savings, in 2011, I bought two condos in Burnaby so my parents and I could live together side by side. Everything seemed to go well, and my father's health was getting better. Yet I started feeling physically weak and dizzy at times after moving to the new condo that I had bought next to my parents' condo in Burnaby. My weakness, dizziness, and shortness of breath increased to the point where I couldn't do anything. I was always dizzy, and at times had no energy. I was constantly in the hospital, constantly seeing the doctor or specialists. I didn't know what was happening to me, and couldn't take care of my father anymore, so I asked my brother to take him to his place in New Jersey while I got well. I didn't want to be parted from my father, because I knew no one would take care of him like I would. Yet I had no choice, as I couldn't even take care of myself.

My illness was so strange and no doctor could give a diagnosis. At times I would feel okay, while at other times I would be unconscious and in hospital. My dizziness, fatigue, and headaches made me literally disabled and handicapped most of the time. My father returned from my brother's place after about two weeks after having a minor stroke. He never really recovered from that stroke, and within a few months of his return from New Jersey, he had first one heart attack and then another in the space of a few weeks. Within a month, his third and final heart attack put him into his eternal sleep.

My life had revolved around my father, and after losing him, I lost my grip on life. I lost my grounding and my strength. Nothing seemed to make sense in my life. I was here but my heart was constantly crying for my father. It was the hardest and most difficult thing for me to overcome and I still haven't recovered. I focused on my studies during the times I could study, and my own health issues helped me not to think too much about the loss of my father, as the feelings of extreme dizziness and fatigue would make me forget my surroundings. I was still suffering continuously from extreme dizziness, fatigue, and breathing problems, and after three years, I finally managed to discover the source of my illness. It turns out I was suffering carbon monoxide poisoning from the fireplace in the condo I had bought. Soon after discovering the root cause of my illness and addressing the problem in my home, I started feeling better and returned to work and studies.

Recovering from the carbon monoxide poisoning was like getting a second chance at life. It made me look within myself to find my calling, and to find peace after losing my father. I found this peace through music and art. I joined an art club in Burnaby and New Westminster, as well as joining a music school of which I have since become one of the directors. I also organised several music shows for local artists and participated in various art exhibitions locally. I have made many great friends now through my engagement with the music and arts community as well as through my work and studies, and I value each and every one of them for their support and the contributions they have made to my life. I live with my mother now, in a house in Panaroma Ridge in Surrey that I bought after selling my condo. Since moving to this house, I have discovered a new passion that I didn't know I had, which is gardening!

Though Canada failed my father in every way we could imagine, in return, Canada turned me from a dreamy, impractical, illogical girl to a confident, strong, responsible, and independent professional who has learned to live in the moment and doesn't fear anything. My father used to tell me, "Whenever you have to make a decision about something, think about your value first; when you know your value, you will always do the right thing and until you know your value, don't make any decision." I carry this advice from my dear father with me always.

MUSTAFA CHOWDHURY

BENGALI CANADIANS IN THE NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION: MAPPING SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IDENTITIES

PROFILES OF BANGLADESHI IMMIGRANTS IN THE NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION (NCR)

In the absence of a precise number of Bangladeshi Canadians in the NCR, it is generally held that there might be at least five to seven thousand Bangladeshis, consisting of immigrants and their Canadian-born children.

1. COMMON BARRIERS BANGLADESHI CANADIANS INITIALLY FACE

By and large, Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada do not seem to have any language barrier as they can converse pretty well in English. The majority of Bangladeshi Canadians, however, lack knowledge of French. Many Bangladeshis live in the Gatineau area (in the province of Québec) due to its affordable housing. While they save on rent, they have difficulty enrolling their children in English schools. Many parents have expressed their frustration as they are unable to coach their children and are never sure how their children are doing and what assistance they might need.

Upon arrival in the NCR, most Bangladeshis rely on their family's informal support system. Bangladeshi families extend various forms of assistance to newcomers, including helping them find a family physician, apply for a health card and open a bank account. They might also direct newcomers to the Coordinator and Senior Settlement Counsellor, Settlement and Integration Program at Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO). Newcomers also have the advantage of directly connecting with OCISO, an organization that supports immigrants. According to Nasir Tarafdar, OCISO's Coordinator and Senior Settlement Counselor, Settlement and Integration Program, over the years, OCISO has served roughly one thousand Bangladeshi immigrants and refugee families out of a total of almost seven thousand Bengali immigrants (Tarafdar 2017). A Canadian of Bangladeshi origin himself, the Senior Settlement Counselor takes a deep interest in providing services that are offered in the areas of education, work permits, employment, education, housing, immigration-related matters, tax filing and so on.

New immigrants in the Ottawa area also enjoy the services provided by the Bengali Community Service Centre of Canada (BCSCC). Established in 2002, the BCSCC serves the local Bengali community. It is an organization run by Bangladeshi Canadians in the Ottawa area for Bangladeshis. Its focuses include: Women's and Children's Issues; Seniors Services; Youth Services; Settlement, Employment and Training Services; and Counseling and Information Services.

First-generation Bangladeshi Canadian immigrants face a unique set of challenges since there are a number of factors at play. Challenges that tend to limit these first-generation immigrants include foreign credential recognition or academic equivalencies, lack of "Canadian" work experience, lack of French language and lack of a social network. Due to a shortage of savings, Bangladeshi newcomers, like other immigrants, are forced to take up jobs at whatever level they can find (such as security guard, salesperson, factory labourer, etc.) to keep the pot boiling. Many find no time to look for employment, or opt for quick training or any other opportunities that do come up. Fortunately, this problem does not exist to the same extent for second-generation Bangladeshis raised in Canada. Both groups, however, experience subtle racial discrimination.

2. RETENTION OF BANGLADESHI CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Bangladeshis in the NCR do not want to assimilate since they feel that they are quite content with their negotiated identity – i.e., *Canadians of Bangladeshi origin.* They take pride in retaining the culture they had known in their country of birth. They recognize that race, religion, language, name and cultural customs such as dress and diet are visible factors identifying them regardless of their time of stay in Canada. For that matter, they know all too well that race alone is the one insurmountable barrier to assimilation. Naturally, they are more focused on retaining the best of both worlds by becoming part and parcel of a diverse Canada.

Although there have been no in-depth case studies or focus group discussions related to this issue, my simple observations and interactions reveal that Bangladeshi/Bengali immigrants negotiate and re-define their "proper" ethnic, cultural, nationalist, and religious identities by creating "separations" and "differences" based on their own understanding of values and ethics. The second-generation often discusses experiences, exchanges information, identifies issues of concern and proposes suggestion for change in seminars and conferences as well as in their daily lives.

By and large, first-generation Bangladeshis in the NCR have retained some essential identity of their country of birth while adapting to the Canadian way of life. There is a marked difference even between the first-generation Bangladeshi Canadians who came in the 1960s and the recently arrived first-generation Bangladeshis. Those who came in the 1960s or earlier seem more attached to Canada in that they and their Canadian-born children are less aware of or interested in the events taking place in Bangladesh. Nevertheless, having lived in Canada where freedom is seen as a core Canadian value, Bangladeshi Canadians have moved on in their lives by redefining their own lifestyle and by acquiring new values in a multicultural Canada.

Second-generation Bangladeshis need to strengthen ethnic solidarity, norms and values through cultural and religious events that relate more to their country of birth than to the country of adoption on the part of their parents. It is interesting to note that both groups (immigrants and Canadian-born Bangladeshis) express their concern during any disaster or emergency situation in Bangladesh or Canada. Fundraising for the 2016 forest fire victims of Fort McMurray is an example of this attachment to the country of adoption in the case of immigrants and the country of birth in the case of Canadian-born Bangladeshis. The level of integration among the first generation is noticeably impressive as they are

constantly moving forward having identified themselves as *Canadians of Bangladeshi origin*.

In pursuing their identity, Bangladeshi Canadians have not created any self-contained world of their own. Instead, their world has been juxtaposed between Bangladesh and Canada. In a sense, the lifestyle of Bangladeshi Canadians in the NCR is a combination of Bangladeshi and Canadian culture. Almost all of the houses of the community members contain displays from both countries. Handmade show pieces such as *pakha* (a manual fan), *rickshaw* (a manual three-wheeler) *hurricane* (a kind of lamp) and *nakshikatha* (an embroidered quilt) as well as paintings by prominent artists and photographs of natural scenes such as villages, paddy fields, rivers, boats etc. are commonly displayed in their living rooms. Many Muslims have different kinds of Islamic symbols in their houses, such as a portrait of the *Qaba* (the prophet Muhammed's grave where millions of Muslims gather once a year from all over the world) and some Arabic scriptures from the Quran (the holy religious book of Muslims). They also have many pictures, displays and gazettes that are typically Canadian. At the same time, Bangladeshis actively participate in activities on Canada Day including *Bangla* Caravan (discussed below), as well as in Canadian sports and recreation, etc.

Unsurprisingly, the more the recent the immigrants, the more politically sensitive they are in relation to the politics of Bangladesh. This sentiment is more prevalent in relatively new immigrants. It is evident in the ways in which they attach importance to certain national holidays that are solemnly observed in Bangladesh. Their dedication and enthusiasm for the causes of Bangladesh are manifested by their level of participation in community activities such as the observance of *Shwadhinota Dibosh* (Victory Day), *Shohid Dibosh* (Martyr Day), *Bangla Nobo Borsho* (Bengali New Year) and other national celebrations (Rahim 1990).

In a sense, Bangladeshi Canadians in the NCR seem to be unique in that, unlike their cohorts in other cities such as Toronto, Montreal, Edmonton and Vancouver, who tend to be more political in constructing their identity in Canada, Bangladeshis in Ottawa participate without reservation in activities organized by cultural, social and educational organizations. The older first-generation immigrants do not seem as interested in the political ups and downs of Bangladesh as do the recent immigrants.

Seeing the incidence of drug addiction and teenage pregnancy, many new immigrants tend to worry about their children who are in high school. They feel a bit alienated as they choose to associate more with the culture and tradition of their country of origin. Consequently, as their feelings of being alienated become stronger day by day, they move in the opposite direction from their present Canadian life towards the culture, tradition and religion of Bangladesh. This is particularly true since 9/11, an incident that changed the thinking of many Bangladeshis who became, in a sense, more religious following these events. Although Bangladeshi Canadians had been enjoying a relatively secure life, following the 9/11 incident, people of a different colour, race, ethnicity and religion found it hard to believe how suddenly their secure life transformed into an intense feeling of threat and distrust in a country they had known as their "own."

Unfortunately, it was not just the Muslims of the Ottawa area who were affected; instead, the public attitudes towards Muslims throughout the globe became one of suspicion since they were stereotyped as potentially dangerous. Many I talked to recalled how more than a hundred incidents of violence had occurred in Canada immediately

following the September 11 incident. Like other Muslims, Bangladeshi Muslims in Canada had felt insecure for some time, especially seeing that many bearded Sikhs were beaten, *hijab*-wearing women were insulted and a few mosques were vandalized. In a sense, such fear, perceived or real, brought Bangladeshi Canadians together even more in an attempt to strengthen their sense of group identity in Canada.

Seen from that angle, Bangladeshi Canadians are unlike many other ethnic groups in Canada, especially those groups that attempt to achieve one of two incompatible goals – survival as a distinct ethnic group and admittance into the mainstream of Canadian life. Bangladeshi Canadians seem to be rooted in the reality of race and culture – they believe in cultural pluralism in that they can contribute certain parts of their tradition and adapt to certain Canadian traditions (such as having a special turkey dinner with cranberry sauce on Thanksgiving weekend, etc.), but they passionately love all of the occasions relating to their religion in Bangladesh. Children of Bangladeshi origin born in Canada tend to be less pretentious as they know all too well that, no matter how they look upon themselves in their country of birth, people in the street may them as someone who is from another part of the world. The colour of their skin makes them look different to the point that they are seen as "outsiders" or "foreigners" in that they are not deemed to be "local" Canadians. Only a white-looking Canadian would pass the perception test of being a "Canadian," argue Bangladeshi Canadians.

To argue in the same vein, no matter how much Anglo-conformity Bengali immigrants and their Canadian-born children might display, at the end of the day, they are still seen as immigrants or children of immigrants and therefore as perpetually immigrants. This is a reality that Bangladeshi Canadians, whether we are talking about the first, second or third generation of Bangladeshis in Canada, have come to understand and accept accordingly. This is not to say that this is an easy way to situate oneself in Canada culturally. Yet most Bangladeshi Canadians have come to terms with their notion of identity. Bangladeshi Canadians, regardless of their experiences, do not feel "rejected by Canadians."

There are no universally accepted criteria for ethnic identity. In fact, the criteria used for defining ethnic identity may vary from group to group in relation to time and place and may reflect pressures from the larger society. Peter Weinreich defines ethnic identity "as that part of the totality of one's self-construal made up of those dimensions that express the continuity between one's construal of past ancestry and one's future aspirations in relation to ethnicity" (Weinreich 2003: 28). Bangladeshi Canadians are cognizant of their personal, social and ethnic identity and associated terminologies.

We know for a fact that conflict does occur when the minority group's self-definition (or identification in Canada) does not correspond with the perception of mainstream Canadians (i.e., Caucasian Canadians). In that sense, Bangladeshi Canadians, especially those who are immigrants in Canada, are respectful of every culture and are not willing to do away with the culture that they grew up with. Similarly, their Canadian-born children recognize the importance of sticking to the culture and traditions of their parents. They are certainly not ethnocentric. Ethnocentrism, as we understand it, is the firm conviction that one's culture is superior to that of any other ethnic group. Thus, without being ethnocentric, Bangladeshi Canadians are dynamic, willing to adapt to certain basic "Canadian" culture to the extent possible without assimilating into "Canadian" mainstream culture.

To explain it a bit more, they see themselves as Canadians who are able to bring with them a host of Bangladeshi culture and traditions that become part and parcel of Canada's pluralism. They don't see themselves as being the centre of everything in Canada. Instead, they see themselves as a group with culture and traditions of their own that add to Canada's rich diversity. There are no instances of voluntary segregation, physical or cultural; nor are there any instances of withdrawal from the larger Canadian society to establish their own groups. They live all across the greater Ottawa area and interact with all groups without any reservation both socially and culturally. The existence of various cultural, social and philanthropic groups in the Ottawa area is evidence of their way of becoming a part of the diverse people of Canada, the country they call "home."

Bangladeshi Canadians neither resist social pressure favouring Anglo-conformity nor accept 100% of the mainstream culture. Being conscious of their religio-cultural backgrounds, they have successfully retained their culture and traditions (such as practicing religion, observing religious festivals and observing national events of Bangladesh along with all Canadian national festivals); hence they are actively embracing the best of both worlds.

3. RETENTION OF *BANGLA* LANGUAGE

By and large, the locus of culture is the family, and Bangladeshis in the NCR have taken responsibility for maintaining the culture with which they grew up in Bangladesh. Not surprisingly, therefore, Ottawa area Bangladeshis place emphasis on maintaining their vernacular language by speaking *Bangla* (Bengali) at home and teaching their children the same language to the extent possible; they also socialize with other Bangladeshi families, encourage their children to read the holy scriptures, exposure them to *Bangla* culture, and marry them off within the community or bring in their spouses from Bangladesh. Some families had more success in doing this, while others had less. This, however, did not decrease the number of interracial marriages between Bangladeshis and non-Bangladeshis (that is, Caucasians). In fact, the recent trend is that more and more Canadian-born Bangladeshi boys and girls are seeking their life partners from the mainstream population, often much to the disappointment of their generally conservative parents.

Like many other immigrant communities, Bengalis are creating and preserving their unique identity in the NCR's diverse ethos. In general, Bengalis are a proud people – highly ambitious and always striving for excellence having incorporated certain aspects of Canadian culture into their culture and heritage.

Considering the importance of *Bangla,* several Bangladeshis have worked very hard to establish heritage schools with assistance from the government. The first Bangladeshi *Bangla* school (there had been one *Bangla* school already established by the people of West Bengal, India, who also speak *Bangla*) was opened by an enthusiastic Bengali couple (the husband is an engineer and the wife is a teacher at Bayshore P/S site) having obtained the approval of the Ottawa Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) in 1998. For this couple, especially the teacher, this was a realization of her dream to be a *Bangla* teacher in Canada, having taught for 17 years in Bangladesh.

The couple recognized that it was only natural for the children who were growing up in an English environment to be less inclined to learn *Bangla* on weekends. Being aware

of the acculturation process in Canada, they were a bit apprehensive seeing how a split had started to take place between parents born in Bangladesh and their children born or raised in Canada. It was obvious to them and other parents that their children were becoming acculturated at an increasingly accelerated pace; they were less and less interested in speaking *Bangla*. For the couple, it was a red flag. They began to work even harder.
With the passage of time, the teacher became very successful, demonstrably influencing a large number of parents to send their children to Saturday school. Many parents appreciated the efforts of the couple and jumped at the first opportunity to send their children to *Bangla* schools around the city. Evidently, this became possible because the couple was able not only to generate profound interest among the members of the community but also to persuade them to demand heritage language education from the School Board. Thus, seeing the level of interest, the OCDSB also took interest in expanding the *Bangla* school to other locations in the Ottawa area. The couple even found suitable teachers from within the community.

Today, there are eight registered *Bangla* schools scattered across the NCR, all administered by Bangladeshi Canadians under the district supervision of the OCDSB. Gradually, this particular couple and other teachers of *Bangla* became known to the community, having earned special respect. "From the very beginning, parents cooperated and helped us materialize the plan of establishing and running the *Bangla* school in the Ottawa area; probably, we were able to convince them to understand the importance of learning Bangla in Canada, a country far away from Bangladesh," (Bashar 2017), observed the couple with a great deal of humility. This couple has long been recognized by the community for their dedication and hard work in generating interest among the children to continue their weekend study. Canada Bangladesh Muslim Community (CBMC) recognized the couple for their dedicated work in preserving and disseminating *Bangla* language in the NCR.

4. THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGION IN THE LIVES OF BANGLADESHI CANADIANS

By and large, most of the Bangladeshi Canadians in the NCR are Muslims; the rest are Hindus and Buddhists, while there are about four Bangladeshi Christian families in the NCR. They practice their religion without any problem whatsoever. For the most part, they are able to avoid being the target of bullying. Only when racism and ethnophobia raise their ugly heads do visible minorities experience instances of prejudice that persist in the larger society. Having come from a politically vibrant country, Bangladeshi immigrants have brought with them different religious and political philosophies, different sets of social and ethical values, and different mental attitudes, all of which doubtless make imperceptible changes in their Canadian lifestyle and in the quality of life in a Canada that thrives on multiculturalism.

The majority of Bangladeshi Canadian Muslims take their religion very seriously. At the same time, they don't want to isolate themselves from the mainstream culture. To the extent possible, they participate in activities that allow them to practice their religion, and give their children an opportunity to learn about the religious values and responsibilities in Canada. Given that religion is an important part of their lives, both first- and second-generation Bangladeshis remain very keen on ensuring that the children practice their

religion from the beginning of their lives. Below is a short account of the followers of Islam, Hinduism, Christianity and Buddhism.

5. BANGLADESHI MUSLIMS IN THE NCR

Attendance at Islamic Schools

There are quite a few families that choose to send their children to Islamic School – called *Abrar* School – instead of sending their children to free non-denominational schools attended by most of the community's children. In addition to following the Ontario curriculum, the *Abraar* School teaches Islamic Studies including the *Quran*. The Muslim Association of Canada (MAC) runs the school, which does not receive any funding from the government. Instead, the parents pay tuition to cover the full cost. There is also another school called the Ottawa Islamic School that also has a number of Bangladeshi children. As one parent, an economist at Statistics Canada, observed: "Islamic knowledge is utterly important and has no substitute. It provides clear criteria to differentiate between right and wrong and guarantees success in both lives when combined with the knowledge of math, science and English. We've sent our sons to *Abraar* School so that they get institutional knowledge on both – that was an easy choice" (Islam 2017: 1). Evidently, Bangladeshi *Abrar* School graduates have received numerous awards for their outstanding academic performance, for which they have also obtained merit scholarships at various Canadian universities. Approximately 15 students are currently enrolled in the Islamic schools in the Ottawa area. Many parents say that they would have preferred to send their children to the *Abraar* or Ottawa Islamic School if they could afford the tuition fees.

The Importance Bangladeshi Muslims Attach to Learning the Quaran with the Right Arabic Accent

There are many Bangladeshi Canadians in the NCR, both first-generation and second-generation, who regularly go to *"Al-Furqan*," a coaching school also run by MAC. This is a school that gives individual lessons on the proper Arabic accent, pronunciation, and meanings and interpretations of the verses of the *Quran.* Evidently, many who have been through *"Al-Furqan"* have been able to modify their Arabic accents with a better understanding of the language due to the personalized, one-on-one coaching.

Given how seriously Ottawa Bengali Muslims take their religion, a group of concerned Bangladeshi Canadians have formed several organizations and associations to undertake activities to help them remain focused. Below is a short account of some of the educational, socio-religious and philanthropic organizations formed and run by these Bangladeshi Canadians. In fact, the following are prime examples of their creativity and enthusiasm in moving forward having ensured that their children also embrace the same values and religious obligations in Canada in spite of the many hurdles they have to overcome.

Canada Bangladesh Muslim Community (CBMC)

CBMC (http://www.cbmc-canada.org) was founded in 1994 as a value-added not-for-profit organization almost single-handedly by a Bengali Muslim with cooperation from a handful of friends and volunteers. CBMC's objectives are to sustain and promote the religious, cultural and social values, traditions and ideals of Bangladeshi Muslims in Canada by enabling the children of Bangladeshi Muslim Canadians who are born and/or raised in the NCR to think through their identity trajectory and become proud Canadians of Islamic faith. Additionally, they aim to promote greater understanding, mutual respect, tolerance and cooperation among Canadians of diverse cultural, social and multi-faith groups.

CBMC organizes a yearly Blood Donor Clinic in partnership with the Islamic Society of Cumberland (Bilal Mosque) and other interested parties, participates in the yearly Petrie Island Cleaning Initiative in partnership with the Orleans Multicultural Association and organizes an annual picnic through which they encourage the celebration of diversity by engaging children of different ages in various activities during the picnic. CBMC also organizes yearly badminton and basketball tournaments involving community members across the NCR with a view to strengthening bonds among children and their friends, and distributes meat and canned food products for the Ottawa-based *Sadaqa* Food Bank, something that allows children to see and learn from their parents about the concept of "giving."

In addition, CBMC organizes the annual *Iftar Mahfeel* during the month of Ramadan along with associated activities, such as an *Essay Competition,* a *Student of the Year Award* and the recognition of a Canadian of Bangladeshi origin for his/her contribution in his/her field of endeavour through a *Distinction Award*. Referring to CBMC's ongoing activities and ultimate goal, the organization's Vice-President observed: "CBMC's goal and intention is to satisfy *Allah Subhana wa ta'ala* (the most glorified, the most high) by undertaking activities that represent Bangladeshi and Muslim culture and values embedded in Canadian culture" (Zaman 2017). CBMC, in partnership with Human Concern International, launched a scholarship program for Bangladeshi orphans in 2017. Many distinguished guests, such as Senators, Members of Parliament and research scholars, attend the functions and grace the occasions.

In 2016, while introducing a group of young, talented Bangladeshi Canadian students to her colleagues and the Speaker and commending them for their excellent academic performance in high school, Senator Mobina Jaffer stated that these were not just young Canadian students but "Muslim Canadians and future Canadian leaders" (Jaffer 2016: 1). The implicit message was that the problem often arises from other people's perception of visibly ethnic groups of Canadians because of the colour of their skin or any physical attributes.

Muslim Family Gathering of Ottawa (MFGO)

MFGO was established in 1999 to provide a forum in Ottawa for family-oriented Islamic discussions among Muslims in general and Bangladeshi Muslims in particular. It holds a *Halaqa* (study circle) every second Sunday of the month with a potluck lunch. The objectives of the *Halaqa* are to create Islamic Awareness and to learn about *Deen* (the way of life of a Muslim). MFGO's programs are specially oriented towards youth and children by

encouraging them to learn about and practice Islam in their day-to-day life. MFGO also organizes a summer picnic and games for participants of all age groups. It also holds special community events such as *Iftar Mahfeel*, and the celebration of *Eid Al-Fitr* and *Eid Al-Adha*; additionally, with a view to exposing the children to their country of origin, it observes special days (such as Victory Day, International Mother Language Day, etc.) that are observed in Bangladesh.

Under the stewardship of its President and seven other volunteer couples, MFGO has been growing steadily and is doing what it believes in – raising children to become responsible Muslim Canadians. Since 2013, MFGO has also initiated a scholarship program for poor meritorious students in Bangladesh. "May Allah (SWT) provide us the ability to achieve our *niyat* (intention)" (Zaman 2017), observes one of MFGO's core members.

Ottawa-Bangladesh Muslim Funeral & Social Welfare Organization (OBFMO): Helping You Prepare for the Last Journey

Under the Chairmanship of a Bengali Canadian, and in collaboration with a number of dedicated workers, OBMFO was created in 2010 with a view to assisting fellow Bangladeshi Muslims in dire need of help after the death of a family member. OBFMO's comprehensive package includes collection of the body from hospital/home, arrangement of all of the appropriate paperwork and payment of expenses related to burial services. Keeping in mind the spirit of helping the needy, OBFMO is committed to helping Bangladeshi Muslims by providing financial assistance to the family of the deceased if the family is not capable of handling the cost. OBFMO facilitates allocation of one or more plots based on a monthly donation for a few years in the Muslim cemetery for the purposes of burial. OBFMO also provides counseling and guidance to surviving family members of deceased Bangladeshi Muslims living in Ottawa.

OBFMO also participates in charitable activities to improve the health and wellbeing of Bangladeshis living in the NCR. Since its inception, it has been promoting and organizing social events such as children's programs, yearly competitions for young Bangladeshi Canadian boys and girls of various ages involving the recitation of *Quaranic* verses, sports and summer camps, and a summer picnic. It celebrates religious events without creating conflict among other groups with similar mandates. In the last few years, OBFMO has expanded its activities and, in partnership with local organizations, has successfully raised over $30,000 for the Syrian Refugee program and another $50,000 for the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. OBFMO's appeal to fellow Bangladeshi Muslims in the NCR has been gaining momentum. Everyone around seems enthused with OBFMO's slogan: "In your time of need, we are here to help you honour the lives of those you love."

Ottawa-Bangladesh Muslim Funeral & Social Welfare Organization – Youth Group (OBMFOY)

OBFMOY (http://www.obmfoyouth.com/) is a youth group whose primary focus is to unite and strengthen youth across the Ottawa community to help them deal with various social pressures. Its key services include peer tutoring, mentoring, drug and alcohol counselling, and the promotion of civic and cultural respect through dialogues and conferences.

6. BANGLADESHI HINDUS IN THE NCR

There are about 150 Bangladeshi Hindus in the NCR although the number could be more, according to a popular Bangladeshi social worker. While the Hindu community is growing, it does not have any formal association of its own yet. Most of them join other Bangladeshis (Muslims) for cultural activities. During *Durga Puja,* they generally gather under the banner of *Deshantari* of Ottawa, an established club built by the Bengalis of the state of West Bengal (now called *Bangla*), India. According to Mazumdar, because of the sheer workload surrounding the celebration of *Durga Puja*, Bangladeshi Hindus join hands with their fellow brethren from *Bangla* (West Bengal) for the celebration. Bangladeshi Hindus, however, manage the other two important religious festivals – *Lakshmi Puja* and *Saraswati Puja* – by themselves through the work of a group called *Mongol Dip.* For these two religious festivals, they go to the Hindu Temple of Ottawa-Carleton and Iskcon *Mandir*. Through the celebration of various religious festivals, Bangladeshi Hindus attempt to expose their children to the religio-cultural traditions of the Hindus. The *Mongol Dip* group also organizes a summer picnic for Bangladeshi Hindus that brings them together.

7. BANGLADESHI CHRISTIANS IN THE NCR

This is the smallest group and consists of only about four families, according to one Bangladeshi Christian. Naturally, for every religious festival, especially Christmas, they tend to go to Montreal or Toronto where a significant number of Bangladeshi Christians live. During the Easter Holiday, or on other occasions, however, most of them go to the Ottawa-based St. Maurice Parish which is a Roman Catholic community under the guidance of the Companions of the Cross. They are involved in all other socio-cultural activities with the mainstream Bangladeshi Muslims in the NCR.

8. BANGLADESHI BUDDHISTS IN THE NCR

The number of Buddhist families of Bangladeshi origin in the Ottawa area is not very significant. According to an active member of the Bangladeshi Buddhist community, there are about 20 families in the NCR, totalling about 50 or so individuals (Thowai 2017). Though there are only a small number of them, the majority of Bangladeshi Buddhists are quite well-placed in Canada with steady jobs in the federal, provincial and municipal governments. Some are also employed by private organizations, mostly in the IT field. Some have retired and are enjoying their retired life in the NCR.

Bangladeshi Buddhists in the NCR do not have any Buddhist Pagoda or Temple of their own mainly due to their small number. For worship, or any festive occasion, they go to the Thai Buddhist Temple in Kanata, the Cambodian Buddhist Temple in downtown Ottawa and Gatineau or the Sri Lankan Buddhist Temple in Gloucester, Ottawa and Orleans. Though they have different national backgrounds, their religious affiliations and common

observance of religio-social festivals bring them together for worship, celebration and friendship.

Again, there is no formal association of Bangladeshi Buddhists in the NCR due simply to their small number. There is, however, an informal association of the Bangladeshi Buddhist community that organizes get-togethers in partnership with other Buddhists for religious and social activities in the Ottawa-Gatineau area. Given the importance they attach to certain Bangladeshi national holidays, the Ottawa group also organizes cultural functions with the Buddhists from other countries.

The Bangladeshi Buddhist community has an impressive track record for their spirit of volunteerism. According to a senior Buddhist, who remains very active in cultural affairs of the Buddhist community, community members are involved in numerous types of volunteer work with the Ottawa Police, the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO), the City of Ottawa and local Bangladeshi community organizations. In 2016, they formed a cultural organization called "*Maatir Taanay"* (for the love of the soil). One couple personally organized a Bangladeshi cultural show in 2017 to raise funds for the CHEO. The program was so successful that they have committed to undertaking a similar program every year.

While there is not much available information on the religious practices of the Hindus, Christians and Buddhists, there is plenty on Muslim Canadians since they are very large in number. An interesting observation with regard to Bangladeshi Muslim Canadians in the Ottawa area is that their Muslim identity is just as important as their identity as *Canadians of Bangladeshi origin*. The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the USA, which came as a bolt from the blue, actually reinforced one's identity as a *Muslim Canadian of Bangladeshi background.* Evidently, after the initial shock and horror of the events, Bangladeshi Muslim Canadians got over the associated feelings of insecurity. Despite the disturbing witch-hunt all around the world which pointed the finger at Muslims, Canadian Muslims continued to remain quite comfortable in having multiple identities in Canada. They tell me they are *Canadians of Bangladeshi origin,* they are Muslims or Hindus (or whatever might be their religious affiliation) and at the same time they are an integral part of the multiracial and multicultural Canada where they have comfortably retained the culture and religion they have inherited from their country of birth. They have successfully incorporated their cultural attributes into what is referred to as the typical "Canadian" culture. Whether they are first- or second-generation Canadians, all are quite comfortable placing themselves in the scheme of things in Canada, the country they call "home" without any reservation.

9. EDUCATIONAL, SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND PHILANTHROPIC ORGANIZATIONS CREATED BY BANGLADESHI CANADIANS

Ottawa Bangladeshis take a keen interest in their religion, culture and language, and this has prompted them to form a number of organizations with a view to reinforcing their identity in Canada as *Canadians of Bangladeshi origin* by involving their children and grandchildren.

Bangla Caravan

Spearheaded by a number of Bangladeshi Canadians, *Bangla* Caravan is an initiative that began in 2015 to share the richness of *Bangla* (Bengali) culture and heritage with the members of the Canadian multicultural mosaic. This is a unique opportunity, where anyone representing *Bangla* culture and heritage can demonstrate and share their cultural performances with the greater Canadian community, celebrating the diverse treasures that Canadians enjoy.

Every Canada Day (July 1), *Bangla* Caravan takes a lead role in gathering a large number of people in their traditional dress and heading towards Parliament Hill to join the jubilant crowd as part of the grand celebration. Participants, both young and old, join the group wearing typical *Bangali* outfits such as *punjabi, paijama*, *lungi* and *saris* of various kinds in various styles; some wear *dhuti, gamcha, Baul* dress, *Manipuri* dress, Indigenous people's dress and faith-based dress prevalent in *Bangali* society; the wedding dress of the typical Bangladeshi bride and groom may also be seen. Participants carry musical instruments, dance costumes, handicrafts, pictures, banners, festoons, garlands etc. Having joined the crowd, the *Bangla* Caravan makes its way towards Parliament Hill to celebrate Canada Day with friends and family members much to the bewilderment of everyone in the crowd.

Every year, *Bangla* Caravan brings together not only *Bangalis* from Bangladesh but also those from West Bengal; it also invites Indigenous people, new and old settlers from outside of Canada and Canadians of diverse backgrounds to join the Caravan for a display of their culture. As the Caravan moves towards Parliament while the participants sing and dance, the excited members of the crowd, who get carried away, also jump in and join the *Bangla* Caravan parade. *Bangla* Caravan participants thus reflect a large cross-section of people of different religions who speak different languages. Having put aside their differences, they unite under *Bangla* Caravan's banner to show their collective strength as Canadians of diverse backgrounds and education. *Bangla* Caravan also undertakes other cultural activities involving Canadians of various racial backgrounds.

Bangladesh Cultural Society of Ottawa (BCSO)

Founded in 2010 by a group of community leaders, Bangladesh Cultural Society of Ottawa (BCSO) aims to retain Bangladeshi culture and tradition while embracing the multicultural fabric of Canada. Its emphasis is on engaging second-generation children who are being raised in Canada. Its activities are therefore geared toward celebrating the national holidays of Bangladesh, such as *Bijoy Dibosh* (Victory Day), Ekushe February (*Shohid Dibosh*) etc. along with Muslim religious observances such as *Iftar Mahfeel* during the month of Ramadan and Eid-ul Fitr. During these functions, it also engages children of various ages in a competition involving recitation of verses from the Quaran. In addition, it also arranges a summer picnic where children and adults get a chance to mingle, play and spend some time together. Though a relatively a new organization, within a short period of time BCSO has commendably increased its membership. Its core team is now reviewing its action plan with a view to expanding its activities surrounding children and young adults.

Canada Bangladesh Education Trust (CBET)

Canada Bangladesh Education Trust (CBET) was established as a registered non-profit organization in August 2012 under the stewardship of their leader and a handful of dedicated volunteers devoted to working in the area of education. Prior to that, in the summer of 2010, Khan had already formed an informal community organization called *Bangla Dersé Quran* (BDQ). It used to hold home-based monthly gatherings at BDQ members' homes. Within two years, the BDQ members successfully formed the present CBET. In January 2014, it became a registered charity organization with Canadian Revenue Agency (www.cbet.ca).

CBET's aim is to make a difference in the lives of those who are not fortunate enough to continue their education due to financial constraints. CBET attempts to support financially challenged students in Canada and Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, it gives scholarships to college students in all the 450 sub-districts in the country. As well, as the name suggests, CBET gives scholarships to poor and needy Canadian students in the Ottawa area.

CBET's monthly forum consists of 20-25 families that meet once a month at alternating members' homes for a spiritual gathering. This monthly CBET meeting provides an opportunity for young adults to learn about their heritage and develop a strong sense of ethics to integrate into Canadian society.

CBET also puts out an online monthly magazine called *Canadian Dream* (http://canadiandream.cbet.ca/). Since March 2013, *Canadian Dream* has been reaching out to Muslim immigrants of diverse origin in the NCR. This bilingual *(Bangla* and English) e-magazine contains carefully reviewed write-ups not only by Bangladeshi immigrants but also by a large number of immigrants from other countries. Topics such as contemporary issues affecting first- and second-generation Canadian immigrants – including their struggles, ways of overcoming professional barriers, hopes and aspirations, generational gaps, issues affecting minority children, formation of identity of immigrants' children now growing up in Canada, empowerment of women, instances of success, contribution of immigrants etc. – make the magazine worthwhile. *Canadian Dream* has a readership of roughly two thousand.

CBET also has a community TV program (Rogers TV Channel 22) called *Bangladesh Window*, which is the first and only Bangladeshi program available through Rogers Community TV since 2014. This 30-minute monthly program is primarily for educational purposes, to raise awareness of the contribution of Canadians of Bangladeshi origin; it is designed to demonstrate to Canadians at large how this particular segment of the Canadian population has become an integral part of Canada, the country they call "home." Viewers get a chance to see many facets of their own lives reflected in a mirror – hard work, love, compassion, altruism and charity. Like a probing journalist showcasing the contributions of Canadians of Bangladeshi origin, especially in the NCR, CBET's probing interviewer is always on the lookout for individuals or organizations. *Bangladesh Window* is an excellent social vehicle through which CBET tries to motivate young Canadians to involve themselves in charity work from early on.

CBET has also created a portal (www.bangla.cbet.ca) to capture and preserve the sacrifices, successes, challenges and contributions of first-generation Bangladeshi Canadians across the country. It's a relatively new initiative, and since it got off the ground,

CBET has been getting a lot of inquiries about its scope. CBET remains committed to showcasing the lives and achievements of Canadians of Bangladeshi origin. To foster and contribute to the Canadian multicultural mosaic, CBET has also formed an alliance with different ethnic community organizations as well as other Muslim organizations to participate in activities of common interest. For example, by joining hands with other diverse Muslim organizations in the NCR, Ottawa's Muslims were able to raise $64,000 for the forest fire victims of Fort McMurray, Alberta, donated through the Canadian Red Cross.

From the beginning, CBET has been supportive of the aspirations of Canada's First Nations community. CBET has made a humble contribution for the preservation of the Ottawa First Nations' heritage shelter. CBET's scholarships to Ottawa high schools' graduating students are designed to ensure that the students of First Nations high schools in Canada do receive the award. In 2017, CBET constituted two scholarships of $1,000 each for Carleton University and Ottawa University, and one scholarship of $750 for Algonquin College. CBET annually holds a *Pitha* Festival, a Multiethnic Free 400+ persons *Iftar* Program, a Fun Day, a Fundraising Dinner, Volunteer Awards, a High School Graduation Awards Ceremony and Young Professional Networks.

CBET's Youth Forums generally include discussion by and for youth, some of whom have already joined the workforce while some are continuing university studies. The subject areas they discuss include: racism, bullying and xenophobia; their notions of identity; simultaneous attachment to Canada and their country of origin; their relationship with other Canadians (who are also multiracial) including common characteristics and also differences; and what is unique in their group solidarity as *Canadians of Bangladeshi origin*. Small groups and discussants record approaches and solutions as they see fit. As part of its outreach program, CBET maintains cordial relationships with the Ottawa city Mayor and Councilors, provincial MPPs and Federal MPs in the NCR. Elected representatives of all three levels happily join CBET's events and activities.

Cure for Women and Children (CWC)

Established in 2015, Cure for Women and Children (CWC) is an Ottawa-based grassroots project that raises funds to provide free access to treatments and healthcare services to impoverished women and children of Bangladesh. CWC is the result of an initiative by a group of Bangladeshi Canadian women passionate about maternal, women's and children's health. CWC's main objectives include raising funds to: (1) Provide surgeries for women who have childbirth-related injuries such as uterine prolapse and obstetric fistula; and (2) Provide medical equipment for neonatal health care. Since its inception, CWC has raised over $30,000 CAD for these causes. These funds have helped to provide life-enhancing surgeries to 35 women at two well-known institutions in Bangladesh. CWC also funded 15 lifesaving pieces of equipment for newborns, which were donated to Dhaka Medical College Hospital's Special Care Neonatal Unit. CWC holds various campaigns and fundraising events to raise awareness as well as funds. Still in its infancy, CWC is partnering with institutions in Bangladesh, but hopes to expand globally in other developing countries where women and children have limited or no access to proper healthcare. CWC is now a project under Human Concern International (HCI).

Proactive Education for All Children's Enrichment (PEACE)
Formed in 2007, Proactive Education for All Children's Enrichment (PEACE) is a Canadian not-for-profit organization based in Ottawa and spearheaded by a Bangladeshi Canadian with cooperation from a Bengali Canadian professor at the University of Ottawa. PEACE's mission is to establish innovative and non-traditional evening and weekend schools for young people from different parts of the world, with Ottawa being the centre of delivery. PEACE, in collaboration with AlivEducation, has been offering an academic coaching model to students from elementary through high school in Ontario. It is committed to offering its services to the children of underprivileged communities from different parts of the world. PEACE has been able to support more than 500 students since its establishment. The students come from all backgrounds, which gives them a chance to meet with peers of diverse origin, something that brings them closer to each other.

Sanchari
Founded in 2010 by a group of Bangladeshi Canadians in Ottawa, *Sanchari* is a not-for-profit organization run with the help of members' contributions and a host of sponsors. It is an Ottawa-based cultural group dedicated to showcasing the rich and diverse *Bangla* cultural heritage among the members of the first and second generations of Bangladeshi Canadians. Since its inception, *Sanchari* has organized cultural programs in which new generations of children promote and engage with Bangladeshi tradition and culture. It has also participated in a number of national and international events. The most recent performance by *Sanchari* was held on July 1, 2017 to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Canada. The celebratory performance was broadcasted live on TV and attended by a number of national and international dignitaries on Canada's Parliament Hill, and was an amazing example of Canada's pluralism.

Sukara
Established in 2012, Sukara is an informal group of empathetic Bangladeshi Canadians who got together to combine their charitable efforts based on the belief that their collective effort will have a much greater impact than the sum of their individual efforts. The group consists of 11 families, all of whom are professionals in various fields. They chose to name the organization Sukara, which is a Sanskrit word for charity. Recognizing that education is the key to emancipation from the shackles of poverty and that the journey towards self-sufficiency requires accessible basic healthcare, Sukara's primary focus is on health and education.

Sukara has raised $25,000 for the Ahsania Mission Cancer & General Hospital in Dhaka, which provides affordable and/or free medical care to the destitute and underprivileged. It has also provided financial support to the Disabled Children's Fund (DCF) in Bangladesh, which provides education, job training and placement, and other social support to the disabled and their families. It has also provided the bulk of the funds to set up a sewing training center to train disabled individuals and provide job placement opportunities in the burgeoning garments sector, and has provided funds to DCF to set up a computer training centre for persons with disabilities. In terms of local causes, its charity work includes participation in the Terry Fox Run and fundraising for the Children's

Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO). Sukara maintains complete transparency regarding the disbursement of funds.

Bangladesh Canada Association of Ottawa Valley (BACAOV)
Unfortunately, Bangladesh Canada Association of Ottawa Valley (BACAOV), which was formed in 1971 by a handful of Bengalis, became divisive over the years and, having changed management and with loss of its membership, has now gone into a hiatus for quite some time.

Summary
To sum up, Bangladeshis in Ottawa have created their own culture and tradition of "giving" to the community at large, having placed themselves in a position where they are able to accept certain Canadian core values (such as compassion for fellow human beings) and retain certain socio-religious traditions of their country of origin. This is true in the case of both first- and second-generation Bangladeshi Canadians.

10. CONCLUSION

My own observations and experiences have shown that a number of personality characteristics are associated with success in living and working in Canada, including interest in mainstream Canadian culture, flexibility, tolerance, initiative, open-mindedness, sociability, adaptability and positive self-image.

By and large, all Bangladeshi immigrants and their children in the NCR have successfully integrated into what is called mainstream Canadian culture by maintaining their Bangladeshi identity as *Canadians of Bangladeshi origin.* Nevertheless, it is also predictable that, as long as immigrants from Bangladesh continue to come to Canada, they will remain more vibrant politically; second-generation Bangladeshi Canadians see themselves slightly differently since they don't have the same attitudinal baggage as their parents. In that sense, they are more "Canadian" in their thinking and behaviour than their parents, who have also adopted many "Canadian" manifestations. Second-generation Bangladeshis don't seem to be conflicted in the ways in which their parents have struggled with their identities. This is certainly not indicative of the assimilation of Bangladeshi Canadians, however. This may be the right place for us to highlight the difference between the concept of assimilation and that of integration. Assimilation means accepting the new culture while rejecting one's own culture, while integration means adapting to the new culture while retaining one's own culture.

What is lacking among Bangladeshi Canadians in the NCR is an interest in engaging in Canadian politics, whether federal, provincial or municipal. So far, neither the first- nor the second-generation Bangladeshis in the NCR have displayed any interest in becoming involved in politics in any manner. A number of Bangladeshis are, however, card-carrying members of the Liberal, Conservative or National Democratic Party. Two years ago, a Bangladeshi Canadian (an aspiring female political rookie) sought the Liberal Party nomination in a federal Ottawa riding, but failed miserably.

What sticks out clearly from my research is an important characteristic of Bangladeshi Canadians in the NCR – that is, their determination to remain engaged in volunteer work. The phenomenon of volunteerism is inherent in Bangladeshi Canadians regardless of age. Many are working for the *Sadaqua* Food Bank, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, the Canadian Diabetic Association, the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada and Human Concern International, to name just a few organizations. Needless to say, it is through volunteerism that these Bangladeshi Canadians have adjusted to a new life in Canada, as it has allowed them to practice new language skills, build social networks and gain Canadian experience, as well as develop a sense of attachment to and integrate into their country of adoption. Bangladeshi Canadians are also volunteering on various Boards and Commissions, such as Human Concern International, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Commissioner's Advisory Committee on Visible Minorities (ACVM) and the South Nepean Muslim Community, to name a few.

Overall, the large majority of Bangladeshi immigrants in the NCR have prospered and are better off economically than ever before. Today, they have found the freedom and economic security for which they chose to leave their country of birth. All Bangladeshi newcomers, regardless of their age, need to adapt to a new environment and a new social system – including new rules and conditions with regard to education, health services, social services, housing, transportation and banking, as well as new and different habits, customs and social values.

Bangladeshi Canadians are now showing their cumulative pride, energy, enterprise and courage in doing everything that they do in Canada as a part of Canada's fabric. We have already noted how Senator Mobina Jaffer talked about young Bangladeshi Canadians at the Senate:

> *Today we have in the gallery students from the Canada Bangladesh Muslim community. I asked them to attend today and to visit our place of work, the Parliament of Canada. Honourable senators, in a world which is plagued with negative stereotypes of Muslims, especially young Muslims, I ask you to join me here today in recognizing these hard-working Canadian youths. These remarkable people will become our future leaders who will continue to build this remarkable country of ours – Canada*. (Jaffer 2016: 3)

The reality on the ground, however, is a bit different. Although Bangladeshi immigrants become Canadian citizens, they, like all other visible minorities, are still regarded as "immigrants," – that is, they are not seen as "locals," but rather as "foreigners." This includes first-generation Canadians who are actually immigrants, as well as their Canadian-born children and grandchildren; all are grouped together as immigrants or "foreigners." This is a matter of perception by mainstream Canadians. Regardless, we may safely conclude that our children and grandchildren – and their children and grandchildren – have the same hope for achievement as the rest of Canadians regardless of race and ancestry, and the same hope of attaining the same levels of prominence or success in the Canada we collectively call "home."

This leads me to concur with what the news media says about the "Canadian Dream." A Harris poll conducted in October 2015, for example, discovered that 87% of people born in Canada believe in the Canadian Dream, while 91% of people who immigrate to Canada think the Canadian Dream is a reality (Dube 2015). The Canadian Dream is defined as possessing a good-paying job in Canada that one likes, having enough free time available to

enjoy life, and being a homeowner. In a 2016 Environics poll, 83% of Muslims were "very proud" to be Canadian, compared with 73% of non-Muslim Canadians who said the same thing. Canadian Muslims reported "Canada's freedom and democracy" as their greatest source of pride, and "multiculturalism and diversity" as the second greatest. Among Canadian Muslims, 94% reported a "strong" or "very strong" sense of belonging to Canada. Among Canadian Muslims, 48% attend mosque at least once a week; 53% of women wear some sort of head-covering in public (48% wear the hijab, 3% wear the chador and 2% wear the niqab). Most immigrants believe in the "Canadian Dream."

SESSION 4

Multiculturalism, Bengali Organizations, and Social Justice Issues

Session Chair: Bidisha Ray

Ranjan Kumar Datta "Intercultural Activities: A Bridge Building Program among First Nations, Bengali Visible Minority, and Non-Visible Minority"

Iqbal Bhuiyan "Challenges for the Internationally Trained Engineers in BC and the Role of Bangladeshi Engineers' Association"

Mohammad Aminul Islam and Mohammad Zaman "*Ekush*e February – The International Mother Language Day: History, Significance and Implementation of Challenges"

Sanzida Habib and Hafizul Islam "GVBCA: Celebrating and Incorporating Bengali Culture in Multicultural Canada"

Chinmoy Banerjee "Coming Abroad to Find Home"

RANJAN DATTA

EMPOWERMENT: INTERCULTURAL ACTIVITIES IN A COMMUNITY GARDEN

My Indigenous[1] identity, cross-cultural socialization, unique interdisciplinary education, interdisciplinary research skills, and passion for understanding the concept of *empowerment*[2] as derived from *intercultural activities*[3] in a community garden make me uniquely suited to write this paper. Through my experience as an immigrant in Canada and food harvesting in a community garden, I have found that land-based intercultural activities can empower a community by enhancing children's interspecies communication, building community belonging, and developing decolonization[4] and reconciliation[5] skills

[1] I acknowledge that there is no accepted official definition of "Indigenous" adopted by any UN system (United Nations 2017) because of the diversity of Indigenous peoples. Instead, the system has developed a modern understanding of this term based on the following: self-identification as Indigenous peoples at the individual level and acceptance by a community as a member; historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies; a strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources; distinct social, economic, or political systems; distinct language, culture, and beliefs; membership in a non-dominant group in society; and determination to maintain and reproduce ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities. My identity as an Indigenous person from a different country connects me with the land and assists me in building trustful and respectful relationships with Indigenous culture, knowledge, and communities.

[2] The term *empowerment* in this paper refers "to increasing the spiritual, political, social, or economic strength of individuals and communities. It often involves the empowered developing confidence in their own capacities" (Sanderson 2012: 17). Like Sanderson (2012), I have not used the concept to imply a specific goal: "empowerment is not a destination, as the saying goes; it is a process – a lifelong process" (25).

[3] The concept of *intercultural activities* refers to various communities of people learning to value their own cultures, languages, and beliefs as well as those of others. Within intercultural activities, people from a variety of communities come to understand how personal, group, and national identities are shaped, and to appreciate the variable and changing nature of culture (Gondwe and Longnecker 2015). These activities involve people in learning about and engaging with diverse cultures in ways that recognize commonalities and differences, create connections with others, and cultivate mutual respect. Studies (Bartleet, Sunderland, and Carfoot 2016; Murphy and Rasch 2008) have defined intercultural activities as learning tools to describe the conditions that are required to produce positive intercultural outcomes between culturally diverse students and community members.

[4] Decolonization is a historical process specific to land and place (Tuck and Yang 2012). Tuck and Yang (2012) suggest that decolonization is not a metaphor that can be applied to social justice projects that do not result in changes in land distribution, use, and especially relationships. Here I use the term decolonization to indicate a process of healing, resisting, reclaiming, thriving,

(Draper and Freedman 2010; Robinson-O'Brien, Story, and Heim 2009; Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny 2004). I do not attempt to extract any generalizations from this study's findings, nor do I have any intention of making logical predictions about the lives of other communities (Datta 2017). Rather, I share narratives regarding how cross-cultural activities at our community garden became celebrations for our community gardeners and my family.

The purpose of this research paper is to document and communicate immigrant, refugee, Indigenous, and non-Indigenous community gardeners' experiences of empowerment through intercultural activities, such as Elders' and Knowledge-holders' stories; music, dance, and art activities; harvest-sharing; and cross-cultural ceremonies. The objective is to apply relational participatory action research (PAR) methodology to

1) explore how children build empowerment from their relationships with other species;
2) explore how gardeners build, engage, and envision their sense of belonging; and
3) determine whether and how community garden intercultural activities contribute to decolonization and reconciliation learning (Datta et al. 2015).

I have discussed the term *relational* as a conceptual theoretical framework for working with Indigenous communities in relation to issues of nature, land, and sustainability elsewhere (Datta 2015). This framework asserts that things are materially and spiritually connected through interactions with each other. I suggest that a relational way of understanding "centres on relationships and spirituality as a means of explaining not only actors but actions as well. Both actor and actions, in a relational ontology, cannot be explained without considering interactions with other actors" (Datta 2015: 103).

To explore these objectives, I first situate myself as researcher by answering two important questions: 1) How do community garden/land-based activities connect with my understanding of empowerment? 2) Why do I need to reclaim land-based empowerment as an immigrant in Canada? Secondly, I discuss why I chose relational PAR as my research methodology. Thirdly, I present some of the significant research findings. Finally, I conclude by discussing the significance of empowering tools for immigrants, refugees, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

1. SITUATING THE RESEARCHER

The concept of empowerment has various meanings to our Indigenous communities in Bangladesh. I can remember from our many Indigenous community Elders' stories that our intercultural activities in the community garden were an important part of our

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protecting, learning, unlearning, imagining, remembering, connecting, sharing, and loving (Datta 2017). As a relational researcher, "I have learned that decolonization is not a checklist as knowledge is relational; it must be constantly communicated, negotiated, and agreed upon, with honest and sincere hearts" (Datta 2017: 3).

[5] Reconciliation can encompass regeneration, namely cultural regeneration and political resurgence (Simpson 2011). Here I use the term reconciliation to indicate a lifelong process of unlearning and relearning, becoming, and multiple of ways of knowing which can be seen as tools of empowerment for both researcher and participants.

empowerment, incorporating our spirituality, identity, language, culture, education, and food sovereignty.

The meaning of empowerment to our community was living, working, and acting together with the land (Datta 2015). For instance, our community garden/land was for both humans and non-humans (i.e., humans, plants, insects, and animals). In our cultural practice of collectivity, we (i.e., plants, water, insects, animals, and humans) all have agency; in other words, all have the ability to lead a life (Datta 2015). For instance, I learned from my Mom that "we need to respect all plants and animals; they are our gods." This quote suggests that non-humans (i.e., animals, plants, Sun, Moon, Wind, and so on) have more ability than humans in our cultural practice. In our cultural practice, we shared our land with non-humans, and we were all connected by the land.

Empowerment is a relational responsibility in our traditional practice. We used to share our harvests with our community, particularly those who were unable to participate in cultivation. I remember that we did not need to go to the local market for food such as vegetables, fish, and meat. As a community we used to collect from our communal lands, rivers, and lakes. Most importantly, we did not need to harvest vegetables. My Mom used to collect vegetables from our surrounding land. She used to cook vegetable curry with 101 different vegetables, and all of these vegetables were collected from our surrounding land. We used to collectively protect our vegetation and fishing areas for both humans and non-humans; this was our first responsibility to our community.

My childhood and our community garden activities are mutually interconnected. I cannot describe who I am today without exploring my relationships with our community garden. Whenever I think of my relationships with my community garden, it empowers me regarding who I am; it guides what I need to do in critical moments; it provides me with mental strength; and it reminds me of my strong relationships with various plants, insects, and animals. I can remember from my childhood that if anybody ruined my plants in our garden, I would cry a lot. I used to dream about relationships with plants and insects; I still do.

Our community is spiritually interconnected with our community garden. I remember when my Mom used to tell me, "Every morning you need to pray to our community's plants, animals, and insects as they are our gods who not only provide food for our survival but also keep our community connected, and provide learning and sharing space." We used to start our day by praying to the Mother-land.

The community garden was a sacred place for our community. Our ancestors used to show us our surrounding lands and tell us, "We came from this land and will go back to this land. If we are able to take care of our land, the land will take care of us." Our Elders and Knowledge-holders used to use our surrounding lands as our community garden: a teaching and learning place. I remember that they shared many spiritual and ceremonial stories in our garden. All of these stories provide me with strong mental support in my critical moments. Our stories reconnect me with the land, which is empowering for me.

Our Indigenous community's land-based empowerment has been seriously disturbed by mainstream[6] peoples' illegal activities in our ancestral lands, including illegal

[6] I use the term *mainstream* here to indicate the Muslim people in Bangladesh (Human Rights Congress for Bangladesh Minorities 2016). Minorities (i.e., Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, and various Indigenous communities) face many difficulties when it comes to equal land rights, policymaking, and education in

land-grabbing and settlement, forceful displacement, and profit-generating projects (Adnan 2004; Chakma 2010; Datta 2016). Like other minority families, our family was displaced three times from our land. We lost many community and family members because of mainstream people's exploitations. Mainstream people's land-grabbing destroyed our traditional sense of land-based empowerment by creating serious poverty, gender discrimination, mental stress, deforestation, and social inequality in our Indigenous communities (United States Department of State 2016). Because of mainstream peoples' illegal activities on our land, our traditional means of empowerment are under serious threat (Adnan 2004; Datta and Chapola 2017).

2. RECLAIMING LAND-BASED EMPOWERMENT

Many communities in Canada, particularly Indigenous, immigrant, and refugee communities, are living under poverty, mental stress, and discrimination (George, Thomson, Chaze, and Guruge 2015; Kirmayer et al. 2011). International students' families are economically, socially, and culturally more vulnerable than non-immigrants' families in Canada (Neborak 2013). For example, as an immigrant and international student family, we faced many challenges in Canada related to education, rent, food, jobs, and so on. We did not have an opportunity to connect with the land and land-based learning through growing our own food. With limited income most of the time, we were not able to think about fresh fruit and vegetables. When we needed to go shopping, we used to look for the cheapest and/or junk vegetables and fruit in the store. All of this created invisible mental stresses in our everyday life.

In addition, 2016 and 2017 reports by Canada's national public broadcaster indicate that immigrants and refugees might hold negative stereotypes about Indigenous peoples in Canada (CBC News 2017) and that "newcomers …pick on the stereotypes existing of indigenous people" (CBC News 2016). Many international students' families, particularly from immigrant and refugee communities, do not have proper knowledge about Indigenous people, Indigenous culture, and Indigenous treaties in Canada (Datta 2016). In some cases, students hold incorrect ideas about reconciliation and Indigenous issues. For instance, Indigenous scholar Marie Battiste (2013) claims in her book *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit* that "most Saskatchewan students came to university [University of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan, Canada] with little or no understanding of the treaty relationships that their ancestors had negotiated and benefited from, and little understanding of how Aboriginal peoples had suffered" (126). She also suggests that this form of ignorance can create racism as these attitudes have negative impacts and place blame on the victim. Battiste (2013) sees this incorrect information or

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Bangladesh (Human Rights Watch 2015). Minorities are often displaced from their original land, oppressed in their everyday practices, and excluded from any kind of major decision-making process in relation to their land (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2015).

ignorance regarding Indigenous issues in Canada as a form of colonization, which is "violent, ongoing, and traumatic" to Indigenous people (138).

The concept of a community garden and intercultural activities provided an empowering space for my family, which reconnected us with the land, provided food security, created land-based education, and facilitated opportunities to learn from and develop relationships with Canada's Aboriginal peoples.

3. METHODOLOGY: RELATIONAL PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH (PAR)

I used relational participatory action research (PAR) methods to conduct this study and to discuss the intercultural community garden activities my family and I have been involved with for the last seven years. I chose PAR for this study as it empowers participants by respecting and giving importance to participants' thoughts, experience, and spirituality (Blodgett, Schinke, Smith, Peltier, and Pheasant 2011). I have discussed elsewhere that

> PAR is a collaborative process where participants and researchers both benefit. For example, PAR research methodology is helpful in providing researchers with insight into participants' needs, values, and customs; it also improves community capacity, creates critical understanding of self-consciousness, and increases community-based participation and social action outcomes (Datta et al. 2015: 2).

Through intercultural community garden activities, I have learned that relational PAR can lead to empowerment for both researcher and participants as it serves participants' needs, engages participants in the research processes, and provides a shared space (Datta 2015; Torre and Ayala 2009).

In relational PAR, I am both participant and researcher. My family and I came to the city of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada, in 2010 and obtained a University of Saskatchewan (U of S) residence in 2011. My international student family lived under the poverty line and most of the time we could not afford to purchase fresh vegetables and fruit from the local market. Right after we moved to the U of S residence, we got involved in our intercultural community garden.

The term *community garden* within this paper refers to a land-based practice, providing multiple opportunities to explore the role of community in a larger cross-cultural community. A community garden builds a strong opportunity for becoming, for multiple ways of knowing, and for sharing our own culture with other people. More importantly, I consider community gardens as a way to bridge different cultures, languages, and knowledge as an ongoing process. The community garden has countless benefits for a community beyond simply harvesting food. These benefits include access to fresh food, cultural or spiritual practices, financial gains, socialization, and education.

We (i.e., my family along with two other families from two different countries) started our community garden in 2011. With our community garden, we had an opportunity to harvest fresh vegetables for three months. In 2012, I created our community garden board to increase the number of community gardeners and develop intercultural bridges among the gardeners' communities. We grew to include 40 community gardeners from 10 different countries. In 2015, our community gardeners increased to 60 families from 15 different countries, including 200 adults and 20 children. In 2016, our community garden had 120 gardener families from 25 different countries, including 400 adults, 100

children, and 20 Elders. As active gardeners, my family and I developed strong relationships with other gardeners. We did not differentiate between *we* and *they* in our garden. We considered all of us as *we*.

In relational PAR, we use our expert eyes and our understanding of community to work right in the middle of the community. We respond to what the community identifies as the issues it is facing, so instead of the questions always coming from a researcher who is curious about something, they are either co-created or come entirely from the community.

In this relational PAR, we told many stories together and we owned our stories equally. For example, we are currently collectively writing an academic book and reports for the City's Urban Development programs, and we present at community and academic conferences. I have often seen (Datta 2017) how relational PAR can offer social justice by building intercultural bridges for, by, to, and within participants as co-researchers, where participants become a part of the research, sharing community needs, contributing to community-building, and caring for the environment. Relational PAR helps to find ways to support – effectively, ethically, and appropriately – inclusion of cross-cultural communities' relational practice into environmental justice initiatives. The relational PAR in this research engages the question, "Why intercultural activities?" by focusing on relational ways of knowing communities' practices and cultures.

4. METHODS

Following relational PAR in our community garden, this study used four data collection methods: a blanket exercise, art-based activities, individual and collective story-sharing, and a commonplace book. Here I describe why I chose these methods as being effective for this research.

The *blanket exercise* played a significant role in this relational PAR study because it helped to centre participants' spiritual and relational stories, memories, personal experiences, and expectations (Kovach 2010). We (i.e., Indigenous Elders and gardeners) stood on blankets that represented the land. We (as international students, immigrants, and refugees) shared our gardening stories and learned Canadian Indigenous pre-contact, treaty-making, and colonization stories. Through the blanket exercise, we also learned how Indigenous people create resistance, how to build reconciliation, and how to fulfill our responsibilities towards the land.

Art-based research activities (i.e., dance, music, and drawing) led to action-oriented outcomes for our community gardeners that were fundamental to our relational PAR. Art-based activities are an effective method of strength-based (Huss 2009) learning, stressing what people do well in their lives, and are therefore enjoyable for people to participate in. We organized many art-based activities for the children's land-based environmental science learning, building a bridge between formal and informal learning. This method also leads to culturally appropriate learning. For instance, through dance, music, and art activities, both children and adults had opportunities to get involved in an active process of meaning-making that is likely to have transformative potential in their everyday lives.

Individual and collective *story-sharing* is another effective relational PAR method, as it leads to culturally appropriate knowledge (Lavellée 2009; Simpson 2011). For instance,

through story-sharing we had opportunities to learn various relational stories regarding the significance of native plants, relationships with native plants, children's relationships with insects, spiritual stories, and land-based environmental science and health education. The story-sharing method began with a research topic of importance to the community with the aim of combining knowledge and action for social change (Christensen 2012; Lavalée 2009).

A *commonplace book* is a type of journal that is helpful for collecting personal experiences, feelings, ongoing interaction among co-researchers and other participants, and any other information related to traditional culture (e.g., poems, photographs, drawings, etc.) (Sumara 1996). Unlike a typical journal, a commonplace book was used in this study to engage individuals in everyday practice – activities involving the land, insects, plants, wind, water, sun, children, Indigenous stories, and so on. The commonplace book provided a space to represent a variety of experiences in a variety of forms. This choice was made because it enabled participants to have a better understanding of the research objectives by participating in the research data collection and analysis, and other research processes. In this research, my personal commonplace book was used for data analysis.

5. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Participants were involved in determining the thematic direction of data collection, collected and analyzed data through intercultural activities, verified results, and disseminated their findings in a public exhibit. We hoped that engaging community members in data collection and analysis and reporting procedures would contribute to equity by enhancing community empowerment, and that community members would be exposed to new knowledge and skills which could contribute to an enhanced understanding of, engagement with, and changes to their social engagement and environmental sustainability (Castleden, Morgan, and Lamb 2012; Castleden, Morgan, and Neimanis 2010). Most of the data used in this study is from the last six years of participatory activities, including the blanket exercise, art-based activities, individual and collective story-sharing, and the commonplace book. The following themes were used during individual and collective story-sharing:

- Why did you join this community garden?
- How does a community garden impact your everyday decision-making processes?
- How does your garden impact your physical, spiritual, mental, cultural, and economic life?
- Why are the community garden's intercultural activities important for your children's learning?
- How does your garden create belonging in a foreign land?
- How can community garden intercultural activities build a cross-cultural bridge among visible and invisible communities: First Nations, immigrant, refugee, and other?
- How does a community garden offer a bridge between formal and informal learning?

Thematic analysis of the transcripts involved deconstructing participant responses by identifying and grouping key words or phrases throughout the analysis. A continuous consent process was maintained throughout data collection, transcription, feedback, thematic analysis, and report writing.

6. RESULTS

This section includes the findings from the thematic analysis of intercultural activities. Three main themes were identified as significant elements of community empowerment in a community garden, including 1) children's interspecies communication and relationality as a form of empowerment, 2) building a sense of community belonging, and 3) development of decolonization and reconciliation skills.

Children's Interspecies Communication and Relationality as a Form of Empowerment

Through my six years of community garden activities, I have learned that a community garden can create a bridge between classroom learning and practice that integrates the relational meanings of empowerment as a form of interspecies communication for children, providing a relational learning space, cross-cultural knowledge exchange, diversity, empowerment, and mental wellbeing. I see a community garden as a relational teacher who can teach us how we can live together, share, and care for each other. Here are some relational stories:

With Ladybugs

The children, including my two daughters, tried to build relationships with ladybugs. If any ladybug was separated from its family, the children tried to get it back to its family. The children tried to build relationships with ladybugs so that they could understand the ladybugs' needs. I used to observe that when my children went to the garden, they would run to the children's plots. I asked, "Why are you running?" They answered, "I want to say hi to my plants and ladybugs. I haven't seen them for a while."

With Butterflies

In summer, our community garden used to be full of different colours of butterflies. The children tried to find out which garden flower the butterflies liked best and why. I used to sit beside children who sat silently, trying to find out if a butterfly would sit on their hand. If a butterfly sat on their hand, the children were happy, seeing themselves as a good friend of butterflies. One of my daughters told me that butterflies test their food with their feet. She thinks that butterflies' feet are like their hands.

One of the children wrote the following poem to explain her relationship with butterflies:

I dance and play with my friends.
I move with my friends.
I am surrounded by all my friends; they are my family.
We love each other; we need each other; we are connected with each other.
We are one family with many members.

We are the same, but we look different in colour and size.
We share our space, food, and friends.

This poem explains well how a community garden plays an important role in building children's relationships with insects.

With Ants

Relationships with ants helped both children and ants. The children tried to find out why ants ran in groups and where they went. They followed ant activities closely and tried to find out how so many ants worked together. One of the children told me, "I like how ants like and help each other."

The children's discussions showed that ants' relationships can be used as a teaching tool for children to learn. A child said, "They [ants] are from the same family." Other children asked, "How can they be from one family? The family would be so big." Another child responded, "Maybe they are friends and they love each other so much." On a similar point, another child raised her hand and said, "I know why ants run together. Ants run all together so that they can collect more food and protect themselves if there is any danger." She showed us and said, "Look at this large piece of food and how many ants are carrying it. If they didn't work together, the food would be too heavy for one ant." I asked the children what else we know about ants. One child answered, "Ants can inform us if it will be a rainy day. If we follow ants, we can collect rainwater and save the water for our garden." I asked how she had learned about ants and rain. She told me she had learned from her mother and grandparents that "if there is a possibility of rain, ants won't be outside. If we don't see ants outside, there is a high possibility of rain."

With the Wind

The wind helped build relationships with plants. For example, one of the children said:

> *The wind blows through my body, my hair, eyes, skin, mind, hands. When the wind comes, I feel that I am flying with the wind, dancing with all the plants. When the wind blows, I also feel I become we. This we includes different plants, insects, big trees, etc. We dance and sing together.*

With Bees

Relational activities with bees played a significant role in building the children's understanding about bees. For example, one of my daughters asked me, "Daddy, why don't we come to the garden after school every day?" I asked her, "Why do you want come to the garden?" and she replied, "Well, we can play in the garden and learn about different types of plants and insects." Again I asked, "What else do you want to do in the garden?" and she replied, "We can see how different insects and plants live together. We can also learn how we can live together and protect each other." I asked her if she could give me any examples: "Why should we care about insects?" She gave an excellent example that I did not expect: "I learned from my school teacher that bees are so important for our plants and we are not protecting them. If we [their classmates and teacher] could come here [to the community garden], I could explain and show my friends how to protect them [bees] and why." I again

asked her, "How are we [adults and the university] not protecting bees and how can we protect them?" She said, "Look. Your university is building and building, cutting down the bees' plants and putting in green grass." She asked me, "Can you show me one bee in this whole grassy field?" Then she said, "Look how many bees are in this garden." I didn't teach her about the relationship between bees and gardens. She might learn about bees from her school or friends, but in our community garden she is able to connect her knowledge with practice. Through this garden, she not only knows what we are doing wrong but also what we should do.

Building a Sense of Community Belonging

Participants consistently suggested involvement in the intercultural activities in the community garden provided many opportunities to build relationships with other gardeners, non-gardeners, Indigenous Elders, and others beyond the garden through common interests in produce, harvesting, composting, learning, and sharing. Through intercultural activities in the community garden, we created a sense of community and an understanding of inclusiveness, and fulfilled community needs.

Building a Sense of Community

Building a sense of community is one of the significant parts of a community garden. Our community garden brought together various cultures, traditions, and ceremonies through music, dance, art, and story-telling activities. The Elders' story-telling became a teaching tool in our garden, and it provided community-building opportunities for our gardeners. For instance, one of the gardeners said,

> *As an immigrant, we were given new life in a new country. This community garden has given us a space for creating belongingness with the land and communities. Here we created a family away from our family. We created a community away from our community. We created culture away from our community, and we created a home away from home.*

Another gardener explained building a sense of community through the community garden program by saying, "For me, learning from diverse peoples has made me feel more connected to my family and helped me to understand more of what community is all about."

The above quotes indicate how participation and involvement in intercultural activities in a community garden provide the opportunity to create a sense of belonging in a foreign land. This is particularly significant for immigrant and refugee communities who have been forcibly displaced from their family, land, and culture. Through cross-cultural activities, the community garden has proven to be an exemplary place for immigrant, refugee, and international student families to connect with one another, access campus and city support, and participate in ceremony.

Building Inclusiveness

Inclusiveness became an important part of our community garden. For instance, we have 120 gardener families from 28 different countries, including 400 adults, 60 children, and more than 10 Elders. Our 120 gardeners are from diverse backgrounds; for example, there

are gardeners from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) community, single people and families, and First Nations. Through this diverse inclusiveness, we have learned how to create a sense of community that cares about diversity. By creating these forms of inclusiveness, we have seen how inclusiveness can address many static barriers such as gender, religion, age, and nationality. One of the immigrant Elders said, "Inclusiveness is important for all immigrant and refugee communities who want to call Canada home." This Elder also said, "Inclusiveness does not only refer to current generations; it shows a direction for future generations."

Building Programs

From 2013, we introduced various intercultural activities in our community garden: first, decolonization through the blanket exercise and anti-racist workshop; second, learning through music, dance, and children's art activities; third, community-building through cross-cultural cooking programs, harvest-sharing, and networking; and fourth, building environmental responsibility through Indigenous story-telling, composting, and water and bee protecting. All of these activities were developed through city immigrant and refugee centres, an Indigenous community garden, and other environmental organizations. All of these new programs positively changed our understanding of community, empowerment, and culture. These new programs stimulated dialogue, encouraged learning, and supported collaborative actions by building community among immigrant, refugee, Indigenous, and non-Indigenous people. One of the gardeners explained how our new programs empowered her:

> *This community garden's intercultural activities are new for me. Prior to this community garden, even back home, I was not able to connect with other people because of cultural barriers, but this community broke these cultural boundaries. I do not feel gardeners are outside of our community. I know all of the gardeners, they care about us, and we care about them. This gives me lots of strength. I can talk about many challenging issues in our life with my fellow gardeners, and I can find many solutions.*

The above comment highlights this gardener's sense of belonging and relationship through the intercultural activities with other community gardeners and through working collaboratively.

Developing Decolonization and Reconciliation Skills

The research findings indicate that intercultural activities in a community garden lead to gardeners' decolonization and reconciliation.

Decolonization Skills

The Canadian history of decolonization shared by Indigenous Elders and Knowledge-holders with immigrant and refugee communities was significant for both building relationships with Indigenous communities and creating a sense of belonging for immigrant and refugee communities. Through the blanket exercise, our gardeners had numerous opportunities to meet directly with First Nations Elders and Knowledge-holders and hear stories of colonization in Saskatchewan. Immigrant and refugee communities also

had opportunities to learn about our responsibilities for decolonization. Elders explained why decolonization stories were important. They explained how "decolonization is a continuous life-long unlearning and relearning process." One of the gardeners wrote a poem regarding how immigrant and Indigenous Elders' stories are important for her learning: "I love the way you teach me through stories, songs, and drumming."

Building Reconciliation

The concept of reconciliation is not clear for many new immigrant and refugee communities. One of our Indigenous Elders said, "Without proper knowledge, it can be easily misunderstood." Our community garden's Indigenous Elders used to come to our garden and explain the importance of reconciliation for immigrant and refugee communities. One of the Indigenous Elders said, "Reconciliation is not only for Indigenous people but for all Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Education is the key to reconciliation." According to this Elder, "Reconciliation is a continuous and intergenerational healing and relearning process. Through reconciliation we need to reconnect with land, ancestors, and spirituality." Similarly, the Elder also emphasized the intercultural community garden initiatives. He said a community garden should not only be used for harvesting food; "It can be used as a relearning and reconnection with the Mother-land."

In reflecting on Indigenous Elders' and Knowledge-holders' stories, gardeners found reconciliation to be a very important learning piece. For instance, one gardener explained his reflection on Indigenous Elders' and Knowledge-holders' stories about reconciliation by saying, "The speakers who are Indigenous Elders and Knowledge-holders are fantastic. They help me to keep thinking about what type of community member I want to be and spark lots of thoughts about education as a whole." Another gardener said:

> *I learned that there is always more to learn. Indigenous Elders and Knowledge-holders have a lot of very important things to say and I am glad that, even though I am new to this country, I get to see and do all of these things as a responsible community member now. I truly believe that Indigenous Elders' and Knowledge-holders' stories are crucial for my empowerment in this country with proper responses and knowledge.*

Both quotes emphasize the importance of reconciliation for immigrant, refugee, and non-Indigenous communities in our community garden.

7. DISCUSSION

The concept of empowerment has many meanings for our community gardeners, particularly how we want to live our lives given that the structures we wish to transform are structures that persist (Kabeer 2000; Begum and Khondaker 2008). Our intercultural activities in the community garden were essential components in exploring the meaning of empowerment, and our activities helped us to explore opportunities beyond research for Community-based learning and reflection on land relationships. We explored the concept of empowerment as a process for strengthening our community voice, developing our

collective wisdom, encouraging our agency to share our knowledge with others, and inspiring action to address critical learning issues that impact our lives.

Relationality

Relational practice in a community garden is fluid (Datta 2015; Wilson 2008); it can form a bridge between education and practice in respecting the land. Louv (2005) claims that children who are close to nature have less physical and mental illness than children who are disconnected from nature through urbanization. Being close to nature is significantly beneficial for children's emotional support. In connecting with nature, children make friends and develop the ability to protect themselves. Pelo (2009) says our disconnection from the land and the natural world has brought about many kinds of physical problems that are positively connected with social dysfunction. Children's interspecies relationships in our community garden show that our children are connected to the land; they can feel, smell, and hear their relationships. One of the Elders suggested that children's relationships with the environment are significant for developing environmental responsibility (i.e., protecting the environment, animals, and traditional sustainability culture). Indigenous scholar Shawn Wilson (2008) indicates that in real life we are all relational. He suggests that our relationships define who we are. In our community garden, the children's relationships with insects demonstrate how our children are developing a sense of responsibility toward the environment.

Community-Building

The theme of community-building relates to the role community gardens can play in building relationships and facilitating intercultural integration in communities. Relationships are interconnected with positive behavioural, social, spiritual, and mental health outcomes (Christensen 2012). Community-building through intercultural activities is of particular importance in our community garden, especially as we give importance to community voice. The community lives through whatever it is that's going on and they have powerful stories to tell. Communities know about the needs and the agencies that work directly with them. In our community garden, community knowledge is privileged and valued. Similar to findings by Glover, Shinew, and Parry (2005) and Kingsley and Townsend (2006), this research demonstrates that intercultural community gardening can help bridge the gap between diverse communities. It is clear that there is potential to learn and generate new ideas by connecting with each other, particularly through connections between Indigenous and non-Indigenous immigrant, refugee, and international student families. This intercultural knowledge can then be applied to one's own gardening context, among one's friends and family, or to building a sense of inter-cultural community.

Decolonization and Reconciliation Skills

Decolonization and reconciliation are important factors for social, environmental, and physical wellbeing, particularly for new immigrants', refugees', and international students' families (Harris et al. 2014; Louv 2005). Community-building intercultural activities, such as music and dance, are often described as crucial in re-making, re-interpreting, and re-enacting cultural identity in diasporic contexts (Purewal and Lallie 2013). Purewal and Lallie's (2013) study on music and empowerment in the UK, USA, and Canada demonstrated that music and dance are of paramount importance in building an

intercultural community. Studies (Poole 2004; Mooney 2008; O'Neill 2015) suggest that practising traditional music and sacred songs serves another significant purpose: it brings empowerment for the community. In the oral exegesis offered by Elder members of the community, dance represents a condensed form of enlightenment. Likewise, Indigenous Elders' and Knowledge-holders' stories in our community garden led to a direct connection to alternative stories of Canadian colonization and our responsibilities for immigrant, refugee, and non-Indigenous children and adults. According to Indigenous Elders, "Decolonization is the first step in (re)building relationships with the land." Greenwood (2013) says that decolonization and reconciliation through land-based practice is more than a political goal; this process is living and it provides a sense of belonging. Indigenous scholar Linda Smith (1999/2013), in her book *Decolonizing Methodology: Research and Indigenous People*, observes that, "Coming to know the past has been part of the critical pedagogy of decolonization. To hold alternative histories is to hold alternative knowledge" (34). Another land-based scholar, Louv (2005), discusses how the process of decolonization can challenge our ways of knowing: *Who am I? Where am I coming from? Why am I here? What are our relationships with our land?* As Smith and Thorton discuss, decolonization not only creates a new common space for all; it is also about challenging power and uneven relationship networks.

Our community garden's intercultural activities, including music, dance, artwork, blanket exercise, and story-telling, were helpful to a land-based decolonization and reconciliation practice. Our Indigenous and immigrant Elders' story-telling in the community garden deconstructed Canadian stories in empowering ways so that immigrant, refugee, and international students' families could create belonging in a new land. Indigenous and immigrant Elders explored questions such as, "Who were its [this land's] original inhabitants, both human and other-than-human? What are Indigenous people's stories of the place? What were – and what are – Indigenous place-relationships, and how did these relationships, and the place itself, change or persist over time?" (Greenwood 2013: 97).

I learned that children's empowerment through relational activities in the community garden not only provided multiple ways of learning but also created critical thinking skills for the children. Through garden activities, the children showed many examples of how they can be engaged in critical discussions and how they can learn from each other without having a teacher. Therefore, I agree with Louv (2005) that relearning our relationships with the land from everyday practice can empower us and bring peace into one's self and community.

8. CONCLUSION

Focusing an intercultural activities lens on the immigrant, refugee, Indigenous, and non-Indigenous student communities in the city of Saskatoon unravels the meaning of empowerment. This study recommends rethinking the broad narrative about the concept of empowerment since many subcultures and marginalized Indigenous communities' identities have been subsumed under the hegemonic and taken for granted. Through the intercultural activities in our community garden, we attempted to uncover the complex entanglements between refugees, immigrants, and non-immigrants (Indigenous and non-

Indigenous) by accepting responsibility, which included building a relationship with Indigenous land-based knowledge, culture, and practice; respecting Indigenous treaties; accepting accountability for unlearning and relearning as a continuous process of reconciliation; and building a transnational community by challenging the issues of class, caste, gender, and ethnicity that regulate our home away from home.

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IQBAL HOSSAIN BHUIYAN

CHALLENGES FOR INTERNATIONALLY TRAINED ENGINEERS IN BC AND THE ROLE OF THE BANGLADESHI ENGINEERS' ASSOCIATION

1. INTRODUCTION

Canada is a melting pot – a nation of new immigrants. Originally inhabited by Aboriginal peoples, Canada saw its first immigration with the French and British colonization in the 17th century. The influx continued through the 18th and 19th centuries with United Empire loyalists who fled the United States during the American Civil War. A subsequent wave of immigration from Europe after the two World Wars brought many new cultures, languages and religious groups to Canada, resulting in many changes in government policy and the first laws to protect diversity. During the past 60 years, immigration has continued to flourish, with newcomers arriving from every corner of the globe. In 1971, Canada became the first country in the world to enact an official policy of multiculturalism, showing how valued diversity is in Canada's political and social fabric. The Canadian constitution, implemented by Prime Minister Trudeau in 1982, contained a Charter of Rights and Freedoms that protected multiculturalism. The Canadian Multiculturalism Act was introduced in 1988 and federal funds began to be distributed to ethnic groups to assist them in preserving their cultures.

Bangladeshis started to migrate to Canada in the 1960s, and professionals were the first category of immigrants from Bangladesh (Nazneen 2003; High Commission for Bangladesh 2017). Bangladeshis come to Canada under two major categories, namely the skilled workers category and the family category. Around 100,000 Bangladeshi-origin people are currently living in Canada, of which the lion's share is comprised of internationally trained, skilled workers.

Canada is a successful multicultural nation strengthened by national policies, where immigrants can continue their own professional and cultural practices, creating a diversified society. Yet skilled and/or professional workers face significant obstacles to obtaining work in the field in which they are trained (Geddie 2002). Although internationally trained professionals hold credentials, experience and skills that constitute professional qualifications in their home countries, they are faced with the challenges of validating these credentials and obtaining required licenses to practice their profession in Canada. The Washington Accord recognizes the equivalency of education accreditation system programs only within the signatory countries, and from the year that the signatory was first recognized by the Accord (Engineers Canada 2017). An engineer is an individual who has been issued a license to practice engineering by a provincial or territorial

engineering regulatory body after demonstrating that they have the requisite education, skills, knowledge and experience. An engineer is sometimes referred to as a licensed engineer, a registered engineer or a professional engineer. Licenses are valid only in the province or territory where they are issued.

Newcomer Bangladeshi engineers who land in Vancouver and end up settling in British Columbia (BC) face similar challenges. Bangladeshi Engineers and Applied Scientists of BC (BEASBC) was created to provide support to internationally trained engineers (ITEs) from Bangladesh. The Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of the Province of British Columbia (APEGBC) is the regulatory body in BC, and BEASBC has been working with the APEGBC Vancouver Branch to extend collaborative support to ITEs. The Internationally Educated Engineers Qualification Program (IEEQ) at the University of Manitoba was developed in 2003 to provide guidance and a pathway to obtaining formal recognition of foreign credentials for internationally educated engineers (IEEs) to meet professional licensing requirements of the local regulatory body (Friesen 2013). This IEEQ model is currently being implemented at two other universities in Ontario. Implementation of the IEEQ model is urgently required in BC. An initiative has been undertaken in collaboration with UBC to implement this model in BC.

2. CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY INTERNATIONALLY TRAINED ENGINEERS

Internally Trained Engineers seeking professional employment in their field when they come to Canada face particular barriers to finding employment that utilizes their skills because they must first gain a professional license before they can seek relevant jobs. This is because work conditions fall under provincial jurisdiction in Canada, and provincial governments delegate the regulation of professions to self-governing professional associations (APEGBC for the province of BC). For professionally trained recent immigrants, it is essential to obtain a professional license in the province to which they immigrate so they can practice their profession in Canada. This requirement makes their experience of finding employment considerably more complex than that of immigrants in non-regulated professions.

Vancouver currently receives approximately 2500 new immigrants annually who wish to find work as "engineers." APEGBC only issues licenses to work as a professional engineer to approximately 150-200 foreign-trained applicants annually (Geddie 2002). Since the regulatory system was introduced in 1967, internationally trained professionals in Canada have been awarded higher admission points for criteria such as level of education, occupational training, and knowledge of English and French. The underlying belief was that individuals with these selected human capital characteristics could more easily enter the workforce, and thus could make significant contributions to the Canadian economy and to society. This policy has undoubtedly affected and enhanced the labour market qualifications of new immigrants. There has been a dramatic increase in the number of ITEs in proportion to the internationally trained principal applicants who declare upon arrival that they intend to work as engineers. As shown in Table 1 the number increased from 3% to 31% between 1991 and 2000 (Geddie 2002). Figure 1 shows how the number of engineers who declare themselves as engineers to BC and finally end up in Vancouver is also increasing since 1991.

Year	Principal Applicants (PA) to BC	PAs Reporting as 'Engineers' to BC	PAs Reporting as 'Engineers' to Vancouver	Engineers as % of PAs	Engineers in Vancouver as % of PAs
1991	4107	115	94	3%	82%
1992	3672	173	153	5%	88%
1993	4978	648	414	9%	88%
1994	5614	715	647	13%	90%
1995	7509	1010	888	13%	88%
1996	9976	1430	1307	14%	91%
1997	10153	1665	1596	16%	96%
1998	7171	1462	1394	20%	95%
1999	7675	2089	2045	27%	98%
2000	8196	2506	2444	31%	98%

Table 1: Internationally Trained Professionals
Declaring as Engineers in Vancouver (Source: Geddie 2002)

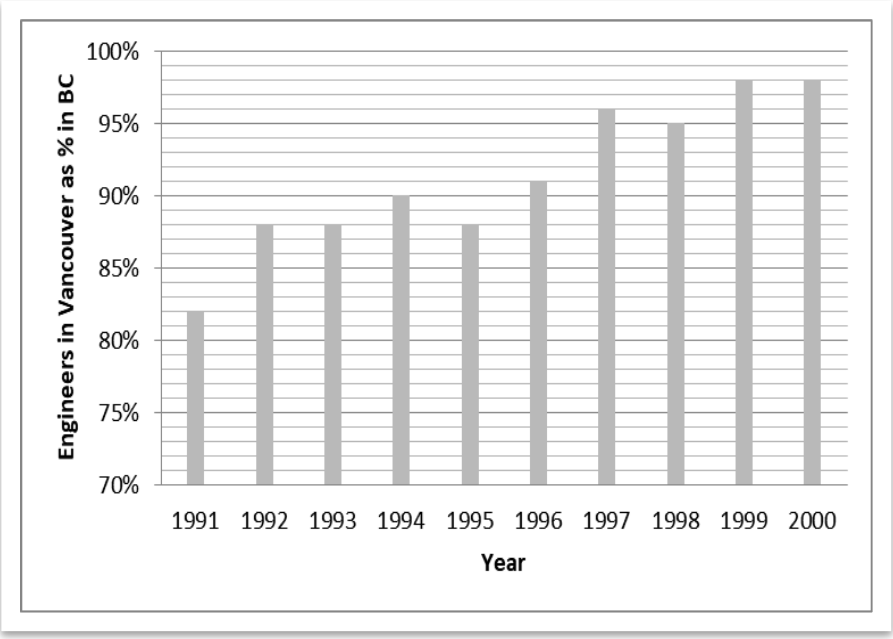

Figure 1: Trend of Engineers in Vancouver as % in BC

The newcomer engineers who settle in Vancouver either come as immigrants with family after a number of years of service in their home country or other countries, or initially come as students in the graduate programs of the University of British Columbia (UBC) (Vancouver or Okanagan campus), Simon Fraser University (SFU) or the University of Victoria (UViC) and later apply for immigration. Some engineers think about getting into these graduate programs or obtaining a certificate from the British Columbia Institute of

Technology (BCIT) when they realize that a local degree and/or work experience is very important to secure a professional job in Canada.

To work as an engineer, one must either be registered as a professional engineer or professional geoscientist, or work under the direct supervision of someone who is a registered professional engineer or professional geoscientist. Professional Engineer (P.Eng.), Professional Geoscientist (P.Geo.), Engineering Licensee (Eng.L.) and Geoscience Licensee (Geo.L.) designations are required to independently practice professional engineering or professional geoscience in British Columbia. On one hand, it is difficult to get a job without a license or registration with APEGBC. On the other hand, APEGBC requires that an applicant meet academic requirements and have at least one year of local job experience. If the applicant has completed his/her graduate degree from an institution offering accredited undergraduate engineering programs and he/she is found to meet minimum academic requirements, APEGBC may offer an Engineer-in-Training (EIT) or Geoscientist-in-Training (GIT) designation. If the applicant has more than five years of work experience in their home country, he/she may qualify for an interview to determine if the work experience and training from the home country are satisfactory to reduce or eliminate assigned confirmatory examinations. An ITE may still need to complete one year of related work experience in a Canadian environment. Newcomer engineers who face all these challenges and at the same time have to support their families either end up doing non-professional jobs or suffer from the dilemma as to whether they will stay in Canada or go back home. APEGBC receives approximately 700-750 applicants for the P.Eng. each year. Only 150-200 of these are "new" applicants, meaning most likely they are immigrants. The rest of the applicants have either obtained their license from elsewhere in Canada and are moving through inter-provincial mobility, or are moving up from the EIT/GIT program. Those who move up from the EIT/GIT program, have had their engineering education recognized and have completed four years of working experience under the supervision of a licensed engineer are in the process of the natural progression for recent graduates of Canadian "accredited" engineering programs. The "new applicants," therefore, are generally immigrants who need to apply for licensing to work in Canada. According to APEGBC, nearly all "new" applicants were awarded a P.Eng. at some point. Yet the figure of 150-200 is shockingly lower than the almost 2500 people who landed in Vancouver in 2000 who declared engineering as their desired profession. Apparently, there are barriers that prevent large numbers of foreign-trained engineers from even applying for certification. Since its inception, BEASBC has been providing all possible support to these newcomer engineers to remove these barriers.

3. THE ROLE OF BANGLADESHI ENGINEERS AND APPLIED SCIENTISTS OF BC (BEASBC)

BEASBC was founded on March 6th, 2005 by a group of young Bangladeshi engineers who had either been working for a few years in Canada or completing their graduate degrees from UBC. It is a registered non-profit, non-political and non-religious voluntary engineering professional organization organized exclusively for educational, scientific, cultural and charitable programs.

The purposes of the association are:

- To bring together and share ideas, technology and experiences between engineering professionals of Bangladesh and British Columbia (BC).
- To work towards the advancement of engineering professions of Bangladeshis in BC.
- To provide assistance in job search and career development for its members and affiliates.
- To conduct seminars and other educational programs.
- To provide mutual assistance and cooperation between the association and other non-political associations/societies and institutions.
- To help develop feasibility studies of various engineering and technological concerns of Bangladesh.
- To collaborate with public bodies and with other societies for the benefit of the engineering professions as a whole.
- To honour any individual/group who has made significant and outstanding contributions to the profession of Engineering, Geosciences and Computer Science.
- To carry out any other activities incidental or conducive to the above objectives.
- To help socialize among family members of engineers, computer scientists and geoscientists in BC.

Each year, starting from January 1st, the general management of the association is vested upon an executive committee (EC) comprised of the following positions:

i. Chair
ii. Vice Chair
iii. Office Chair
iv. Assistant Office Chair
v. Finance Chair
vi. Executive Members (4)

The EC is supported by an advisory committee consisting of three members from among the members or life members and selected by the general members. The EC seeks advice from the advisory committee for the good governance of the EC's affairs, if required.

4. MEMBERS AND BENEFITS

The membership of the association consists of members, life members, fellow members and student members. A member of the association shall be a person of Bangladeshi origin with a degree (four-year Bachelor's, Master's or Ph.D.) in Engineering, Geosciences or Computer Science, who is a resident of BC. When a new engineer arrives in BC, the representatives of BEASBC contact him/her and invite him/her to attend any upcoming event and obtain membership. Currently, BEASBC has 183 members (Bangladeshi Engineers and Applied Scientists of BC 2017).

Members get multiple benefits from the association. To increase benefits to the members, the following sub-committees work tirelessly to support the EC:

1. Membership Committee
2. Technical Committee

3. Professional Advancement Committee
4. Fundraising Committee
5. Publication Committee
6. Professional Assistance and Job Search Committee
7. Constitution and Bylaws Committee
8. Any other committee deemed necessary by the EC

5. RECENT ACTIVITIES AND SUCCESS STORIES

BEASBC organizes professional training programs for engineers at affordable prices, wherein members who are already engaged in professional jobs provide voluntary services as resource personnel. These training programs have reportedly been useful for these engineers in helping them either strengthen their resumes or prosper in their careers.

Every year, BEASBC organizes a technical seminar where the members of the organization who are professionally established share their experience and knowledge in their respective fields with their fellow engineers. In these seminars, BEASBC always invites guests from APEGBC and other sister organizations that work with immigrants, such as MOSAIC, SUCCESS, the Multicultural Helping House Society (MHHS) etc. A keynote speaker is also invited, from a reputed organization or based on his innovative work in the industry.

APEGBC recently identified that there are two main hurdles for ITEs in Canada:

- Communication Skills
- Cultural Gaps

To enhance the skills of newcomer engineers in these two areas, BEASBC organized a half-day workshop on November 2011 in collaboration with APEGBC and MHHS, which more than 40 engineers from different countries attended. Speakers from Applied Science Technologists and Technicians of BC (ASTTBC), APEGBC, Toastmasters Club and BEASBC made the workshop successful. Similar workshops are organized in connection with the technical seminars that take place every year.

The members of the association have a strong fellow feeling for each other. Originating from the same cultural background, they tend to help each other, especially the newcomers. BEASBC also organizes an orientation program to introduce newcomers to the other members and familiarize them with available resources. As part of that orientation program, newcomers get to know the members who are already in the Canadian job market including in senior positions. If there are opportunities, they try to refer the newcomers for those positions. Some of the senior members are also engaged with APEGBC and other voluntary organizations where they can create opportunities for newcomer engineers to serve in volunteer positions.

BEASBC also organizes job search and career development workshops where people from the industry, media and recruiting agencies are invited. These workshops familiarize newcomers with the industry and the requirements of the employer. Additionally, BEASBC organizes cultural programs, annual picnics and programs to recognize the contributions of the engineers in society and in their professions. BEASBC also organizes networking events when a distinguished individual who has made significant contributions to development in Bangladesh visits Vancouver. These events provide opportunities for the

members to learn about recent development in Bangladesh and to mingle with fellow members.

Collaboration with APEGBC
The author is a founding member of BEASBC and served as the Vice Chair of the organization for the year 2008-2009. The author also served as the Chair of the APEGBC Vancouver Branch for the term 2014-2015. While serving as the Chair of the APEGBC Vancouver Branch, the author initiated a coordinator position within the organization for ITEs. Since then, the APEGBC Vancouver Branch has been organizing events specifically for ITEs. One of the most successful events that the Vancouver Branch organizes is a panel discussion where experts in the industry speak about their experience and answer questions asked by the ITEs in attendance. The author always involves BEASBC in every possible way in the events organized by APEGBC, and keeps the members of BEASBC updated about the programs, events and development of APEGBC.

Collaboration with MHHS
BEASBC has organized several programs in collaboration with MHHS. Since the author is keen on helping newcomer engineers and is personally involved with an initiative to implement a bridging program (see below) in BC, BEASBC has organized two workshops each year since November 2014 for newcomer internationally trained professionals at MHHS with that organization's support. The most recent workshop was organized in May 2016 and focused on networking, with the theme "Your Network is Your Net Worth." Newcomer Bangladeshi engineers also attend the workshops. BEASBC also organizes its programs, meetings and events at MHHS, with MHHS providing support and incentive for those programs.

Collaboration with Other Support Programs
BEASBC works closely with the other support programs available in Greater Vancouver, namely MOSAIC, SUCCESS and the Society for Internationally Trained Engineers (SITE), which provides services for ITEs. Representatives from BEASBC attend the events organized by these groups. BEASBC also invites local representatives to its events as special guests or as the chief guest. These networking opportunities with local representatives and politicians give insight into local and regional politics and systems.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

BEASBC has already developed a solid track record in the community. The executives put their best efforts toward keeping the association vibrant and meeting its objectives. Continuous support from the members is needed to help move ahead and sustain the credibility of the association.

What is needed in BC for ITEs?
Canadian regulatory agencies have always provided licensing pathways for newcomer engineers, often in the form of an assigned set of confirmatory exams to check engineers' technical background and establish eligibility for licensure. As the number of immigrants is increasing every year, the government supports developing alternative pathways that will

help integrate internationally trained professionals more quickly and efficiently while maintaining standards for public safety (Friesen 2010).

It is widely discussed that within the Canadian industry, the formal recognition of ITEs confirms the need for alternative pathways to licensing where difficulties in Foreign Credentials Recognition (FCR) and obtaining at least one year of Canadian experience are the two primary obstacles to full market participation. Employers in the engineering sectors also concur that the most important factors that influence the ITEs' level of employment are related to Canadian experience (at least one year), communication skills and professional licensure. A formal FCR is only one aspect of the Qualification Recognition (QR) of ITEs. Other important aspects of QR include the acceptance by an employer of the engineer's credentials, as well as the employer's confidence in the engineer's skills and competence.

The Internationally Educated Engineers Qualification Program (IEEQ), developed in 2003 at the University of Manitoba, addresses QR for the ITEs who newly arrive in Canada. The IEEQ Program was developed to serve as an alternative licensing pathway. While the core of the program is general and technical subject matter, the exemplary programs include diverse components that provide opportunities to link participants to the community and the labour market, and address factors that influence labour market participation such as language, communication skills, Canadian work experience and knowledge of the culture in the industry, and professional licensing requirements. The program also provides an opportunity to gain experience in the Canadian job market through internship. Successful graduates of the program go through an easy transition into the Canadian job market. The IEEQ Program has been successfully launched at Ryerson University and the University of Toronto. The author is involved in an initiative with UBC Continuing Studies to implement this program in BC. Once implemented in BC, it will create opportunities for newcomer Bangladeshi engineers as well as engineers from other countries to obtain their QR easily and have an easy transition into the labour market. It is anticipated that the number of engineers reporting as engineers after their arrival will also increase significantly.

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MOHAMMAD AMINUL ISLAM AND MOHAMMAD ZAMAN

EKUSHEY FEBRUARY – INTERNATIONAL MOTHER LANGUAGE DAY: HISTORY, SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES[1]

1. INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

Ever since its declaration by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in November 1999, International Mother Language Day (IMLD) is celebrated globally every year on 21st February. The celebration aims at enhancing awareness of linguistic and cultural traditions all over the world by protecting and promoting all languages and linguistic diversity for multilingual education. The UNESCO declaration honored the people around the world who speak about 7000 distinct mother tongues/languages in some 188 countries. Unfortunately, many native/indigenous languages in various countries, including Canada, are now extinct and/or threatened by more dominant languages. According to one source, one language dies every 14 days; as a result, by 2100, nearly half of the 7000 languages that are spoken will most likely have disappeared (Abbi 2017).[2] Today, close to 3000 mother tongues, particularly those of native/indigenous or First Nations people, are seriously endangered. Therefore, use of and/or speaking one's mother tongue/language in a multiethnic and multilingual country like Canada is still not something that we can all take for granted. Canada has only two official languages (English and French), but we speak more than 300 mother tongues/languages in our homes across Canada. The worldwide annual observance of IMLD has given rise to a new awareness regarding the importance of saving our mother tongues, and the value of multilingualism and linguistic and cultural diversity.

We are thankful for the invitation to present on the background and significance of IMLD at the *Canada 150 Conference on Migration of Bengalis to British Columbia.* Many of you at this conference may not be fully aware of the contributions of Bengalis in BC to this historic IMLD declaration. The Bengali community took the initiative, coordinated with UNESCO and provided the leadership leading to the proclamation on 17 November 1999 of the *Ekushey* or 21st February as UNESCO's official International Mother Language Day. Why was February 21st/*Ekushey* chosen? What is the significance and spirit of IMLD within the context of Canada 150? How to plan and implement this monumental task to develop in all of us a deep sense of respect not only for our mother tongue but for those of others as well

[1] We dedicate this paper to the late Rafiqul Islam, the architect of International Mother Language Day.

[2] Professor Anvita Abbi is the recipient of the prestigious Kenneth Hole Award for her outstanding lifetime contributions to the description and documentation of languages of India. She also worked closely with elder Haida women for documentation and preservation of Haida language.

– more particularly minority and Indigenous or First Nations languages – thus promoting intercultural understanding through language and dialogue?

In this paper, we set forth a brief background and history of IMLD, discuss the relevance of *Ekushey* or 21st February to IMLD, and consider the significance of IMLD in creating a global family of mother language lovers – a linguistic community for the protection and conservation of all mother languages – as well as the challenges in achieving this goal. Finally, we provide our "BC model" to illustrate how to involve local communities and school systems for developing greater awareness, particularly among the younger generations, of mother languages for a sustainable future for all people within the local, national and global community.

2. THE STORY OF IMLD: HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

Rafiqul Islam, a Bangladeshi-Canadian, a freedom fighter for the independence of Bangladesh in 1971 and a resident of Surrey, BC, sent a letter on 9 January 1998 to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan requesting that the UN take steps for saving all languages of the world from the possibility of extinction. He also asked the UN for the declaration of an International Mother Language Day, and proposed *Ekushey* or 21st February – in memory of the language martyrs of 1952 in then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) – as the day for international commemoration. The request was denied on the grounds that any such proposal needed to be tabled by a UN member state rather than by an individual or an organization. Instead of giving up his proposal, Rafiqul Islam – a remarkably gentle and polite person with a strong conviction and a penetrating vision – formed the "Mother Language Lovers of the World Society" (MLLWS) along with another Bangladeshi-Canadian named Abdus Salam from Burnaby BC. The original MLLWS Committee consisted of 10 members representing seven different mother tongues/languages: Rafiqul Islam and Abdus Salam (Bengali or Bangla); Albert Vinzon and Carmen Cristobal (Tagalog); Jason Monir and Susan Hodgkin (English); Calvin Chao (Cantonese); Renate Martens (German); Karuna Joshi (Hindi); and Nazeen Islam (Kachi). Rafiqul Islam was made the President of the MLLWS. As Director, Abdus Salam re-wrote the original letter by Rafiqul Islam on behalf of the 10-member MLLWS Committee and sent it to David Fowler, then Canadian Ambassador to the UN, with a request to submit the letter to UN members. David Fowler then sent the letter to the Ministry of External Affairs in Ottawa for approval, which took about a year. Meanwhile, Rafiqul Islam continued regular communication with the UN and the Government of Canada.

Around June 1998, Hasan Ferdous, the Chief Information Officer of the UN and a Bengali himself, contacted Rafiqul Islam and Abdus Salam (Rafiq-Salam)[3] expressing his support for their dream of an IMLD, but advised that the MLLWS should route their efforts through UNESCO with respect to this matter. As advised, they made contact with Anna

[3] As a matter of co-incidence, Rafiq-Salam have the same names as the famous Rafiq and Salam of 21st February, who were killed by the Pakistani police force in Dhaka during the Bengali Language Movement of 1952.

Maria Majlof of UNESCO's Bureau of Strategic Planning, who provided immense support and informally guided them through the UN system to make it happen. Accordingly, Rafiq-Salam also contacted the National Commission for UNESCO in Bangladesh, Canada, Hungary, India and Finland. Hungary was the first to reply on 16 April 1999 giving their full support to the proposal. However, there was still a snag – i.e., the proposal must be made to the UN as a proposal from the country itself.

It was almost late August 1999 when Rafiq-Salam and the MLLWS approached the Minister of Education, Mr. A. S. H. K. Sadek, Government of Bangladesh (GOB); he forwarded the proposal to then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who showed keen interest in the proposal. The Prime Minister asked for approval from all her ministries before submitting it to the UN. However, time was running out as the proposal had to be with the UN by 10 September 1999 in order for them to act upon it for that year. Unfortunately, the Education Minister was out of the country at that time. In desperation, Rafiqul Islam called UNESCO National Commissioner of Bangladesh Professor Kafiluddin Ahmed, who conveyed the message to Education Minister A. S. H. K. Sadek. Upon his return, the Education Minister raised this issue directly in the *Jatiya Sangshad* (Parliament) in the presence of the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who gave her instant approval. Rafiq-Salam had a sleepless night in Vancouver, remaining close to the phone while this was playing out in the *Jatiya Sangshad* in Dhaka. This fast-track approval by the Prime Minister helped in the eventual submission of the proposal on 9 September just before the deadline. The dream was very close to being realized.

Once the proposal arrived at the UNESCO Secretariat in Paris, all possible efforts were made to convince other member countries to sign the proposal. The Bangladeshi proposal in the form of a draft resolution was published on 26 October 1999. Twenty-eight member countries supported the draft resolution. UNESCO then submitted the resolution to the UN General Assembly on 12 November 1999. Five days later, on 17 November 1999, the resolution was adopted by the 30th Session of UNESCO's General Conference, which declared *Ekushey*/21st February as "International Mother Language Day." All 198 countries attending the Conference, including Canada, supported the UNESCO resolution. The Conference unanimously agreed to observe 21st February as "International Mother Language Day" to promote linguistic and cultural diversity and multiculturalism.

The adoption of IMLD by UNESCO was an incredible international event with far-reaching impacts on language, culture and human rights – locally, nationally and globally. First of all, language counts. It is not only a means of communication, but is also the most powerful tool for preserving and developing our culture and heritage. Secondly, education in one's native language, particularly in a multicultural and multilingual context, provides a sense of inclusion. With IMLD, there is a new awareness that our adults – both men and women – should achieve literacy and numeracy, which supports the current UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 4.6). Thirdly, preservation and exchange of language fosters intercultural understanding and helps build global citizenship. In the words of former Director-General of UNESCO Irina Bokova, "linguistic and cultural diversity may be our best chance for the future: for creativity, innovation and inclusion" (Bokova 2014).

3. WHY WAS *EKUSHEY*/21ST FEBRUARY CHOSEN?

The UNESCO resolution recognized the great sacrifices made by the people of Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) during the 1952 Language Movement. The date chosen for IMLD, 21st February, represents the date in 1952 when students of Dhaka University demonstrating for recognition of their language – Bengali (or Bangla) – as one of the two national languages of newly independent Pakistan were shot and killed by the police. There is perhaps no parallel history anywhere on earth where people gave their lives to protect their right to use their mother tongue. Thus, it was quite appropriate for UNESCO to proclaim 21st February International Mother Language Day throughout the world to commemorate the martyrs who sacrificed their lives on this very day in 1952. The UNESCO resolution further said that IMLD would not only promote linguistic diversity and multilingual education but also develop fuller awareness about linguistic and cultural traditions throughout the world and inspire solidarity based on understanding, tolerance and dialogue.

The historic 21st February has now assumed new dimensions both at home and in the international arena. For Bengalis, it represents a new "identity" which is global; the international community bestowed this honor on us as Bengalis. Additionally, the *Ekushey* is viewed as the source of our independence and secularism that will inspire all our future generations to come. The *Shahid Minar* (Language Martyrs' Monument) at Dhaka University and the annual celebration of Ekushey/21st February all over Bangladesh is a clear demonstration of this national sentiment. With a total of nearly 250 million speakers, Bengali is the sixth most spoken language in the world today. IMLD will remain as a "gift" from the Bengalis to the world.

4. IMLD: JUBILATION AND RESPONSES

International Mother Language Day was celebrated for the first time on 21st February 2000, and was inaugurated by a ceremony held at UNESCO headquarters in Paris (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 2000-2007). Rafiqul Islam and his wife Buli Islam were in attendance as invited guests of UNESCO in Paris. Since 2000, IMLD is celebrated globally every year by member countries under the leadership of UNESCO, as well by many social and linguistic/community groups around the world. In 2001, the Government of Bangladesh, in recognition of the MLLWS's efforts and contributions to the declaration of 21st February as International Mother Language Day, awarded the Society the *Ekushey Padak* (Medal). The *Ekushey Padak* is the second highest civilian award in Bangladesh, introduced in memory of the martyrs of the 1952 Bengali Language Movement.

Internationally, an immediate response to IMLD was the formation of International Mother Language Committees in many countries. International Mother Language Monuments were built in countries such as Australia, Canada, Japan, the USA, the UK, Italy, Denmark, Norway and many others. One of the first such monuments was Canada's *Lingua Aqua*, the first audiovisual Mother Language Monument in Surrey (BC) as a permanent

reminder of IMLD.[4] This was done under the leadership of Mohammad Aminul Islam, another Bangladeshi-Canadian from Surrey. The City of Surrey paid for the *Lingua Aqua* from its "Cultural Capital of Canada" funds received from the Government of Canada.[5]

Despite UNESCO's promotion of linguistic diversity and the need to protect minor languages, activities at the local level remained largely confined to annual celebrations. Rafiqul Islam wanted to change this by establishing a "global secretariat" for IMLD with country-level committees and representation to move forward UNESCO's agenda for the protection of languages and education in native or mother tongues. A draft constitution and programs for action were prepared accordingly. Rafiqul Islam also made a four-part video series on "Language and Multiculturalism in Canada" to disseminate the message of IMLD through local TV channels.[6] Unfortunately, Rafiqul Islam was diagnosed with and treated for leukemia in 2011-2012 with a brief remission, and passed away on 20 November 2013. This was a great loss to the MLLWS and the world. Many people around the world loved Rafiqul Islam. In 2016, the Government of Bangladesh awarded the *Swadhinota Padak,* the highest civilian award, to Rafiqul Islam (posthumously) and Abdus Salam. Buli Islam and Abdus Salam received the award from Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on 24 March 2016.

5. THE "BC MODEL" FOR IMLD IMPLEMENTATION

Canada is one of the most endangered zones for languages. In Canada, there are 89 listed Indigenous mother languages; of these, 85 are living/spoken and four are already extinct. Three of four extinct languages are from BC; further, of the remaining 85 languages, 14 are listed as endangered, of which seven are from BC (Islam). Against this backdrop, and with BC being the "home of IMLD," we need to protect, conserve and promote all mother languages. Thus, for the MLLWS, British Columbia provided a "test" ground for IMLD implementation.

Following the adoption of IMLD and the initial euphoria, the MLLWS – and more particularly Mohammad Aminul Islam – took on the challenge of implementation of IMLD in the City of Surrey and in BC. Working with local municipalities and the provincial government in BC, Mohammad Aminul Islam and his MLLWS team have created a revolutionary model called the "BC Model" for implementation of IMLD. To date, this is perhaps the only tested framework for IMLD implementation. It took the team almost 10 years to develop this model. The model consists of two phases. The first phase is called the "Integration of IMLD," based on local recognition of IMLD to create an understanding of its value and enhance public awareness. In this phase, we received tremendous local support from various levels of government, including formal proclamation of IMLD. Under this phase, the MLLWS worked with local municipalities – for instance, Vancouver, Surrey, Richmond, Burnaby, North Vancouver and New Westminster – for proclamation of 21st February as IMLD, which was done by all the municipalities in 2007. In BC, IMLD received the highest level of recognition signed by Hon. Judith Guichon, the Lieutenant Governor of

[4] For more information, see http://www.motherlanguagelovers.com/

[5] The City of Surrey was awarded a $2 million grant in 2008. The design and construction cost of the *Aqua Lingua* was $120,000.

[6] The authors were interviewed in two episodes of the four-part TV series made in 2010.

British Columbia. Additionally, the Mother Language Festival is held annually with the support of the City of Surrey and the Arts Council of Surrey. Many community-level organizations, including the Greater Vancouver Bangladesh Cultural Association (GVBCA), are local partners in annual IMLD celebrations.

The second phase was dedicated mostly to the implementation of IMLD in the School Districts of British Columbia. The target group of this phase was the children and schools as a "platform" to facilitate IMLD in a sustainable manner. Children are the carrier of mother languages. IMLD is now part of the BC School Year Calendar and curriculum to uphold the importance of mother languages and linguistic diversity and cultural traditions. We tried this model in the School District of Surrey, which has around 70,000 students who speak 172 mother tongues/languages. The new awareness in the school systems will help students celebrate and share their own and/or other languages and cultural heritages. Beyond Surrey, the School Districts of Vancouver, Richmond, Langley, New Westminster, Delta, Burnaby, West Vancouver and North Vancouver have also recognized and incorporated IMLD into their School Year Calendars. Our mission and the "BC Model" reflect and comply with UNESCO's Education 2030 Framework for Action SDG4. In a recent letter to Aminul Islam, the Assistant Director General (ADG/Education) of UNESCO noted with thanks "the amount of work undertaken by the Mother Language Lovers of the World Society to raise awareness about mother languages and preserve linguistic diversity in British Columbia and Canada."[7] Concerning the "BC Model" for IMLD implementation, the UNESCO letter urged the MLLWS "to continue efforts locally and globally on IMLD implementation using the BC Model."

The MLLWS has also adopted a "2020 Vision" for further advancement of IMLD in BC as well as in Canada and internationally. In BC, implementation of IMLD will soon cover all 60 School Districts with an estimated 650,000 students who speak over 200 different mother tongues. The Trustees of each School Board (10 per school x 60 = 600 Trustees) are being consulted for their support to eventually establish a Mother Language Institute in BC. The work is already in progress. We are also working with the Federal Government of Canada to officially declare *Ekushey*/21st February as IMLD. In 2007, with the help of the local Member of Parliament (MP), a proposal (Bill C-407) was tabled in the Canadian Parliament. Currently, the MLLWS is working through a Federal Minister to table the Bill again in the Parliament in 2017/2018.

Finally, the MLLWS is working internationally for globalization of IMLD. Currently, we have MLLWS chapters in the USA, Australia, India and Bangladesh. We have plans to further expand the MLLWS to all UNESCO member countries. As is evident from the above discussion, our efforts from the local to the global are achieving good results. We are proud that BC and Canada are leading the way globally. Thus, the BC Model and 2020 Vision will fulfill Rafiqul Islam's visionary plan for a "global secretariat" of the MLLWS in the near future.

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[7] ADG (UNESCO) Letter to Mohammad Aminul Islam (Ref: ED/IPS/ESG/17/6140), dated 29 July 2017.

SANZIDA HABIB AND HAFIZUL ISLAM

GVBCA: CELEBRATING AND INCORPORATING BENGALI CULTURE IN MULTICULTURAL CANADA

1. INTRODUCTION

Bangladeshi Bengalis carry their love and pride for their cultural heritage and linguistic and religious identities wherever they travel or migrate. No matter where they settle, most of them generally want and try to build a home away from home by practicing and preserving their rich national heritage and cultural legacies. The Bangladeshi Canadians in Greater Vancouver are no exception, and that is why there is a GVBCA – Greater Vancouver Bangladesh Cultural Association. The total number of Bangladeshi Bengalis living in Greater Vancouver is hard to ascertain, but a large number of them come together to socialize, celebrate Bengali culture, and observe important national days and events of Bangladesh organized by GVBCA.

We, the President and Secretary of GVBCA, will outline a historical overview of this organization along with its main mandates, milestones and achievements. The mission, significance and contribution of this organization have been assessed and narrated in the relative contexts of the missions and activities of other important Bangladeshi/Bengali organizations. Additionally, some of the major challenges of the Association have been discussed alongside the broader vision and future prospects of this organization. There has been little official documentation of the history and activities of this organization, and this is likely the first ever comprehensive documentation and presentation related to GVBCA delivered at an academic conference. The information presented in this paper is derived from the constitution and contents found on the website of GVBCA. It is also based on the first author's personal observation and insider experience credited to her involvement in the organization as a current Executive Committee member, and her role as a community member, activist, organizer and performer for almost 10 years. Numbers presented here reflect mere estimation and best guess. Names or contributions of individual members of the community have not been mentioned so as to avoid confusion and controversy, as it is beyond the scope of this paper to verify any information through archival or empirical research. Terms such as Bangladeshi Canadians, Bangladeshi immigrants, Bangladeshi Bengalis and Bangladeshi diaspora have been used interchangeably in this paper; GVBCA has often been referred to as the Association.

2. HISTORY AND ORIGIN OF THE ORGANIZATION

GVBCA was formed in 2002 as a result of a reunion or merger of two associations in the Bangladeshi community. The growing number of individuals and families in the

Bangladeshi community in Greater Vancouver and the increasing demand for entertainment and social-cultural activities and festivals to celebrate the heritage and national days of Bangladesh on a larger scale and in a more unifying fashion seem to have necessitated the establishment of this Association. Before the emergence of GVBCA, there were two separate organizations in the Bangladeshi community; these were known as the Canada Bangladesh Cultural Association of BC (established around 1988-1989) and the Bangladesh Cultural Association of BC (established in 1992-1993). Both of these organizations arranged special events and celebrations for smaller groups of Bangladeshis under different leadership. In 2002, these two organizations decided to merge together to form GVBCA and to register as a non-profit society under the BC Societies Act. There appeared to be a desire and need to become one stronger community as the small community started to grow bigger (from a couple of hundred people to a few thousand people, at that time), and to organize activities and events under one strong organization and its leadership. Hence, GBVCA is often considered the "mother organization" of Bangladeshi people in Metro Vancouver.

The general purpose of this organization is to promote the national heritage, culture and linguistic history of Bangladesh in the multicultural society of Canada. According to its Constitution, the main purposes of GVBCA are:

- To promote the advancement of the social and general welfare of the Bangladesh community in the Greater Vancouver area of British Columbia.
- To promote friendship and co-operation among Bangladeshis and other ethnic groups in Canada.
- To develop friendly relationships and goodwill with other communities, societies or associations and to affiliate with other such organizations.
- To promote the culture, literature, music, arts and education of Bangladesh in Greater Vancouver as well as to integrate them into mainstream Canadian society.

3. GOVERNANCE AND MEMBERSHIP: INCLUSIVITY AND DIVERSITY

GVBCA is a registered non-profit cultural organization of the people of Bangladeshi origin living in the Metro Vancouver area of BC. Although the Constitution does not clearly state GVBCA as a "secular" organization, it is often claimed informally as the "mother" organization which implies that it aspires to include and represent all members of the Bangladeshi community irrespective of gender, class, clan and faith. It is run completely by volunteers – officially by the Executive Committee (EC), which is an elected governing body of the organization. Governance is generally guided by the Constitution of the Association and by the Societies Act of BC. The EC consists of volunteers chosen from among the members through an election process every two years. The current EC consists of nine members who took office in June 2016, and will hold office until May 2018.

The website of GVBCA features the full list of EC members since 2006, which includes a few dimensions of diversity and representation. The size of the EC has often varied between eight and ten persons. Female representation started in 2008 (though women served mostly as members, with the only exception being the Organizing Secretary from 2008-2010), and there has been no representation of minority faith groups (Hindu, Christian or others). The current EC has the highest number of women (four in total) and

the first female secretary; however, no female President has served as yet. As the list of the Executive Committee between 1998 and 2006 on the GVBCA website shows, the Bangladesh Cultural Association of BC, one of the major organizations that was merged under the Association, had a female Vice-President from 1997-1999; the same person was also appointed Secretary of the same organization from 1997-1998. Apparently, GVBCA has been represented and governed mostly by men of Bangladeshi origin and Bengali Muslim backgrounds.

There are currently about 200 fee-paying members of this organization, and approximately 700 email addresses of community members in the listserv of the Association, which is used for communication and promotional activities. The Constitution sets no limit on the total number of members; however, the general membership is restricted to people of Bangladeshi origin residing in BC. As the Constitution requires, all persons of Bangladeshi origin, eighteen years or older, who live in the province of British Columbia are eligible to become general members of the Association by filling in the membership form and paying a nominal yearly membership fee of $10. Members enjoy the right to vote at any general meeting and to run for an office of the Association, but no other perks such as discounted tickets for entry to any event. In fact, most of the programs and events offer free access to everyone. Anyone of any race, gender, age, socioeconomic status, nationality or language-speaking group can have equal access to any of the events organized by the Association. The Constitution allows (under Article 2.01 of the By-laws) the spouses of members who are not of Bangladeshi origin to be admitted to the general membership of the Association. Additionally, there is a provision for creating associate membership by the EC amongst people who are not of Bangladeshi origin. The EC is supposed to establish other criteria for such membership. However, associate members do not have the right to vote. Every member is obliged to abide by and comply with the Constitution, By-laws and other rules and regulations of the Association, as established by the EC from time to time. The Constitution allows the power of a "casting vote" for the President in the case of equal votes on any issue. However, the President of the Association cannot hold office for more than two consecutive terms (four years), and can be eligible for re-election only after a lapse of one term. If a member of the EC remains absent from three consecutive meetings of the EC without providing a good reason to the President then such a member shall be deemed to have resigned. Decisions are made mostly on general agreement by the majority and by voting if necessary (rather than by consensus). General members have the power to amend the By-laws by special resolution at an Annual General Meeting, to be passed by a two-thirds (2/3) majority of the members present at the AGM, which is usually held in the month of May.

4. MAIN EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

GVBCA observes important national days of Bangladesh, including Independence Day and Victory Day. It also facilitates celebration of Bangladeshi Bengali cultural heritage through organizing secular events such as the Bengali New Year and *Pitha Utsav* (festival of Bangladeshi pan/cakes, desserts), and also other social events, such as an annual picnic and Eid Reunion following *Eid-Ul-Fitr*, the biggest celebration of the Muslim community. *Vaishakhi Mela*, a fair to celebrate the Bengali New Year, is the biggest and most popular

event of the Association. During their tenure from May 2016 to May 2017, the current EC organized the following events:

1. *Anondomela:* Eid Reunion and Inauguration of the new GVBCA Executive Committee was held on July 10, 2016 from 6:00 pm to 10:00 pm at the Kensington Community Centre Gym. There were music and dance performances by community members. Dinner, prepared by some community members and some EC members who volunteered to cook, was served to around 400 attendees for free.
2. Victory Day (*Vijay Divas*) was observed on December 18, 2016 at the Douglas College Theatre. A scripted audio-visual live show portrayed the chronological historical perspective of the birth of Bangladesh through a nine-month long liberation war. The program was attended by fewer than 200 people. The attendance for this free event was much lower than expected due to inclement weather conditions.
3. *Pitha Utsav* took place on January 22, 2017 at the Kensington Community Centre. There were about a dozen stalls that showcased and sold Bangladeshi *pitha* to a gathering of more than 200 people. A couple of representatives from the Vancouver Asian Heritage Month Society (VAHMS) visited the festival to capture the beautiful sights of Bangladeshi *pitha* and the festivities for their project for an interactive photographic exhibition entitled "Following the Spice Routes and Beyond."
4. *Ekushe* February was observed on the exact day of February 21st at the Multicultural Helping House, where a symbolic boxed "*Shaheed Minar*" (monument for the language martyrs) was set up to pay homage to the language martyrs following a "Prabhat Ferry" (morning procession) attended by a small group of 25 people on a weekday morning.
5. The Independence Day of Bangladesh was celebrated through a brief program on March 26, 2017 at the Renfrew Park Community Centre, attended by about 120 people.
6. A Bangla New Year (*Pahela Vaishakh*) celebration was held on April 9, 2017 with a day-long event at the Ukrainian Catholic Centre. There were 30 stalls selling and exhibiting Bangladeshi foods, clothing and accessories; a colourful rally displaying handcrafted masks and festoons; and joyful music and dance performances by local artists and community members. A 32-page souvenir magazine was also published on this occasion. Throughout the day, about a thousand people joined this joyous celebration of the thousand-year-old Bengali cultural heritage.
7. Volunteer and Artists Appreciation Night was organized on April 23, 2017 at the Renfrew Park Community Centre, attended by about 60 people including artists, performers, sponsors and volunteers who participated, performed and helped the Association to organize all the events.

These are more or less the usual programs and events of the Association that had been organized for the past 15 years by the previous committees as well. All these events had free admission and were open for anyone to attend. There were 13 EC meetings in total during the first year of our tenure, with each Executive member volunteering approximately 40 hours on average; another 40 volunteer hours on average were contributed by individual members to plan, organize, coordinate, attend and perform at the events. The current EC decided to start the second year with an annual picnic on August 20,

2017 instead of the Eid Reunion program to incorporate more diversity in programs and events, and also to balance religious and secular events.

5. SIGNIFICANCE AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF GVBCA

The Association works towards preserving, promoting and presenting Bangladeshi and Bengali literature, music, arts and culture in the multicultural atmosphere of Metro Vancouver. In so doing, it provides a platform for local artists and performers to hone and express their talents, skills, creativity and passion; it particularly promotes such activities by youth and second-generation community members, and thus facilitates fostering of Bangladeshi arts and culture among local Bangladeshi Canadians. The Association has published a number of souvenir magazines where both professional/established and amateur writers from within and outside Vancouver have written on local, national (Bangladeshi as well as Canadian) and international issues. It has thus facilitated expression and exchange of ideas and opinions, and fostered the creativity and originality of the members of the diaspora. For the same purpose, the Association has undertaken other ventures, but has struggled to maintain success in these areas. For example, GVBCA started sponsoring a Bengali radio show called *Radio Bangladesh* (Coop Radio – CJSF 90.1 FM and 93.9 Cable FM) every Sunday from 3:00 pm to 4:00 pm, broadcasted from Simon Fraser University (SFU), Burnaby campus. The radio show delivered important community and national news as well as songs, interviews and birthday wishes in order to promote Bangladeshi culture and national heritage in Canada. Unfortunately, the show was discontinued, and the particular reasons are unknown to the writers. However, it can be assumed that commuting to the secluded SFU Burnaby campus on a weekend can be difficult, especially when it demands volunteer time and energy. The Association also started a Bengali School to transmit linguistic heritage to the next generation, and this too faced many challenges and suffered an untimely end.[1]

The Association promotes volunteerism and fosters leadership. It creates openings for community members, especially youth, to volunteer for the Association and its events. It offers opportunities for members to develop and enhance leadership, communication, community development and organizational skills. The Association encourages and fosters local leadership, and recognizes significant national, international and local accomplishments and contributions of distinguished community members by offering a special award to such community members every year. For example, the Association has recognized and celebrated the robust leadership behind the declaration of February 21st (originally the Language Martyrs Day of Bangladesh) as International Mother Language

[1] This paper is primarily based on information found on the websites listed in the references. No attempts were made to gather investigative data about the causes of the discontinuation of these two important projects. Further research can be carried out to ascertain the particular challenges faced by both projects and also to indicate possible solutions to those problems so that the radio show and the school can be resumed.

Day by UNESCO; the proclamation of the first week of *Vaishakh* (April 15th to April 21st) as Bangla Heritage Week by the Municipalities of Vancouver, Surrey, Richmond, North Vancouver and New Westminster; and the establishment of Lingua Aqua (a public work of art) in Bear Creek Park by the City of Surrey as a tribute to mother languages and in recognition of International Mother Language Day. These are also examples of the ways the Association has collaborated in, supported and reinforced initiatives undertaken by eminent community members to integrate Bengali cultural heritage and values into mainstream Canadian society. The current EC is working to document and publish the history and leadership behind these significant milestones and achievements of the Bangladeshi Bengali community on the website of the Association.

The Association does not provide any direct settlement services to Bangladeshi immigrants, but does play a vicarious role in the settlement and integration of many by providing an opportunity to socialize and build friendships, support networks and a sense of community with fellow members. Through various celebrations, festivals and events, it creates an atmosphere and opportunity for the diasporic community to feel at home and to make Vancouver their new home. The Association's events, programs and activities thus contribute to the wellbeing, settlement and integration of many immigrants from Bangladesh. The Association works closely with the Multicultural Helping House Society (MHHS), a settlement service organization that provides free orientation and information, assistance with completing various application forms, referrals, and assisted access to services and social support for newcomers to help them settle and integrate into Canadian society and the Canadian economy. MHHS has a Bengali settlement worker to provide such assistance and services in Bengali if needed, and in a culturally appropriate manner suitable for Bangladeshi and Bengali-speaking newcomers in Metro Vancouver. The GVBCA website has an active link to the website of MHHS. MHHS also provides space and other support to the Association as well as to other organizations of the Bangladeshi Bengali community to hold meetings and rehearsals for performances at no cost.

The email listserv and Facebook page of the Association serve as important media for making public announcements about programs and events, and for sharing important news among community members. The Facebook page administrators have often received messages from Bangladeshis outside of Vancouver planning to settle in different parts of BC including Vancouver, inquiring about settlement services and networking opportunities with other Bangladeshis. This shows the importance of such services and also the potential of GVBCA to be an important link between Bangladeshi migrants and settlement services in the Lower Mainland.

6. GVBCA AND OTHER BANGLADESHI/BENGALI ORGANIZATIONS IN METRO VANCOUVER

Although the Bangladeshi community is relatively new and small compared to the Punjabi or other Asian communities, there are presently many organizations (or at least, organized groups and clubs that coordinate socio-cultural programs and activities) of different scales and calibres and with different missions within this community. The most noticeable ones include the Canada Bangladesh Community Centre (CBCC), the Mother Language Lovers of the World Society (MLLWS) and the Vancouver Tagore Society (VTS) – all legally registered

Societies. There are also other prominent organizations, such as *Utsav* (meaning "festival"), the Society for Bangladesh Climate Justice (SBCJ), the Dhaka Club and the Badminton Club, as well as professional organizations, such as the Association of Bangladeshi Engineers and Applied Scientists of BC, and the Bangladeshi Agriculturalist Association of BC. Some of the other organizations include *Mukhosh* (meaning "mask," formed by some painters and fine arts professionals of Bangladesh), *Bangabandhu Parishad* and *Zia Parishad*, with the latter two being formed by followers of political leaders of Bangladesh. A couple of religious or faith-based organizations are the Baitul Mukarram Islamic Society and the New Westminster Islamic Society (NWMIS). A couple of important but currently inactive or extinct organizations are the Praveen Wellness Association (PWA) and *Prabash Bangla*. The PWA used to organize programs for seniors, and initiated the "Eid Reunion" event, which was eventually brought under the bigger banner of GVBCA. *Prabash Bangla* used to organize cultural programs, especially the *Rabindra-Nazrul Jayanti* (a birthday celebration of two great poets and cultural icons of Bengal) every year for a number of years.

Lower Mainland Bengali Cultural Society (LMBCS) is a registered non-profit charitable organization of Bengalis from West Bengal, India. According to the information posted on the LMBCS website, LMBCS was first formed in 1977 and later became a registered Society in 1979 with the mission to promote Bengali culture and heritage, and to foster and carry forward Bengali traditions and values alongside the other great traditions in the Lower Mainland area through organizing various socio-cultural activities and events. It also runs a Bengali School for children, and offers a small bursary to members to support post-secondary education of their children. The Society started its activities with Bengali-speaking people in the Lower Mainland who migrated from West Bengal and other parts of India as well as from Bangladesh, since the community was quite small back in the 1970s, and they found common ground based on shared language and cultural experience. The founding members had envisioned "a secular and non-political platform for Bengalis"; however, later on, the religious festivals of *Durgapuja* and *Saraswatipuja* were added due to popular demand and "with consensus from [the] majority of the then members" in the early 1980s. At that time, the number of Bangladeshi Bengalis also started growing, and they started having their own programs, activities and organizations. Members of both of these Bengali communities still attend each other's programs and events, and a good number of Bangladeshi Bengalis are still official members of LMBCS.

It is not possible to describe or explore within the limited scope of this paper all the activities of all the other aforementioned organizations and clubs. The names of these organizations alone demonstrate a great diversity of interest groups and organized activities within the Bangladeshi Bengali diaspora in Metro Vancouver. GVBCA, however, plays a significant role in terms of community development, promoting the inclusion and unification of community members of diverse ages, religions, regions, educational, professional and socioeconomic backgrounds. Organizations such as the VTS and the MLLWS, on the other hand, have been more successful in presenting and integrating Bengali arts, music and culture into mainstream Canadian society in Greater Vancouver. Both of these organizations have built partnerships and collaborated with other ethnic groups and mainstream organizations to organize events for multicultural audiences. They have also been successful in receiving funds from the municipal government to organize such events.

The VTS promotes culture, especially Bengali culture, and presents the work of Tagore, the Nobel-laureate Bengali poet, philosopher and humanist, through multicultural activities, events and festivals. The MLLWS creates awareness about linguistic diversity, inclusive education and multilingualism, and the importance of protecting minority and endangered languages. It celebrates International Mother Language Day and organizes the Mother Language Festival to bring together Canadians of various linguistic and cultural origins to celebrate their heritage and to enrich Canadian multiculturalism. Both of these organizations provide platforms for other ethnic and language groups to perform and present their cultures in a multicultural atmosphere. Both organizations have been successful in attracting and accommodating at their events people of different nationalities including Bengalis from India and Bangladesh.

All these organizations have their own mandates and they organize diverse events; the Association supports all these organizations by providing a broad platform for their outreach, announcements and promotion of events in the community. Additionally, members of all these other organizations usually come together under the banner of the Association to reach out and network with each other, and particularly to celebrate the national days and heritage of Bangladesh in a unifying and befitting manner, and thus to celebrate their identity as Bangladeshi Bengali Canadians. Among these celebrations, such festivals as *Pitha Utsav* and *Pahela Vaisakh* have attracted to some extent the Bengalis from West Bengal. The religious festivals of *Durgapuja* organized by *Utsav* (composed mostly of Bangladeshi Bengalis of Hindu faith) and cultural programs such as *Rabindra-Nazrul Jayanti* have been quite successful in integrating Bengalis from both Bangladesh and India, and from both the Muslim and Hindu faith groups. The two major events of the VTS, namely the Tagore Spring Festival and the West-Coast Tagore Festival, have also been successful in this regard, although they seem to attract the highly educated and elite class of the Bengali diaspora in Greater Vancouver.

The CBCC is committed to building a community centre – a facility and physical space where Bangladeshis and other ethnic groups will mingle together and hold events and programs. The Centre also looks forward to the prospect of starting distinctive settlement and labour market programs and services for newcomers, especially those from Bangladesh. The organization collects funds regularly for this purpose and often organizes fundraising events. It aspires to preserve and celebrate "Bangladeshi identity" and to provide customized support for Bangladeshi immigrants to settle and integrate while keeping its doors open to people of all other nationalities and cultures. GVBCA strongly supports this project, and the CBCC works hand in hand with the Association to realize this project. The current EC of GVBCA is following the path of previous committees by working in harmony with all other organizations and with as many members of the community as possible with a vision of upholding unity and harmony through mutual respect, tolerance and cooperation.

7. CHALLENGES, PROGRESS AND PROSPECTS

The activities of the Association are completely driven by volunteers and are supported by the charity and generosity of members. The EC is expected to organize six to seven large and small events on average every year, which takes a lot of time, energy and resources.

Funding and other resources are very limited, however, and the Association possesses no office or space of its own. It is extremely difficult to organize events and to keep them free of cost without any government or other funding. The EC has to rely heavily on donations from community members and limited sponsorships from a few business owners in the community where the majority are engaged in service-oriented and professional jobs.

The Bangladeshi community, like many other communities, is often viewed through a hegemonic lens, which reflects the powerful majority. Because the Association is a Muslim-majority group, religion is often reflected as a dominant element behind many of its activities, even though it is expected to be secular, non-communal and non-partisan. As a result, the diversity of gender, religion, age and socioeconomic status is often erased or ignored. The GVBCA can definitely do better in terms of representation of youth and people of other religious faiths on its governing committee.

As the biggest organization in the community, GVBCA is expected to bring the community together and keep it unified. However, as the community gets bigger and more diverse, organizing inclusive programs and events and unifying people under the umbrella of one organization becomes more challenging, especially when the community tends to be divided and polarized according to political ideologies and agendas. Engaging the youth or second generation in the Association is quite a challenging task. The younger generations that came to Canada at a very young age or were born here often face unique struggles to fit into two different cultures and to cope with the tensions and conflicts of values and norms. They most often do not share with their parents the same passion to preserve and practice the "home" culture and traditions while they also try to fit into the mainstream culture. Thus it is not easy to engage them in the activities of the Association, yet it is highly important that they be involved in leadership positions and feel included in these activities.

Although it depends on the volunteer service of community members, there seems to be a lack of systematic effort on the part of the Association to engage, manage and reward these volunteers. On the other hand, continuous commitment to volunteer service takes a lot of passion and is not easy. As first-generation immigrants struggle to settle and integrate financially and socially in Canada, it becomes difficult for many to find time and energy to contribute volunteer hours to the Association's activities. The Association can try to motivate and reward volunteerism more, and create a more efficient system to coordinate and manage volunteer services for the organization so that youth and other volunteers are registered, engaged in activities according to their skills and credited with an accurate number of hours and certification.

As a "cultural" organization, organizing good quality cultural programs and shows is one of the main tasks of the Association. As a community organization, it is also expected to be inclusive and to provide free and equal access to everyone in the community to participate, perform, socialize, network and feel part of the community. This tends to create tensions among the organizers, performers and community members. In addition, community members try to kill two birds with one stone at these events as they try to both watch cultural shows and socialize in a family gathering atmosphere. Most Bangladeshi families, unlike the Punjabi and Chinese multigenerational families, do not have childcare and other support from extended family members, and therefore they bring their children to these programs and events. However, the Association has not been able to provide childminding support or any child-friendly activities to engage the young children, and this makes it difficult for the adults to enjoy the shows.

It is extremely difficult for a community organization to organize and present a good quality show/production with local amateur artists or without some professional artists due to very limited funds and resources. Although there are many talented artists and performers in the community, a lack of funds, time and common space for rehearsals present a lot of challenges to maintaining a high standard for the programs. Organizing too many programs a year with two little time does not do justice to the quality of the programs. Often, a desire to follow traditions and celebrate festivals at exactly the same time and in the same manner as in the home country puts extra pressure on the Executive Committee. Furthermore, there is also an expectation for the biggest organization in the community to be involved in providing information and services to fulfil more material needs of immigrants, especially newcomers. Reviving the Bangla School and the radio show can also be found on the wish list of many.[2] Therefore, the Association needs to prioritize, optimize and balance all these expectations and activities according to limited resources, and also needs to apply for grants, raise funds and improve resources.

Given the limited resources available, however, GVBCA has definitely been very successful in consistently organizing all the important national days and events of Bangladesh for the last 15 years. It has provided a common platform for Bangladeshi immigrants in the Lower Mainland to come together to share and celebrate cultural heritage and build a sense of community and "home." It has nourished the roots of Bangladeshi immigrants while helping them to carve out a new identity as Bangladeshi Bengali Canadians. It can do more in the area of integrating Bangladeshi arts, culture, music and literature into the mainstream by connecting and collaborating with other ethnic or multicultural groups and their organizations, and by organizing or participating in more intercultural events and activities.

In short, for sustainability, inclusivity and successful integration into multicultural Canadian society, the Association need to promote non-partisan, secular and inclusive values. It seriously needs to increase and/or diversify funds, and to develop a more efficient volunteer coordination, management and accreditation system. It can put forward more efforts to ensure inclusion of diverse religions, ages and professions in the organization and membership; to involve youth/second generation Bangladeshi Canadians in activities as well as leadership; and to encourage and support stronger female leadership. It can engage in more intercultural exchange and collaboration with other ethnic groups and organizations. It can participate in mainstream cultural activities

[2] It deserves a mention that a weekly Bengali radio show named *Juktakshar* has been going on for a number of years on Vancouver Co-op Radio (CFRO 100.5 FM). It was initiated by the Secretary of the VTS, and is currently run by a small group of dedicated volunteer members of the Bangladeshi Bengali community. Additionally, despite multiple challenges, *Vancouver Bangla Vidyalaya,* the only Bengali school started by LMBCS, has been running every other Sunday due to the dedication of a member of this organization at her residence in Coquitlam. The volunteer teacher of this school informed us that a small number of children from both the Bangladeshi and Indian Bengali communities attend this school. It seems more could be achieved if these Bengali organizations could collaborate with each other and support each other with the limited resources available.

through organizing, sponsoring or supporting radio and TV shows on local multicultural channels. Lastly, since there are very limited culturally appropriate settlement support and services available for Bangladeshi and/or Bengali immigrants in Greater Vancouver, it can start or lead some projects to provide social and settlement services and programs alongside its cultural activities.

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Mother Language Lovers of the World Society (MLLWS): www.motherlanguagelovers.com

Multicultural Helping House Society (MHHS): www.helpinghouse.ca

Vancouver Asian Heritage Month Society (VAHMS): www.explorasian.org

Vancouver Co-op Radio: www.coopradio.org

Vancouver Tagore Society (VTS): www.vancouvertagoresociety.org

CHINMOY BANERJEE

COMING ABROAD TO FIND HOME

I can only speak autobiographically because I have no training as a sociologist. I shall, however, address my experience as an immigrant and activist in Canada in a way that I hope will throw some light on issues of concern regarding the South Asian diaspora. However unreflectively I may have lived, this conference makes me see my own trajectory from some distance, placing it within the specificity of the class, culture, and place of my origin and the professional enclave of my settlement here. These are the basic categories within which my idiosyncratic biological and psychological particularity has found its expression. Perhaps these reflections would fall into a genre called *"apologia pro vita sua."*

I came to this country on a wave of privilege of which I was only vaguely aware, feeling it largely as a debt I owed to my homeland, which had given me so much. This oriented me to think of my stay in North America, first as a graduate student in the US and then as a professional in Canada, as a period of training, on the completion of which I would return to India. I had come on a leave of absence from my college in Delhi and fully expected to go back. I remember a conversation in a bar in Chicago during a convention I attended as a student, wherein a man asked me what I planned to do; on my saying that I would go back to my country, he expressed irritated surprise. His skepticism regarding the notion of "my country," a concept that I had never questioned, opened up important questions for me: was he annoyed that I wasn't sufficiently awed by the US? Or was he genuinely skeptical about the notion of belonging to a country? Was this a philosophical question about the notion of belonging, patriotism, and cosmopolitanism? These questions about homeland, patriotism, belonging, and cosmopolitanism stayed with me.

Some friends who had been here for a while told me that those who went back immediately after the completion of their degree made it, but those who stayed longer to work couldn't return. I found this intriguing but thought myself resistant to the lure. I accepted a job in Canada, turning down one in the US because the opportunity to get away was attractive. I had been at Kent State University when students protesting Nixon's bombing of Cambodia were shot down by the National Guard, and had participated in anti-war demonstrations. I came to the US as a product of elite education in India without ever having questioned my status or the state of affairs in the world. Political matters, whether Indian or international, had seemed remote to me. My middle-class privilege insulated me, keeping me securely within the cocoon of my class; I accepted things as they existed as normal, as they always had been and had to be. Coming to the US made holes in the cocoon, letting in questions, and witnessing the students in protest against their nation's policies and the passion of the anti-war movement enabled me to step out of my blinkered world. I recognized that I respected these people who were protesting, that they saw things that I had been blind to. I wished to be like them.

I came to Simon Fraser University in 1970, and learned that the university had been through turmoil related to student agitation, that some professors had been suspended for

standing with the students, and that the university was under a boycott from the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT). There were frequent rallies in the mall and numerous meetings. Leftist literature was being sold and distributed. I was invited to join a study group and learned to stand on the street to distribute papers. An Indian colleague invited me to join him in going to the Indian Consulate to submit an international petition he had organized for the release of political prisoners in India; I joined him for the first of my many visits to the site for various protests, and learned in the process the horrifying extent of the problem of political prisoners, about which most Indians are kept in the dark. Some colleagues from Sociology and Anthropology approached me regarding the need to raise awareness about the genocidal war being waged by Pakistan against Bengalis in East Pakistan with the support of the United States, and we agreed to organize a meeting on campus on the issue. Again, the need for action based on what I only slightly understood at the time led to an educational process motivated by the search for deeper understanding. Within a very short time, I learned to connect the US war in Vietnam with the Government of India's many wars at home, as well as Pakistan's war on its own people. As an Indian, I found it necessary not to remain silent regarding the injustice and violence of the state in India while protesting the policies of the US government. I found myself developing a double awareness, feeling that I had a responsibility to remove my previous blinkers regarding my homeland as I challenged the injustices that I saw so clearly here and in other places.

Coming to the US as a student had removed me from the security of my class privilege, made it possible for me to think critically about class society, and brought home the imperative of social justice. Seeing people like me doing every kind of work, and men doing some things only women did in Indian homes, challenged my notions of hierarchy and patriarchy, though patriarchal notions would take much longer to emerge into critical consciousness, being more deeply embedded and prevalent here as well as there. Race, too, is something I learned about only by leaving India, though of course I knew about it from my reading of English and American literature. Yet it had been something historically and spatially distant, not something in which I was personally involved. My first experience of racism was on the way to the US, when my flight had taken me to London. On my first walk in the streets of London, a group of young people had shouted, "Go home, you bloody wog"; I was completely in the dark as to the meaning of this term until an Indian friend who had come down from Oxford enlightened me. Nor did I know what was meant when, on entering a pub, we were directed upstairs, where we would find a quieter space. These intimations would make sense only later when I saw the racism directed at black people and learned about the racism faced by Indians and other people of color in Britain. On my first exposure to racism, I had shrugged off any personal offense, thinking that it was no different from the untouchability and purification rituals that I had seen commonly practiced in my own Brahmin family, which I had been socialized to see as normal. But coming face to face with the equation of what was palpably unacceptable and what had been my sense of the normal determined my opposition to the inequities of my homeland. My flight out of India had brought me to the frontier of critical consciousness.

The leftist study group I had joined introduced me to Marxist literature, which enabled me to understand the world in a critical light. If coming to a totally different culture within which I remained a stranger had filled me with a sense of dislocation, this Marxist literature gave me a sense of belonging in the world, as a part of the global

community in struggle against an unjust order. But I was not at home in Canada, and decided to return to India on a leave of absence from my tenured position. My hope was to connect with like-minded people in India, but this hope was rudely frustrated by Indira Gandhi's declaration of emergency in June 1975, shortly after my arrival. The emergency led to mass incarceration of people critical of the government, and an atmosphere of suspicion that silenced all who were outside prison. Any attempt at a political conversation was seen as a sign of being a provocateur. A comment I heard in a crowded bus in Calcutta, which had always been the hotbed of leftist politics, summed up the situation, when a man hanging by the straps, as if in a scene from a street theater, announced, "We are already dead. What you see is only the husk." This was the verbal equivalent of the newspapers with blank front pages protesting censorship that I had seen in book stalls and along footpaths. Finding myself wholly unequipped to function in the repressive reality of India, I decided to come back to Canada. Yet I returned with a profound sense of failure, and a gloom that lifted only when I discovered that shortly before Indira Gandhi's declaration of emergency, Indians teaching and studying in several US and Canadian universities had met in Montreal to found the Indian People's Association in North America (IPANA), which had taken up opposition to Indira Gandhi's dictatorship as its immediate task. I promptly joined this organization and immersed myself in its work.

IPANA had chapters in Vancouver, Montreal, Toronto, New York, and Boston, and was connected with people mainly in universities in several other cities of Canada and the US. We produced a quarterly journal from Montreal (the *New India Bulletin*), a monthly from New York (*India Now*), and a monthly Punjabi paper from Vancouver (*Wangar*), all of which we distributed in the streets. Our group in Vancouver included university teachers and students as well as workers from various sectors, including sawmill workers, truck drivers, factory workers, and janitors. This was the first time in my life that I had come into intimate contact with Indians outside the middle class, and this in itself was a profoundly educational experience. It also brought me into contact with the large Punjabi community that constituted the main body of immigrants from India. This enabled me to enter a cultural world that was new to me though I had lived in Delhi for many years and was married to a Punjabi woman. My world in India had been either Bengali or an elite space where regional cultures were submerged in an English-based national amalgam. Through IPANA, I developed a wider and deeper knowledge of India than I had before, and had the privilege of entering another Indian community than the one I was born in.

There were several Bengalis in IPANA and a few in the Vancouver chapter, mainly Indians but also a Bangladeshi. A woman who was musical formed us into a singing group and trained us to sing the Internationale in Bengali as well as some songs from the Tebhaga movement. We would sing these songs at our public meetings. We also sang them in solidarity with similar groups from other countries at their meetings, possibly the only time Bengali songs were sung at political meetings in Vancouver. However there were very few Bengali families in Vancouver in the 1970s, and no organization that would enable us to maintain contact with our culture. This need led us to communicate with other Bengali families regarding the formation of a society, and resulted in the creation of the Lower Mainland Bengali Cultural Society (LMBCS), which included West Bengalis and Bangladeshis.

IPANA linked up in solidarity with organizations concerned with similar issues in other countries and formed an organization called the "Third World People's Coalition,"

comprising First Nations people, Indians, Palestinians, Chileans, South Africans, Ethiopians, and Eritreans. We held meetings, marches, and demonstrations to bring our concerns to the notice of the public. Our most memorable demonstration was in solidarity with Palestinians following the 1982 Israeli-sponsored massacre of Palestinians by the Phalangists in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Lebanon. Many of the issues we took up remain pertinent today.

Following the defeat of Indira Gandhi in the elections of 1977, it became clear to us that our work could not remain focused on India and had to take up the concerns of our community in Canada. This led us in two directions. One was the concern that a large number of people in our community were engaged in farm work in atrocious conditions, and the other that we as a community of visible minorities faced both systemic and overt racism that was becoming increasingly violent. We had started our opposition to racism by holding a demonstration and calling for a boycott against the New Westminster newspaper the *Daily Columbian,* in which journalist Doug Collins had been publishing racist attacks against Indo-Canadians. In 1978, we formed a coalition, the "Committee against Bill C-24," joining with similar groups in Montreal and Toronto to oppose the proposed immigration rules that we saw as enshrining racist discrimination against immigrants of color. We also joined with other groups in holding a protest march in Vancouver against the visit by David Duke, the Grand Wizard of the KKK, in 1980. These activities culminated in the formation of the BC Organization to Fight Racism (BCOFR) in 1980 to meet the challenge of increased racist activity and violence, such as the open marches by hooded Klansmen through Robson Street, the distribution of racist leaflets in schools, the painting of swastikas on temple walls and homes, the burning of crosses on people's lawns, shootings and fire-bombings, and racism in the media including print, radio, and television. The BCOFR brought together many communities, including First Nations and Chinese, and had the support of churches and unions. The Bengali community of Vancouver also took part in BCOFR demonstrations and marches. However, some Bengalis expressed the fear that opposition to racism would provoke racists, and the LMBCS withdrew from the struggle. This distanced me from the Bengali community, but the work against racism brought me into contact with a much larger section of the Vancouver community than before. As we know, this collective struggle has led to considerable progress, though a great deal remains to be done.

IPANA took the lead in forming a farmworkers' organizing committee to investigate the conditions of farm work and to organize the workers, but stayed in the background while providing all possible help because this struggle had to be led by working people. We helped to create a support group for farmworkers at Simon Fraser University, and participated in all the struggles of the farmworkers both before and after the formation of the Canadian Farmworkers' Union in 1980.

The work of the BCOFR – which involved day-to-day attention to incidents of racist violence and various forms of discrimination; public meetings in Vancouver, the Fraser Valley and the interior; publications and media interviews; and public presentations and demonstrations – kept us extremely busy for several years. At the same time, the work of the Canadian Farmworkers' Union, support for which required joining demonstrations in several towns and cities in BC including Vancouver and Victoria to demand government action, writing, attending pickets, visiting farms in solidarity with the workers, and attending court to express support for their suits for the payment of back wages from farm labor contractors, made heavy demands on our energy.

The events of 1984 in India returned our attention to what was happening in that country. Operation Blue Star – the attack on the Golden Temple in Amritsar that killed hundreds, damaged the temple sacred to Sikhs everywhere, and deeply offended Sikhs across the world –engaged us in condemnation of the Government of India, though the Indian community at this time was deeply divided over the rise of the separatist Khalistan movement, which had strong support in Toronto and Vancouver. This movement was vehemently anti-leftist, generated opposition from the left, and interfered with anti-racist work. Our effort to unite people against racism had come up against the wall of sub-nationalism in India. Yet the attack on the Golden Temple and the state-supported massacre of at least two thousand Sikhs in Delhi and many more elsewhere in India following the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards not only made it imperative for us to stand with the Sikhs but also led us to understand that henceforth the issue of minority rights in India would become salient. However, IPANA as a North American organization fell apart over differences of understanding and the absence of any specific goal in India to hold people in the diaspora together. The deaths of 329 people in the Khalistani bombing of an Air India plane in 1985 only made the division within the Indian community deeper and the possibility of organizing even more challenging than it already was.

No diasporic community is homogenous, and the Indian community is possibly more fractured than most, but the Khalistan movement deepened these fractures and consolidated identity ghettoes. At the same time, the community began to realize its potential as a vote bank in electoral politics and began to assert itself at the provincial and federal level. IPANA, which had been concerned with uniting people for support of democratic and human rights in India, and against racism and for the rights of oppressed Indian farmworkers here, lost its purpose and lapsed into inactivity. Its last achievement was the struggle to bring about recognition of the injustice done to the community over the incident of Komagata Maru in 1914. This struggle brought various sections of the divided community together, and resulted in a plaque commemorating the 75th anniversary of the incident being placed in Portal Park in downtown Vancouver in 1989.

The attack by Hindu nationalists on the 17th century Babri Masjid in Ayodhya on December 6, 1992 struck many of us who had been involved in IPANA across North America as a call to unite on an even larger front than before to meet the challenge of majoritarian attacks on minorities in India. What had started as a result of Indira Gandhi's political opportunism had now come to fruition on another level in a systematic politics of communalism that would change the social and political life of India. The rise of Hinduva or Hindu nationalism would have to become the focus of our work, and an organization called Non-Resident Indians for Secularism and Democracy (NRISAD) was created for this purpose. NRISAD brought together diverse sections of the South Asian community, including Indians of different faiths, Dalits, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Nepalis, Sri Lankans, Ismailis from East Africa, and Hindus from Fiji. Some were devout practitioners of their faiths and some were atheists, but all were interested in the cause of pluralism and religious tolerance. NRISAD was also allied to an American group called the Coalition Against Genocide, which carried on work in the US lobbying the government, spreading information about conditions regarding religious tolerance in India, keeping tabs on the activities of Hindu nationalists, and monitoring text books to screen Hindu nationalist interventions. NRISAD did some extremely successful work, bringing to Vancouver

progressive film and theatre personalities from India to promote the cause of secularism, screening good films, and organizing community fairs. Though it, too, petered out as a national and North American organization, the Vancouver chapter continued with its work and changed its name in 1999 to the South Asian Network for Secularism and Democracy (SANSAD) to accurately reflect its composition and field of concern.

SANSAD's first major activities were in conjunction with anti-war activities following the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York on Sept 11, 2001 and the impending war in Afghanistan. We joined the anti-war movement in Vancouver and tried, without success, to persuade members of the local Afghan community to oppose the US-led invasion of Afghanistan. Unfortunately, we found the leaders of the Afghan diaspora in Vancouver to be entirely supportive of Western military intervention in their homeland, and our argument that foreign bombs and guns did not bring about peace and democracy fell on deaf ears. We all know the fallout from that.

The end of February 2002 brought us face to face with genocide when, following the burning to death in a carriage of the Sabarmati Express near Godhra railway station 59 Hindutva activists ("kar sevaks") who were returning from their trip to Ayodhya to build a Ram temple in the place of the Babri Masjid, state-supported mass violence was unleashed against the Muslim population of Gujarat. SANSAD organized a series of public meetings with invited speakers from India, including victims, journalists, and activists to publicize the atrocities in Gujarat and build support for the quest for justice. SANSAD also screened documentaries and sponsored the launching of a book by an Indian journalist who covered the events in Gujarat. These activities continued for several years as the victimization of the Muslims continued, justice was denied, those pursuing justice were persecuted, and Narendra Modi, who as Chief Minister had presided over this genocide, remained unscathed and was reelected in Gujarat. At the same time, just as the Khalistan movement had split the Punjabi/Sikh community, the rise of Hindu nationalism and the genocide in Gujarat split the Hindu community, one section of which was deeply involved in the promotion of the Hindu nationalist ideology and generating political and financial support for it while another remained secular, though largely passive. The Bengali community shared this profile. Needless to say, I remained very much in the margin of the Bengali community as my identity as a Bengali became far less important than my identity as a South Asian professional engaged in human rights and social justice activism.

The quest for justice for the atrocities against Sikhs remains an ongoing concern in the Punjabi community, and I have supported this quest through the screening of films on the issue and by organizing conferences to enable discussion on the matter. The genocide in Gujarat was an experiment in communal violence that has resulted in the current situation of daily and widespread violence against Muslims in India today. This continues to engage me through SANSAD in the work of supporting human rights activists in India and trying to develop support within the South Asian diaspora for human rights and social justice both here and in our homelands. Though my personal concern has been focused on India and Canada, the South Asian perspective of my organization has made me alert to the issues of justice and rights in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. We have organized regular public forums to deal with these issues with particular focus on specific countries. Again, these concerns have been addressed not only through lectures and panel discussions but also through films, often screened in collaboration with a film society that I was instrumental in setting up, the South Asian Film Education Society (SAFES). The

purpose of this society is to educate the community about South Asian cinema, cinema as such, and South Asian society as revealed through the medium of film. The society has mounted a festival of films dealing with violence against women in South Asia, screening films from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, and another on the use of Shakespeare in Bombay cinema to cast light on Indian society. It has also organized a festival on Tagore in film to highlight the continued relevance of Tagore's art. The film society and SANSAD have also collaborated on screening films on female foeticide in India and on the discrimination and violence against Dalits. The film society has benefited greatly from the enthusiastic participation of several members of the Bengali community, from both India and Bangladesh, and has screened several Bengali films from both sides of the border.

The passing of my colleague, friend, and comrade, Dr. Hari Sharma, in 2010 was an enormous loss because it left us bereft of his great energy and organizing ability. Yet it opened a new avenue of work thanks to the donation he made of the larger part of his estate to a foundation dedicated to the advancement of the South Asian community. Through the Dr. Hari Sharma Foundation, we have been able to support scholars engaged in graduate work on South Asia or the South Asian diaspora at several Canadian universities as well as other forms of research and publication in these areas. We have been working in a collaborative relationship with the Labor Studies Program at SFU, supporting students through bursaries and setting up a series of lectures on global labor issues. We have also supported musicians, poets, and filmmakers. While we have supported institutions engaged with South Asia, including the Indian Summer Festival, the Vancouver Art Gallery, the Vancouver International Bhangra Festival, and the Vancouver South Asian Film Festival, our most direct engagement with the community has been through the organization of public lectures and conferences. We have offered two annual public lectures with prominent guest speakers in memory of Hari Sharma and Gursharan Singh, the great Punjabi playwright, actor, theatrical producer and educator, and human rights activist, since 2012. The first of these lectures was given by the Swedish writer and activist Jan Myrdal in 2012. Subsequent lectures have dealt with human rights in Kashmir, Adivasi struggles, the impact of neoliberal policies on India, the struggles of Dalits and poor farmers in Punjab, the legacy of Bhagat Singh, the relation of the Dalits and the left in India, and global food security. We have instituted a third annual lecture in collaboration with Chetna Association of Canada, the Institute for the Humanities at Simon Fraser University, and several departments at the University of British Columbia in memory of Dr. Ambedkar. The first of these lectures will be given in November 2017.

We have organized a series of conferences to highlight issues of importance to South Asians and our host community in order to generate conversation and produce engagement. The first of these, in 2011, was on migrant labor with a South Asian focus which brought together speakers from Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, India, and the US, as well as panelists from various sections of local work on migrant and immigrant labor. In 2014, we brought musicians from Bangladesh and India to offer a concert of Sufi music to pay homage to the Sufi legacy of South Asia in conjunction with a conference on the issue. In 2015, we organized a conference on climate change ahead of the United Nations conference in Paris in November of that year to engage the South Asian community with the ongoing struggles against climate change in Vancouver and British Columbia. In 2016, we organized an international conference on genocide to memorialize the many genocides that are

forgotten or denied, including the dispossession and cultural genocide of the First Nations, as well as the genocide of the Armenians, Palestinians, Bengalis in East Pakistan, Sikhs in Delhi, Muslims in Gujarat, and Tamils in Sri Lanka, the genocide in Rwanda, and the ongoing genocidal violence against the people of Kashmir and the Adivasis in the forest regions of India. The goal of the conference was to overcome forgetting and denial, to create solidarity, and to alert people regarding the ever-present threats of genocide. We have just concluded a conference on the urgent need to come together against the threat of nuclear war, entitled "Gathering in the Shadows of a Nuclear Winter," which brought together scientists, scholars, and activists from India, Pakistan, Canada, and the US, including Indigenous activists.

The call to review my presence in Canada brought about by this conference on the occasion of Canada's 150th anniversary (though of course it is only the last 150 years of many thousands of years of Indigenous presence on these lands and waters) has enabled me to see that leaving my homeland has put me on a quest for home. Finding return impossible, but filled with longing in an alien land, I discovered the homeland I had left before I knew it. Coming to know it through action enabled me to find a place with others similarly engaged. It gave me a new identity. It placed me within a world. The work rooted me in Canada, making it not alien anymore but rather a space that had to be fought for, a country to make my own by changing it, making it better by accepting people like me within it. My work became the work of homemaking, making me a Canadian making Canada.

DAY 2: SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2017

Welcome Address:

Mandakranta Bose
Director, Center for India and South Asia Research
University of British Columbia

MANDAKRANTA BOSE

DAY 2 WELCOME ADDRESS

Good morning. I am Mandakranta Bose, former director of the Centre for India and South Asia Research at UBC. On behalf of the Centre and UBC, it is my privilege to welcome you all to this third day of the Canada 150 Conference on Migration of Bengalis, which is being held at the University of British Columbia. Before we begin, I would like to acknowledge the traditional, ancestral, unceded territory of the Musqueam First Nation, upon which this University stands.

This conference, which is on its third and last day, began its inaugural session on the evening of 15 September with a Bharatanatyam performance by Arno Kamalika. She also danced excerpts from Tagore's dance dramas *Chandalika* and *Chitrangada,* to welcome you all and offer you a feast for your eyes, so that you may savour a sample of the riches that the culture of Bengal possesses. The second day was spent at the SFU Harbour Centre campus downtown, where we all met to listen to speakers share their experiences and observations on their lives as immigrants in Canada.

Yesterday we covered a large area, beginning with the keynote lecture by Professor Tania Das Gupta, a Torontonian Bengali who questioned what it means to be a Bengali Canadian. This was followed by a very lively discussion on Bengali identity in the diaspora. The discussions then moved on to migration and settlement, history, demography, religion, and health issues within the Bengali diaspora. We then heard papers dealing with gender, culture, family, and work. The day ended with a discussion of multiculturalism and social justice issues, and some sharing of information about Bengali organizations.

Today's session will open with an ethnographic account of migration, identity, and contributions of Bengalis to Manitoba by today's keynote speaker, Dr. Emdad Haque. We will then be moving on to the issue of Canadian Bengali youth and their social and cultural identity, and the shaping influence of their family life. Finally, more experiences of Bengalis related to settlement and the community services they have found in Greater Vancouver will be discussed. We will end our day with discussions on the political and social impact of multiculturalism on the lives of Bengali Canadians in their adopted country, and finish with roundtable workshops with participants from the Bengali community.

This conference has come to fruition through the vision and unflagging effort of Professor Habiba Zaman of SFU, who is also a contributor to this Centre's research endeavours. I may mention here that many years ago, in 1994, the Centre organized a conference of Canadian Bengalis to discuss Bengali culture. From that small beginning, we have now progressed to this much more comprehensive conference, thanks to Dr. Habiba Zaman's energy and vision, ably supported by Dr. Sanzida Habib. Dr. Zaman has put together this conference by inviting people of Bengali origin from many parts of Canada to share the Bengali diasporic experience in Canada. It is a special event for and by Bengali-speaking Canadians who migrated from their homelands to Canada. This conference has

been made successful by the participants and observers who have come here to voice their joys as well as concerns in the new country they have embraced.

Dr. Zaman's initiative has brought us together to learn about our achievements, earned against the many challenges that an immigrant population is bound to face. By doing this, she has been able to showcase Bengali migrants' achievements and reveal their concerns to Canadians at large. I would like to thank Dr. Zaman for organizing this conference to let us look at our achievements again from many perspectives. I hope this initiative will energize a steady effort to map the lives of Bengalis in Canada. As a Bengali myself, I am proud to be here to welcome you to the last day of this invigorating conference.

SESSION 5

SESSION CHAIR: MOHAMMAD ZAMAN

KEYNOTE SPEECH 2:
C. EMDAD HAQUE

C. EMDAD HAQUE AND HELAL MOHIUDDIN

CAN WE REALLY HAVE A "JAIGA" (SPACE) IN A NEW PLACE? AN ETHNOGRAPHIC QUEST OF MIGRATION, IDENTITY, AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF BENGALIS IN MANITOBA

1. INTRODUCTION

Immigration of Bangladeshis to Canada is a recent phenomenon. According to Statistics Canada, there were a total of 45,325 Bangladeshi immigrants in 2011. Survey findings of a recent study revealed that immigration from Bangladesh to Canada has increased at a rate of 110% per decade recently (i.e., 2001-2011) (see Figure 1). The 2016 statistical update of the *Canadian Magazine of Immigration* (2016) suggested that 14,652 Bangladeshi immigrants were added during the 2012-2015 period, bringing the total number to around 71,000 immigrants. Although the data for 2016 and 2017 are yet to be released, with an assumption of a linear trend, the estimated number of Bangladeshi immigrants who live in Canada would be approximately 90,000.

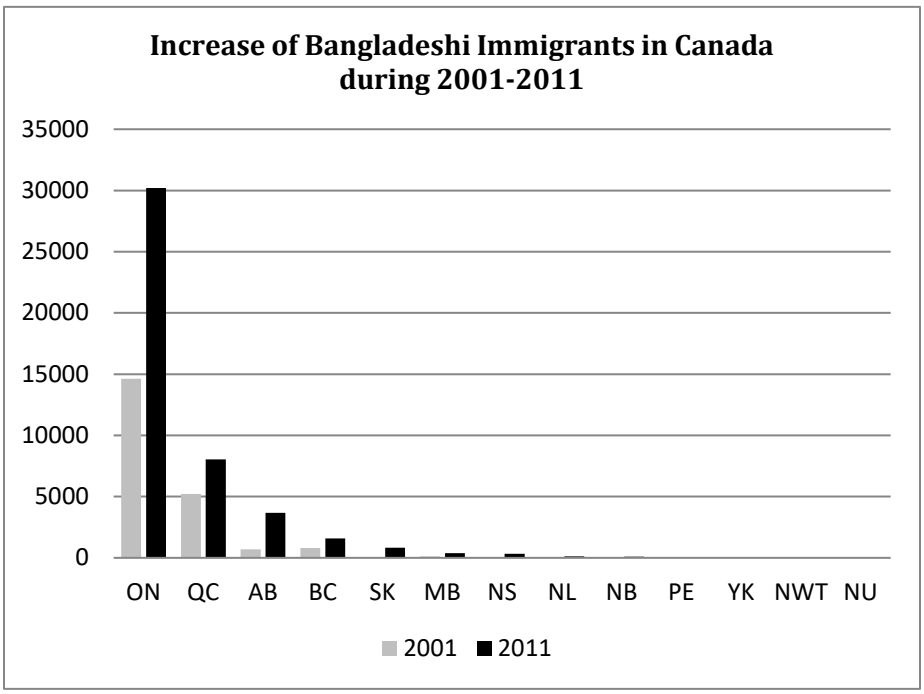

Chart 1: Increase of Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada during 2001 – 2011
Source: canadaimmigrants.com

The Bangladeshi immigrant community in Manitoba is one of the smallest in Canada. According to 2011 statistics, 67% of Bangladeshi immigrants settled in Ontario, 18% in Quebec, 8% in Alberta, 3% in British Columbia, and the remaining 4% in all other provinces (Canadian Magazine of Immigration 2016) (Figure 1). In 2011, there were 20 Bangladeshi immigrants in Yellowknife, and 510 in the Province of Manitoba (Statistics Canada 2011). However, a count by a 2009 community study (Mohiuddin 2009) recorded the presence of a total of 589 Bangladeshi immigrants in Manitoba. At present, about 1,700 Bangladeshi-originated residents live in Manitoba. Of them, nearly 1,200 are immigrants, and the rest reside on student visas, temporary work permits, dependent visas, and other types of temporary stay permits (Canada-Bangladesh Association [CBA] 2017).

It is apparent that, with a 115% increase in less than a decade (8 years), the Bangladeshi immigrant community in Manitoba is one of the fastest growing communities among similar ethnic groups in Canada. Expansion of the community may invoke diverse livelihood stresses and struggles (e.g., adaptation crises, settlement woes, skills utilization anomalies, and job dissatisfaction), and also generates new ideas, opportunities, and synergies. Against this backdrop, this ethnographic study aims at examining the migration trends and settlement patterns of Bangladeshi immigrants and capturing the *emic* and *etic* perspectives of their identity and contributions to community building (see Annex I). As well, the study draws insights from narrative-based discussions with expatriates and immigrants who directly experienced (emic) the transcontinental change of permanent settlement, as well as Manitoban observers' or outsiders' (etic) perspectives. For the purpose of employing appropriate ethnographic methodology, archival research, desk review of documents and statistical data-sets, and key informant interview (KII) technique were employed; data were collected to analyze settlement, assimilation, and integration processes, as well as to learn from early immigrants and influential leaders of the community about challenges and opportunities in the new place.

2. IMMIGRANT IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Ibn Khaldun, the fourteenth century Muslim philosopher, first presented early diasporic thoughts on "*asabiyyah*" (Dhaouadi 1990: 319). By the Arabic word *asabiyyah* he meant social solidarity, cohesion, community bonding, and unity and togetherness as latently persistent principles of nomadic livelihood. *Asabiyyah* indicates an embedded nuance of strong "we" perception of the nomadic people; here, spiritual meanings of "we" provide necessary material strength – forming a band, staying together in the same tent, and nurturing courage, bravery, and confidence towards confronting enemies and intruders. Above all, *asabiyyah* serves as the best social conflict resolution tool to minimize intra-conflicts but maximize adaptation capabilities in trans-migratory settings. Ethnographic accounts of Romani (or "Gypsy," though this is currently considered a derogative term) identities and other migration studies (Barany 2002) confirm Khaldun's *asabiyyah* assertion even in modern immigration contexts.

James Clifford (1994) presented "diasporas" as the transmigration of groups of people that does not take a uniform shape, but rather frequently changes and transforms across different historical courses and political experiences of the immigrants in extra-origin settings. He agrees with Safran (1991) that the term "diaspora" should be

understood in terms of immigrant communities' identity-construction dynamics reflected in attachment to ancestral homeland. However, he disagrees with the nuance of the proposition that "diaspora" be considered an "ideal type." To Clifford, attempts to reveal diasporic features lead identity-construction analysis in the wrong direction. For instance, the term "Jewish diaspora" is a reductionist path for ethnography. Such labeling limits analysis of the diversity of accommodation and adaptation of immigrant communities. He writes,

> … we should be wary of constructing our working definition of a term like diaspora by recourse to an "ideal type," with the consequence that groups become identified as more or less diasporic, having only two, or three, or four of the basic six features. Even the "pure" forms, I've suggested, are ambivalent, even embattled, over basic features. Moreover, at different times in their history, societies may wax and wane in diasporism, depending on changing possibilities – obstacles, openings, antagonisms, and connections – in their host countries and transnationally. (Clifford 1994: 306)

The "creolization" or "hybridization" thesis comprises a major segment of diasporic identity-construction literature in anthropology. Building on Derrida's "deconstruction" and "difference," Stuart Hall (1990) adopted the term "creolization" for his post-colonial anthropological pedagogy in general. However, the concept helps in better analyzing immigrant identity construction. To Hall, and subsequently to Charles Stewart (2007), Robin Cohen (2006, 2007, 2008), and Wendy Knepper (2006), identity construction cannot be a binary process. For instance, "Canadians" and "non-Canadians"' in a "we" and "they" structure or "we" and "others" constructions could be labeled as phenomenally flawed. Two groups of enslaved Black people – one group imported to the Caribbean and the other group exported to Europe from the same departure point (Africa) – apparently become two binary entities after a generation: born-Caribbean and born-Europeans. However, when both born-Caribbean and born-Europeans immigrate to North America, they immediately become identified as "Black" people – not as Europeans or Caribbean. Those emigrating from France, Britain, or Portugal often lose their French, Briton, or Portuguese identities. A French Black immigrant community in the USA accommodates and assimilates with a Caribbean Black community much faster than the French immigrant community. Their historical past and biological features make them members of one community. However, this does not restrict or limit their capacity to assimilate with all other communities despite the fact that their "Black" identity outweighs all other identities. "Hybridization" is the greater mingling process in general. "Hybridization" can be better understood through popular labeling such as "Mexican-Americans" or "Irish-Americans." Stuart Hall's approach assists us here in understanding Bangladeshi immigrants' identity-construction process in Canada as well.

Arjun Appadurai's (1991, 1995, 1996) concept of "ethnoscapes" or "global ethnoscapes" also lends considerable insight into immigrant identity construction under globalization. Interconnections and interactions of the "scapes" construct the minds and actions of global citizens. Appadurai introduces the term "transnational anthropology" to denote that present-day people on our planet are continuously in a process of transnational and cross-border movements, and become exposed to diverse global cultures. Such movements do not always mean physical relocation from one country to another country or one place to another place. In this era of globalization, citizens can hardly claim their

entitlement to one specific culture or ethnic identity based on political or cultural boundaries. Appadurai's approach indicates that immigrants experience more dispersal than consolidation in the process of identity construction in transnational settings.

3. MIGRATION, IDENTITY, INTERACTION, AND PERFORMANCE: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNT

The above theoretical perspective[1] provides an analytical framework for analyzing the dynamics of the Bangladeshi immigrants in Manitoba. The dynamics of emergence of the Bangladeshi immigrant community in Manitoba over a half-century period – beginning from the late 1960s – represent features of multiple approaches (i.e., *asabiyyah*, "diasporism," "creolization," and "ethnoscapes") in varying degrees. They were neither present uniformly at all stages, nor became completely absent at any stage.

Despite the fact that the Bangladeshi-Canadian community was a small one in 2001, the 9/11 incident in the USA caused considerable security-vulnerability and identity-insecurity (Mohiuddin 2009) among the members of this community, of which the majority were Muslims. Many planned to return to their country of origin, while some ceased practicing religion publicly. Some shaved their beards and gave up wearing religious outfits; many hid their names and identities. A number of immigrants considered changing their Muslim names, replacing them with names rooted in European linguistics. Community organizations also suffered considerable setbacks in organizing community members under a common umbrella. The influence of various incidents in mainstream Bangladesh politics in the home country also had various impacts on Winnipeg community solidarity.

The analytical premise of this study was built upon five interrelated questions:
i) How has the Bangladeshi-Canadian community-identity evolved in Manitoba? ii) How is the community as a whole adapting to Canadian principles of multiculturalism, diversity,

[1] This study employed anthropological methods combined with archival document analysis. For key informant interviews (KIIs), five informants were extensively interviewed, with periodic follow-up rechecking and debriefing of information. Another six informants were interviewed for the purposes of collecting supplementary information, and cross-checking. Six focus group discussions (FGDs) were held informally, involving community members participating in six community get-togethers, parties, and potlucks. Additionally, in-person phone conversations were held with a dozen (12) senior Bangladeshi immigrants and seven non-Bangladeshi immigrants. The conversations were designed to gain insight into identity-creation processes of different communities, and to evaluate how the process Bangladeshi immigrants adopt may differ from other communities' perceived processes. As tools, we used a checklist and a logical framework (logframe). Questionnaire schedules were avoided to facilitate informal free-flow discussion. Informants contributed in various capacities ranging from supplying a document to sitting for prolonged discussions. Six organized FGDs drew opinions of about 30 participants. Of these, five were present at all six of the community events and showed immense voluntary interest related to the study topic.

inclusion, assimilation, and integration? iii) What are the major challenges of cultural identity creation and inclusion of the Bangladeshi-Canadian community in mainstream society? iv) What and how has the Bengali, Bangladeshi diaspora community contributed to strengthening Canada or Canadian society at large? v) Which actions, activities, and interventions should be considered essential for the community's mainstreaming and inclusion? The discussion deserves an assessment of the courses of emergence of the Bangladeshi-Canadian community and pertinent community organizations.

4. A BRIEF HISTORY OF BANGLADESHI IMMIGRANTS IN WINNIPEG

The immigration of the Bangladeshi (then East Bengal/East Pakistan) population to Canada and the USA began in the 1950s. Large-scale immigration to Canada from outside North America has a more than 100-year history. The population from the present-day territory of Bangladesh did not take part during the early Canadian immigration years when only Punjabi railway workers from India were brought in by the early British colonizers. It was only in the mid-twentieth century when Indians began to immigrate into Canada that a few East Pakistani immigrants began expatriating to strategic Canadian locations as technical service providers and health service providers. The first person from East Pakistan (present-day Bangladesh) came to Winnipeg, Manitoba in 1966; he was a physician named Farid Shariff. He migrated from the United Kingdom to Winnipeg, and was followed by six other Bengali-speaking engineers and physicians from West Bengal and East Pakistan.

According to the 1996 Census of the Canadian government, only 2.4% of the Canadian population held South Asian identity (Mohiuddin 2009: 43). In 1971, there were fewer than 1,000 Bengali-speaking people in Canada; by 1991, this number increased to 8,000 Bengalis, all of whom were immigrants. This number doubled within the next five years, as the Census of 1996 reported the presence of a total of 16,000 Bengali-speaking people in Canada (Mohiuddin 2009: 43). The Bengali-speaking immigrants included emigrants from Bangladesh as well as from West Bengal, a Bengali-speaking State of India. Due to the absence of disaggregated data on immigrants specifically from the present-day territory of Bangladesh, precise information about Bangladeshi landed immigrants in Canada in general and in Manitoba in particular is unavailable.

5. GENERAL TRENDS IN BANGLADESHI-CANADIAN IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

The Bangladeshi community at large in Canada still features a small number of immigrants. Therefore, the community-building process among Bengalis is still slow across the country. A gradual and slow settlement pattern of Bangladeshi immigrants has rendered Winnipeg's Bangladeshi-Canadian community building a slowly evolving phenomenon. This was affected by the fact that Bangladeshi immigrants to Canada tend to prefer specific economic and business hubs or networks for their initial settlement, namely in Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia (Rahim 1990; Ahmed 1985; Yasmin 1982), in order to gain greater access to income opportunities and social security.

One of the most important reasons for the relatively low concentration of Bangladeshi immigrants in Winnipeg is that they do not generally fit into the agricultural

workforce to which the Province of Manitoba historically catered. Before the 1930s, Winnipeg was the largest agricultural region of Canada with a considerable demand for an agricultural labour force. James Gray (1966) describes how the 1930s – "the dirty thirties" – caused the province's decade-long economic depression and drought, and consequent harvest decline and agricultural unemployment. The economic loss was soon recovered by modernizing agriculture through massive mechanization, the introduction of sophisticated tillage methods, and the use of synthetic fertilizer (Francis and Ganzevoort 1980). As grain production and processing became highly mechanized and each farmer could harvest several hundred hectares, the prospect of agricultural jobs for migrant agricultural labourers shrunk (Berton 1990). Henceforth, with low-technology farming backgrounds, low-skilled and semi-skilled agricultural workers from Bangladesh never chose Manitoba as their destination of international migration.

Up until the present time, the general trend of Bangladeshi identity construction has been linear. Bangladeshi immigrants in Winnipeg are generally characterized as a highly educated, skilled workforce. A large number of them arrive as students at two Winnipeg-based universities and a number of technical colleges, as well as Brandon University in the City of Brandon. Others move to Manitoba as civil servants, physicians, and engineers. Often, the non-professional immigrants have overseas education and job skills in their field. Recently, a few Bangladeshi immigrants began to secure their place in greater Winnipeg society through small-scale business initiatives and entrepreneurships. However, a noticeable segment of Bangladeshi immigrants to Manitoba is still engaged in blue-collar jobs with job insecurity and unsatisfactory labour conditions. Over the years, Manitoba's refugee program failed to attract Bangladeshis due to the province's weaker support service provisions for refugees. There have been only a handful of refugee claimants in Manitoba who have lately received naturalized Canadian citizen status.

A good proportion of Bangladeshi immigrants in Manitoba pursued the idea that they are transients in the province in terms of work and settlement, and have therefore prepared themselves to move to other places or provinces in search of better job prospects. This out-migratory trend has operated as a potential barrier in establishing a solid diaspora identity of the Bangladeshi-Canadian community in Manitoba.

Despite Manitoba's low retention of Bangladeshi immigrants, since 2005, the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program (MPNP) and family support streams appeared relatively effective. By 2015, at least a dozen Bangladeshi families had relocated from other provinces to Winnipeg, and each family supported an average of 10 relatives to receive permanent residence (PR) status in Manitoba. However, the program was terminated in 2016 by the new provincial government of Manitoba.

6. BANGLADESHI DIASPORA: IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO CANADA

"Community identity is a social construction and community organization is the centre point of community identity creation" (Pratt, Schultz, Ashforth, and Ravasi 2016). Pratt et al. (2016) noted a number of driving forces that lead community organizations to contribute to community identity construction. Of these, three important features selected for this discussion are: i) duration of sustenance, ii) strength of conflict resolution, and iii)

prospect of service expansion. These features can be examined through mapping the historical trends of Bangladeshi community organizations in Manitoba, as well as the growing tendency of community members to contribute to Canadian society.

In Manitoba, there are four important community development initiatives undertaken by Bangladeshi immigrants that operate hand in hand to avoid conflicts of interest and competition. These are: 1) The Canada-Bangladesh Association of Manitoba Inc. (CBA); 2) The Canadian Association for Bangladesh Development (CABD); 3) The Bengal Tigers Club, 4) *Bibartan* – a cultural organization, and 5) The Friends Club (founded in 2017). [2]

The Canada-Bangladesh Association Inc. (CBA)

CBA is the apex community organization of the Bangladesh community. Dr. Farid Shariff, an eminent physician and one of the earliest emigrants from Bangladesh to Canada, formed the organization in 1971 – the year of the Liberation War in what was then East Pakistan – naming it "The Bangladesh Association of Manitoba." The primary objective was to create a platform to collect charitable contributions from the greater Canadian society to aid the victims of the devastating cyclone of 12 November 1970 that killed more than 300,000 people, left more than 200,000 injured, and caused post-disaster diarrheal death havoc and other relief and rehabilitation crises. The then *ad hoc* organization mobilized six Bangladeshi expatriate persons to volunteer for the charity work. By March of 1971, the country that was then Pakistan entered into a civil war, and Bangladesh entered into her War of Independence. From March 1971 onward, the Bangladeshi immigrants' focus also shifted accordingly – towards a new identity of Bengali language-based nationality of Bangladesh and its associated organizations in Canada. The personalities instrumental in the formation of the invigorated organization in Winnipeg were Dr. Tayab and Mrs. Tayab, Dr. Alam and Mrs. Alam, Dr. Hamida Banu, Dr. Ahsan, and Mr. N. Paul.

The organization was considered the very first immigrant community organization formed by Bengali-speaking people who had emigrated from what was then East Bengal/East Pakistan to North America. The success stories of relief and aid operation of the newly reformed "Bangladesh Association of Manitoba" (BAM) inspired the formation of

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[2] The Manitoba Islamic Association Inc. (MIA) is a representative community organization of all Muslims in Manitoba. The Grand Mosque falls under the jurisdiction of MIA management. Presently, seven Bangladeshis are involved in regular volunteering for the centre. During the formation period, Bangladeshi immigrants donated a large sum for structure construction expenses. Dr. Mujibur Rahman and his family members (three daughters) were instrumental in donating, volunteering, and fundraising. The Bangladeshi-Canadian community uses the mosque as a religious-social-cultural hub for organizing community events, as well as mingling with other communities. In 2013, the mosque arranged an interfaith dialogue session involving religious thinkers of different faiths. The Bangladeshi-Canadian community volunteered and participated in the event with enthusiasm. The participation of Bangladeshi immigrants in that event was a testimony to their willingness to assimilate with other faith communities in Canada.

many Bangladeshi organizations throughout North America. With support from 15 immigrants from both East and West Bengal (who migrated from East Bengal to West Bengal, India), the BAM members undertook tireless drives to raise funds for military logistical support for the freedom fighters, and everyday food and medicine supplies for Liberation War-induced refugees sheltered inside India from neighbouring East Pakistan (see Figure 2). Other important roles the organization played were mobilization of diplomatic support for the independence of Bangladesh, gaining recognition for Bangladeshi freedom fighters, and using diplomatic channels to transfer money and aid to help Bangladesh gain independence.

কাজী রেজাউল হাসানের কাছ থেকে আমি জানতে পারি যে, যন্ত্রাদির জন্য মোট খরচ ৮২,৯৫০ (বিরাশি হাজার নয়শত পঞ্চাশ) ডলার-এর মধ্যে ১৮,৩১৪ (আঠার হাজার তিনশত চৌদ্দ) ডলার কয়েকজন বাঙালী মিলে দিয়েছেন। ব্যক্তিগতভাবে দান করেছেন ডঃ রেজাউর রহমান (এম,আর,সি,পি) এবং কাজী রেজাউল হাসান স্বয়ং। আর এছাড়া দিয়েছেন বাংলাদেশ এসোসিয়েশন অব নিউ ইংল্যান্ড, বাংলাদেশ এসোসিয়েশন অব ম্যানিটোবা, কানাডা। নিউ ইংল্যান্ডের চাঁদা পাওয়া গিয়েছিল ডঃ মাহবুবুল আলমের নিজস্ব প্রচেষ্টায়। এ ছাড়াও শিকাগো প্রবাসীদের পক্ষ থেকে অর্থ সাহায্য করেন এফ, আর খান। ম্যানিটোবা এসোসিয়েশনের পক্ষ থেকে দেন ডঃ ফরিদ শরীফ। বাকী ৬৪,৬৩৬ ডলার আসে প্রেসিডেন্ট একাডেমী অব এ্যাপলাইড সাইন্সের পক্ষ থেকে এবং ব্যক্তিগতভাবে রবার্ট রাইন্সের নিজস্ব তহবিল এবং অন্য

Contribution of Bangladeshi Immigrants in Manitoba Recorded in a Bengali History Book. Source: Chowdhury (1992:163)

After the independence of Bangladesh was declared on 16 December 1971, the organization's mission shifted from assisting in the fight for independence and the formation of a new country towards rebuilding and reconstruction. From 1975 onward, Bangladeshi immigrants began to migrate to Manitoba in greater numbers than ever before, especially as graduate students began to seek higher and advanced education at the University of Manitoba.

The Bangladesh Association of Manitoba was officially registered as an ethno-cultural organization with the Government of Canada, with the new name of the Canada-Bangladesh Association (CBA). In 1988, Bangladesh suffered from a devastating nationwide flood disaster, and in 1991 from a devastating cyclone that caused the deaths of 138,000 people along the eastern seashores of Bangladesh. The organization extended post-disaster relief and rehabilitation charity support to the survivors after each calamity. In the process, the CBA became established as a reliable, formal institution in the Province of Manitoba. In 2007, the organization received "incorporated" status, and frequently engaged itself with raising funds to assist communities in Bangladesh in times of crisis and emergency.

One of the most successful initiatives of the CBA in recent years is the move to establish a "Bangla School" – a voluntary language training initiative for children of Bangladeshi immigrants in Manitoba. Established in 2012, the school presently operates as a tuition-

free institution. "Bengali" as a language has already been accredited in Manitoba by the province's school divisions for additional language credit examinations. In 2015, Bangla School played an instrumental role in obtaining the Manitoba Provincial Governments' official proclamation of the 21st February as the language Martyrs' Day and International Mother Language Day.

The Canadian Association for Bangladesh Development (CABD)

CABD is a not-for-profit charitable organization with the intent to support development initiatives in Bangladesh as a nongovernment philanthropic organization. Founded in 2004, it became fully operational during the 2008 – 2009 period. The aims and objectives of the CABD are to provide basic education for adults and children in the areas of literacy, mathematics, health and hygiene, and other life skills; organize education and training programs in professional fields; provide medical equipment, computers, and other equipment to hospitals and schools; and give technical assistance and advice to hospitals, schools, and similar institutions.

The CABD also communicates, establishes networks, and cooperates with hospitals, schools, and other existing institutions in order to identify needs and to complement and coordinate services; engages in fund-raising activities and acquiring, accepting, collecting, receiving, and holding grants, gifts, donations, legacies, and devices for the attainment of the objectives of the corporation; and provides childcare services for working mothers living below the poverty line. The Association presently operates three programs in Bangladesh: 1) Free Vocational Center for Underprivileged Women; 2) Free Day Care Center for Underprivileged Children; and 3) Education for Underprivileged Children.

The Bengal Tigers Club Inc.

This club was established in 2010 by youth immigrants and students from Bangladesh to Manitoba. The Club was established with a mission to provide Bangladeshi youth in the Province of Manitoba a platform to excel in sports and healthy living initiatives around creative activities and musical skill development. Since 2017, the Club has organized 23 different tournaments in cricket, football, badminton, volleyball, and basketball. The organization became well known in Manitoba's multicultural sports communities as a strong sports group by winning in four intercultural cricket matches, three badminton tournaments, and six football matches. The Club also organized three cricket training workshops for children in the City of Winnipeg. Presently, the Bengal Tigers Club is in the process of undertaking two training camps for cricket and football. The Club contributes not only in the area of sports, but also in organizing musical evenings by inviting prominent Bangladeshi singers in Manitoba to perform for larger community audiences.

Bibartan

A cultural organization based around band music – was established in 2009. It is the most prominent Bangladeshi music band in Manitoba. Besides performing before Bangladeshi audiences, it also participates in cross-cultural and multi-ethnic forums. Presently, Bibartan is progressing towards the release of its very first copyrighted music album.

In reference to the element of duration of sustenance by immigrant communities as identified by Pratt et al. (2016), the above three organizational initiatives reflect a high level of commitment on the part of the Bengali-speaking population in Manitoba to

Bangladeshi national identity, through a long duration of sustenance and effective mobilization of conflict resolution within and between communities.

The prospect of service extension and creative generation of economic space has been explored by the immigrants from Bangladesh chiefly in the retail business field. Two important entrepreneurial initiatives of Bangladeshi-Canadian community members are Bangladesh Community Consumers Cooperative Ltd, and *Bandhan* Marketing Cooperative Ltd. Bangladesh Community Consumers Cooperative Ltd was established in 2014, and at present has 38 members. The objective of the cooperative is to invest in businesses of scale at a certain period of the organization's maturity, targeted by 2020. The *modus operandi* of the cooperative involves collecting regular monthly subscriptions from the members to accumulate seed money for suitable and profitable businesses. *Bandhan* Marketing Cooperative Ltd was formed in 2017, with an objective of marketing ethnic consumer goods primarily among South Asian consumers. The long term objective of the cooperative is to generate savings and assemble resources for investing in low-cost housing initiatives. A few other entrepreneurial cooperative initiatives are also underway at present.

The Bangladeshi-Canadian community in Manitoba, under the leadership of Dr. Mujibur Rahman – an immigrant physician who moved to Canada in the early 1970s – volunteered *en masse* for greater community building through protecting and preserving the belief systems of migrants. They joined other Muslim immigrants in Manitoba to establish The Grand Mosque – a Muslim community common arena for meetings and conventions as well as practicing religious prayers and ethnic or cultural events (see Footnote 2). The impact of the Grand Mosque has been phenomenal as it has served as the hub for interfaith religious dialogues, a centre for inclusion, a hub for religious knowledge-seeking, a site for sports and pastimes, and a community centre for social and familial events.

The Bangladeshi-Canadian community identity-creation process aligns with the assertion made by Yasmin (1982), as she observed that small expatriate communities tend to minimize social risks and maximize social adaptation and integration opportunities more efficiently than larger immigrant communities. While larger communities in mega cities are at greater risk of disintegration and conflicts of interest as well as less social intimacy, smaller communities present the opposite scenario. This is because expatriates in the mega cities are generally required to compete with diaspora communities over limited available resources. In contrast, small community organizations of immigrants in smaller cities undergo less competition and demonstrate more solidarity, unity, togetherness, cooperation, mutual exchange, and reciprocity, and promote regular communication between community members (Yasmin 1982: 6). These factors are generally applicable to the Bangladeshi-Canadian community in Manitoba.

7. FEATURES OF BANGLADESHI COMMUNITY IDENTITY IN MANITOBA

Small and culturally homogenous social groups tend to be more cohesive in themselves and protective of their cultural identity in alien cultural settings (McIver and Page 1967; Little 1964; Ogburn and Nimkoff 1972). In this regard, Leiner and Meckl (1995) assert that immigrants' community solidarity is sustained mainly on the basis of serving economic

interests and intra-organizational income-redistribution between members. Intra-organizational distributions take place through the economic and financial support of disadvantaged community members by well-off community members. Distribution is not necessarily expressed in economic terms; rather it is a social arrangement. For instance, immigrants from developing countries tend to promote reference-pool-immigration[3] (Mohiuddin 2009) of their family members, friends, colleagues, or kinsfolk or other community members voluntarily, thus creating scope for a strong organizational basis for solidarity while in expatriation.

First, the most crucial element in Bangladeshi identity construction in Manitoba is a uniform language background, as Bangladeshi-Canadians do not speak various languages. This makes their intercommunity communication more effective than others, and eliminates mutual everyday exchange barriers. Second, the present settlement in places a very long distance from the country of origin (Bangladesh) instigates community members' solidarity as frequent visits to Bangladesh are almost impossible. Third, the usual extreme weather and prolonged winter in Manitoba provides the diaspora community the necessary "space" to mingle through inter-family meetings and gatherings for most of the year. Fourth, international students from Bangladesh at Manitoba's universities are increasing in number every year. There is a wide opportunity for them to mingle with the greater Bangladeshi-Canadian community through rental accommodation, receiving vehicle rides on a regular basis, and other social exchanges. Fifth, social interactions among Bangladeshi immigrants are also expanding through newcomers' job placement in businesses owned by Bangladeshi-Canadians, who also assist newcomers to establish job networking. Sixth, the establishment of an Islamic Centre is benefitting community members to a great extent by serving as a meeting place and communication hub. In addition, in the recent past, reference-pool-immigration through the family and friendship stream of the MPNP provided newcomers with instant support in regards to accommodation, adaptation, and assimilation within the larger Manitoba community.

Muller (1995) provides the insight that immigrants' general economic management system plays a role in their community solidarity. According to him, immigrants tend to remit the lion's share of their income to their countries of birth. As a result, they often suffer from a shortage of savings and capital in the host society. In such situations, community solidarity appears as a saviour to immigrants' financial crises. Todisco (1995: 5) views immigrants' solidarity as a platform to transform an individual's needs to rights, and transform one's lifestyle from marginalization to integration into the new culture. "Choice" and "choicelessness" (Sullivan 1996) are two other factors related to expatriate solidarity. Cultural distance, lack of reciprocity, and role and interrelationships of the individuals continuously create choices to be met and choicelessness to be overcome (Sullivan 1996). The process leads to creating crossroads of community solidarity for most immigrants. All of these stated conditions are present in Manitoba's Bangladeshi-Canadian

[3] Mohiuddin (2009) uses reference-pool-immigration to shorten a long description of Leiner and Meckl (1995) that expresses the process of an immigration chain whereby a settled primer immigrant plays the role of a referee (guarantor) to promote immigration of dependent family members, relatives, and friends. For example, the immigrants of the Sylhet region of Bangladesh still promote a strong immigration pool in the UK, especially in the Brick Lane area of London.

community, indicating their greater solidarity than those in other larger Canadian communities.

8. COMMUNITY ADAPTATION TO CANADIAN MULTICULTURALISM AND CHALLENGES TO IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

"Community identity" is adopted for the present study as "an effort by members to identify themselves with a specific locality and to distinguish them from outsiders" (Bates and Plog 1990: 466). Does community identity construction go against the processes of inclusion, acceptance of diversity and assimilation, and integration? This is an ongoing debate in social science and migration literature. The Bangladeshi-Canadian community identity creation process in Manitoba in general is proven to be congenial to inclusive social integration. One of the indicators is that new citizens' participation in provincial political domains has increased in recent years. There are about 250 registered members from Bangladeshi-Canadian communities involved with three mainstream political parties. Ninety percent of Bangladeshi-origin citizens voted in the 2015 parliamentary elections. In 2016 and 2017, a considerable number of Bangladeshi-Canadians attended local activities, fairs, festivities, film society movements, student movements, and creative arts performances in the province. Community youth are joining photography clubs, and taking out memberships to the Winnipeg Art Gallery. These are clear testimonies of efforts towards social integration by the Bangladeshi-Canadians in Manitoba.

The Bangladeshi-Canadian community, nonetheless, confronts serious challenges in the integration process. Of these, the language barrier, the rise of conservatism, the high relocation tendency, the lack of socialization opportunities, time barriers due to overwork, prohibitive religious values, the over-protectionist tendency of parents toward offspring and their associations, the tendency to avoid conflicts with cultural and religious values of the country of origin, the sense of disentitlement, dispossession, and discrimination in workplaces, a lack of information, and the absence of networking with GO-NGOs and public information are recorded as immediate challenges. These features were confronted and expressed by community members to the authors during interviews.

The organizational and constitutional scopes of the Canada-Bangladesh Association are reviewed in this context. Some important objectives and principles stated in the constitution and revised by-laws (CBA 1996) of the organization are: (1) preservation of community solidarity, unity, and cooperation among the Bangladeshi residents in Winnipeg (CBA 1982: 2), (2) resorting to all possible efforts to serve any valid and justifiable interests of its members (CBA 1982: 2), and (3) elimination of conflicts of individual interests. "Conflict resolution" is declared and adopted as an objective of the Association in contexts of unwanted and unprecedented conflicting situations between the members (CBA 1982:6). Additionally, (4) the Association serves as the common platform to bolster community strength, takes measures to overcome limitations, and explore appropriate scopes for development of lifestyles of its members as well as to eradicate hindrances and obstacles to meet greater community needs and interests (CBA 1996: 4). In short, the goals and purposes of the Association are to determine activities in compliance with strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to the Bangladeshi immigrant community. Correspondingly, solidarity dynamics of the community construe elevated levels and

magnitudes of interactions, ranges of social groupings, association-dissociation, and cohesion and conflict between its members, as well as the nature and extent of intra-and inter-community linkages, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. In this process, however, external network building received least attention.

The community presents "solidarity-bias" with more focus on three dimensions of expatriate solidarity – reciprocity, security, and adaptive capacity. This has, however, created a counterproductive result by taking a "political bias" turn as well – somewhat like Knights' (1996) observation in studying the Bangladeshi diaspora in Italy that Bangladeshi immigrants remain politically active and compartmentalized even in foreign environments, and that such political polarization is often divisive to their community solidarity. *Political division* also contributes barriers to community solidarity. Partisan division in politics in the place of origin (i.e., Bangladesh) influences community splitting of the supporters of both parties in Winnipeg, similar to many other cities of Europe and North America.

"*Polarization syndrome"* is reported as a form of subversion to community solidarity in new societies. The syndrome is identified as an impact of emerging politics of hatred in Bangladesh. In 2013, people of Bangladesh underwent several nationwide currents of political-ideological debates and discourses related to "pro-independence" and "anti-independence" rhetoric. Although these discourses were not characterized as ideological divisions, Bangladesh society in general became sharply divided politically into two camps. While one group tends to propagate the ideational term "the spirit of the independence war," the other camp detests the very motive of the former camp's ideological stance as "false pretense guided by ultra-nationalist political vested interest." This divisiveness is evident through the recent revival of an old debate over the "pro-Independence War force" *(Muktijuddher pokkho shokti)* and the "anti-Independence War sympathizers" or "Pakistani collaborators." Despite the fact that the indicators for such distinctions are hardly objectively verifiable, they are contributing to growing divisiveness among the community members in Manitoba, similar to other Canadian provinces. Latent divisions and conflicts become evident when "groupings of immigrants by regional and linguistic origin" are crystallized. Occupational groupings (conformity) also become viewed as a "segregation complex." Another form is "grouping by support to political parties of the origin."

Expansion of the diaspora community brings newer concerns as well. "*Intra-grouping"* is reported as the leading category of challenges to community identity formation. As a community expands in size, often "petty-regionalism" (Mohiuddin 2009) tends to escalate. For example, "informal fraternity subcultures" (Hebdige 1979) emerge with reductionist principles. Hebdige's (1979) assertion that "subcultures are mostly and generally subversion to cultural normalcy" is somewhat endorsed by senior members of the community. They observed immigrants from different districts (regions) forming their district-identity subcultures as demeaning to community solidarity. Besides subcultures identified by immigrants' regional origins, occupational fraternity subcultures of professionals and blue-collar workers are also on the rise. Mohiuddin's (2009) study found regional fraternity groups' principle of "[receiving] adaptation helps from regional circles first" has resulted in the formation of such groupings. However, community members' recent focus group discussion outcomes in Winnipeg indicate that the approach is reductionist in nature, and that such intra-group separation undermines greater community identity creation.

In Manitoba, non-Muslims (Hindus and believers of other faiths) in the Bangladeshi-Canadian community are closely attached to the West Bengal (India) immigrant community. Commonalities in religious belief system (Hinduism) and cultural practice are the driving forces for such extra-community affiliation. They participate with greater comfort in activities and performances of the West Bengal community organizations, namely Bichitra and Sangskriti. Our investigation reveals that the Bangladeshi-Canadian Muslim community members in general see the tendency of Hindu immigrants from Bangladesh to mingle with the West Bengal community as a "segregation complex," and view them with "disdain, suspicion, and disapproval." In a focus group, some Bangladeshi-Canadian community members elicited that it could be a "form of resistance" (Ong 1991) on Hindu immigrants' part, as they are likely to perceive themselves as a religious minority group in Winnipeg, similar to the case in Bangladesh. The tendency can loosely be considered a "weapon of the weak" (Scott 1985) as the Hindu immigrants from Bangladesh may perceive themselves as the weaker segment by entitlement and mainstream community activities within the community.

9. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

For human interaction and organization analysis, anthropologists Kemp and Ellen (1984) suggest moving from "passive to active" investigation that goes "hand-in hand with elicitation." We explored both *emic* and *etic* perspectives on this ground. Our approach also incorporated phenomenology, especially Cohen's (1984) notion of "intersubjectivity," by "not just mapping the structural process of social organization, but also collecting myths, discovering the morphology of belief systems."

It is observed that the Bangladeshi diaspora community in Manitoba is taking interesting transitional and transformational turns. Known for remaining silent and turned inward, community members are gradually tending to become more vocal and outspoken about global issues, as well as engaging in unconventional debates more than before. An emerging phenomenon in the community is a clash of the "puritans" and "new values." It is worth noting here that the 9/11 incident in the USA and corresponding global events of terrorism prompted a number of community members to consider changing their names to more religiously-neutral and Anglo-Saxon sounding names. They perceived that their Muslim-sounding (primarily originating in the Arabic language) names escalate their "security-vulnerability" at airports and workplaces, and make them prone to discrimination and suspicion in every walk of Canadian life.

However, the "identity concealment" idea seems to encounter broader diaspora community disapproval. Some community members consider it "submission to fear" and tend to detest it as a moral drain. Some opined that such a safety strategy will invoke more suspicion and susceptibility to racial profiling rather than a reduction in vulnerability. Similar clashes seem to emerge, although in debate form, about adapting to more modern Canadian outfits and norms, including avoiding wearing the hijab, considering interfaith and inter-marriage, and questioning the practicality of strict adherence to "halal" and "haram" food and drink.

The Bangladeshi-Canadian community members reflected on the question: what actions, activities and interventions should be considered essential for this community's

mainstreaming and inclusion? The immediate response was to establish a common meeting place, a Bangladesh Centre, which would provide community members an opportunity to maintain networks with greater Manitoban and Canadian society. To connect the community members and their offspring through literature and communication with the place of origin (the roots), the following immediate needs were identified: i) develop a Bengali culture-oriented community school, preferably a Bengali language training school; ii) develop an English-Bengali bilingual community newspaper; iii) construct a permanent Language Martyr's monument or cenotaph. The demands correspond with community members' reverence for martyrs of the epoch-making Mother Language Movement of 1952. UNESCO declared 21 February, the day of the Mother Language Movement martyrdom, as the International Mother Language Day. Referring to this historical event, Bangladeshi immigrants recommended that the event deserves to be archived in the Canadian Museum of Human Rights and the Manitoba Museum in Winnipeg with due merit.

The Bangladeshi-Canadian community is undergoing an intense identity-creation process. All of the identity markers (i.e., identity-conflict, identity-politics, integration, assimilation, accommodation, adaptation, and acculturation) have been taking place over the last few decades in varying degrees. On the "culture" front, we recorded cultural drift, cultural conflict, culture shock, and subculture formation as well. Intergenerational cultural gaps between first-generation immigrants and offspring, however, do not pose serious challenges to the community solidarity drives in Manitoba.

As the community is expanding in membership size, dynamics of fraternity are changing. Community members are tending to form in-groups and fraternity subcultures. This dynamic does not appear to be appreciated by the larger community. Regionalism, ethnocentrism, and political factions are being treated as potential barriers to social solidarity, social cohesion, social bondage, and social groupings. In short, fraternity subcultures are considered to escalate clashes and conflicts of political ideologies of the diaspora community members. Some community members label the influence of mainstream Bangladesh politics in the expatriate context as "carryover effect" and "spillover effect," and believe that they pose considerable challenges to solidarity-driven community identity creation in the Manitoba context. Lessons learned from this study are that the integration, assimilation, and desirable cultural adaptation of the community in the Canadian context depend largely on the increased practice of inclusion and faction-free human interaction within the immigrant community as well as within larger Canadian mainstream society.

A theoretical synthesis related to Bangladeshi diaspora identity-creation dynamics, as revealed through this study, refers to weakening of *asabiyyah* and strengthening of "creolization." "Ethnoscapes" – bonding by ethnic commonalities – are also losing their appeal to immigrants. Globalization and immigrants' access to information technology seem to bridge ethnicity-driven divisions among global citizens at a rapid pace. "Technoscapes" gradually gain ground due to enhanced connectivity between Bangladesh and Canada specifically, and the world in general. Bangladeshi immigrants' identity-construction dynamics in Manitoba correspond more with Clifford's (1994) and Safran's (1991) ideas that immigrants construct their unique diaspora identity predominantly through maintaining and enhancing attachment with ancestral country or origin. This is a reason they adapt slowly to Canadian principles of multiculturalism, diversity, inclusion, assimilation, and integration.

The 9/11 incident and its aftermath, especially the rise of anti-Muslim and alt-right campaigns, appear to pose challenges for inclusion, assimilation, and integration into Canadian multiculturalism norms. Bangladeshi immigrants prioritize "security," and consider community in-bonding rather than out-mingling will provide them much greater security at times of adversity. Such perceptional positioning seems to have gradually discouraged them from contributing to Canadian community building beyond the diaspora community boundary. In reference to inclusiveness and diversification goals of Canadian society at large, the case of Bangladeshi-Canadians in Manitoba calls for the attention of Canadian policymakers to strengthen initiatives of trust building and safety-net assurance among the diaspora communities of this country.

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SESSION 6

Canadian Bengali Youths: Identity, Social, Cultural, and Family Life

Session Chair: Habiba Zaman

Fariha Khondaker "Split between Cultures: Negotiating my Bengali and Western Girlhood"

Bidushy Rahman "Diasporic Foreignness: Bengali Social, Cultural, Family Life on Colonized Land"

Maz Haque "The "Filmly" Life of a Western Bengali Boy"

Rafia Mahazabin "The Evolution of Religious Identity of a First Generation Bengali Immigrant"

FARIHA KHONDAKER

SPLIT BETWEEN CULTURES: NEGOTIATING MY BENGALI AND WESTERN GIRLHOOD

1. INTRODUCTION

Bengali youth in Canada feel a strong need to negotiate between two cultures and nationalisms, whether they are immigrants or Canadian-born. Assimilation and negotiation of different competing nations are significant aspects in shaping one's identity as a Bengali youth. These negotiations determine the positions available to Bengali youth in society as well as in family life from a young age.

In this essay, I will be discussing my personal journey of negotiation between two identities in this Canadian Bengali Diaspora. The first part will discuss immigration and navigation; I will mainly articulate the common obstacles that many immigrant families such as my own encounter. The second section will contain my methods of negotiating and balancing being both Canadian and Bengali, as well as outline how both overlap with each other. This section will discuss the intersections of my identity that are affected by both cultures. The final part will consist of a discussion specifically related to my girlhood as both Western and Bengali. This is where I will discuss how being a Canadian Bengali girl has shaped my upbringing in Canada, and the ways in which I must navigate and make compromises through both identities in order to combine my two worlds.

2. IMMIGRATION AND NAVIGATION

I was born in Bangladesh in 1995 and spent my first four years of life there with my parents. Looking back at pictures and memories, those four years were the happiest years for me and my family. My father had a job at a top lab in Dhaka as a Zoologist and made an upper-middle class income. My mother stayed at home to take care of me, never letting me out of her sight. We were able to live comfortably and happily in a decent sized apartment in Dhaka. Money was not an issue and my father worked hard to make sure our lives were pleasant. In April 2000, we immigrated to British Columbia, Canada. I do not remember the journey getting here; however, I do remember the storm that followed shortly after.

For my parents, Canada was the Golden Nation for immigrants. They had a goal in mind, and that was a better future for my sister and me. As mentioned above, in Bangladesh, my father had a PhD in Zoology, and a well-paid job which allowed our family to live comfortably and contentedly in Dhaka. He was born and raised in West Bengal, specifically in Memary and Bhordhoman. He grew up poor in a *graam* (village) and education was a scarce privilege. Luckily for him, his father was a teacher, and found ways

to educate his children. My father grew up with a drive to be the first person from his village to come to Canada. This was considered an impossible and delusional goal for a poor man's son. My mother, on the other hand, was raised in a drastically different environment. She was born and raised in Dhaka, and her family was financially well-off and upper-middle class. She had opportunities to travel the world and have diverse work experiences, such as being an intern for the United Nations. She rarely had financial struggles, and lived a comfortable life. When my parents got married, it was a story of two very different worlds coming together. Because of their drastically different upbringing both economically and culturally, adjusting to the immigrant lifestyle was undoubtedly difficult. When we immigrated to British Columbia, we lived in a very small one bedroom apartment, where my parents, my 8-month-old-sister, and I all slept.

The building we lived in was occupied by a couple of other Bangladeshi families. Having people from our own country was the most comforting feeling for my family. Immigrating to a country after leaving those who are closest to you can create anxiety and depression in many immigrant family members, especially adults. My parents both experienced the distress that comes from feeling alienated from the community and the culture in which your identity is rooted. From a young age, I could see the significance of having a sense of belonging and community. Living in a building filled with immigrants gave my parents a safe space, which many immigrants do not have. Our new friends shared the same language, religion, and culture as us, which allowed us to feel somewhat at home.

Coming from a middle-class economic standing in Bangladesh to having almost nothing created many obstacles for my family, just as it did for many other immigrant families. I suddenly went from having many different toys to having only a couple. I was four years old when we moved to Canada; however, even at that age I could glean that my family was going through financial hardship. I could see the pain in my father's eyes when we would go to the grocery store and he could not buy me and my sister a chocolate bar or potato chips. I did not ask for anything, as I understood the struggles my family was experiencing; I dared not even look at treats or toys. As the oldest child, I experienced firsthand how life was suddenly shaped by fights and arguments over money, security, and the future. I heard arguments where my mother asked why we had come to Canada in the first place, as the "Golden Nation" had suddenly become a misadventure for an upper-class city girl. My parents persisted through the economic hardship, as difficult as it was, because they still believed in their dreams of a better future for my sister and me. From a young age, I have carried the tensions of money and familial stress. Feelings of anxiety and self-esteem issues came along with these common stresses. Many immigrant families have to face these same challenges. Many highly credentialed and educated people come to Canada for better security and stability, but are ultimately forced to work as labourers performing various types of manual work in order to survive. My family went from being upper-middle class to being working class, and the transition was sudden. These experiences can be an aspect or even the root of anxiety and depressive disorders in immigrants. I like to consider my family to be somewhat lucky because we were able to find a small Bengali community that became a social escape from our stressful lives.

3. DUAL IDENTITIES

Moving on from the beginning of my immigration journey, we come to my journey of assimilation and negotiation. I am a Bangladesh-born, Canadian-raised, Bengali girl. I have two identities, two nationalities, two cultures, and two environments. Most of my life has been a duality between my Bengali self and my Western self. These two identities may coexist; however, both cause advantages and disadvantages when combined. It is a constant struggle of mine, as well as many Bengali youths, to find the balance between these two lives. In order to find balance, negotiation and compromise are occasionally necessary. However, conflict arises when we find that one aspect of our identity does not mesh well with the other. I believe that many Bengali youths, as well as youths from other complex cultural backgrounds, struggle with negotiating both identities. We wonder where we truly fit in. If I am not completely Bengali, nor am I completely Canadian, then where is my place?

My parents have always made sure that we go to every Canada Day parade dressed in red and white. I knew that Christmas was not a celebratory holiday for Muslims; regardless, my parents would take us to every Christmas function at school. They would buy Christmas cards and gifts for my teachers as well. On the other hand, they also took us to every *Boishaki* (Bengali New Year). We dressed in traditional *sharees* and put flowers in our hair. My parents would take us to many *dawats* (Bengali gatherings) and reciprocated the favour by cooking many Bengali dishes and desserts. We knew that having a *dawat* meant cleaning the house until it was spotless, watching my mom cook for two days straight, and dressing up in *salwar kameez* (Indian suits) while waiting for our family friends to arrive. My parents did their best to balance both cultures, so we would be educated in both. They wanted us to be patriotic Canadians, without losing our Bengali heritage.

I use the phrase "not here nor there" as I believe it is the perfect explanation for how the Bengali diaspora is perceived according to both Western and Bengali perspectives. Bengali youths are seen as not completely Bengali. For example, when I last went to Bangladesh in 2008, there seemed to be an aura around me that made it evident that I was a Westerner. I did not have fair skin, nor did I wear distinct Western clothing, so I was quite confused as to how/why strangers viewed us as just *"bideshi."* I was born in Bangladesh, and was well aware of the cultural expectations and mannerisms. When I went to many relatives' homes, they would be in complete shock when I ate with my hands as is customary, as it was expected I would not know how to. Many people spoke to me in broken English, under the impression that I, a *bideshi* Bengali, would not know how to speak *Bangla*. Many of my cousins would be extremely excited to see their *"bideshi"* cousin. They were asked to speak only English with me, for their own practice. The curiosity and excitement are understandable; however, it is unfortunate that I will never be considered a true Bangladeshi. I have come across many international students in Vancouver who seem to have a perception of Canadian-raised Bengalis as uncultured or "white-washed." I have experienced teasing for not being able to understand common Bengali jokes or phrases, or for having a slight accent when I speak *Bangla*. My accent and language, my Canadian upbringing, and my lack of knowledge on Bangladesh's local culture create a boundary between the "true" Bangladesh and myself.

My Canadian identity also has some limitations and boundaries. At first glance, there would be no assumption that I am Canadian, as to be truly Canadian in the imagination of most is to be white. White Canadians will rarely be asked where they are originally from, as it is assumed that they are true Canadians. Even when it is known that I am a Canadian citizen, I will still be asked where I am really from, as there is an assumption that my skin colour does not make me a real Canadian. The discourse here is that, if you are a racialized person, you are indefinitely from somewhere else. As I was raised in Canada for essentially 18 years of my life, I would want to reply by saying that I am from Canada. However, because I was not born here, and because my physical features are "ethnic," I am obligated to say that I am from Bangladesh. This is a complex situation as I am technically not from Bangladesh either. I do not feel as though I belong in or to Bangladesh. I have often received connotative compliments of looking "exotic." Looking "exotic" essentially means being unusual, different, or foreign. Being called "exotic" puts me in the category of the ethnic other. Simone de Beauvoir's term "the other" is what I would use to describe my place in comparison to the white Canadian subject. I am not seen as being the same or equal to the white person who is the subject. My body is automatically racialized due to my skin colour and ethnic facial features.

Most of my childhood was spent in a neighbourhood that had a demographic of predominantly racialized people. I did not feel out of place or discriminated against due to my race until I moved to a predominantly white neighbourhood and school. At this point, looking at my reflection in the mirror or pictures of myself started to generate internalized racist feelings towards my skin colour. This anxiety around my dark colour derived from the cultural ideology of dark skin being unattractive or not ideal. At Bengali gatherings, I would overhear the women talking about particular girls looking like fairies because of their *forsha* skin (fair skin). I did not consciously take this information to heart, however I found myself editing my photos to make my skin look brighter and more fair. I did not purposely do it to make my skin lighter; I simply thought I looked more attractive this way. This was an obvious indication of my internalized feelings about my own dark skin.

Negotiating language was also a crucial part of my identity as a Bengali Canadian. *Bangla* is my first language. When I first came to Canada, I only knew a handful of English terms and phrases. I learned English through watching television, and also through interactions at school. I was put into ESL for a little while in Kindergarten and was a very fast learner as I copied and adapted to other people speaking proper English. Many people would be surprised at the fact that I did not have any distinct accent. They would not believe me when I said that I was an immigrant, as all immigrants are stereotyped to have accents and not be able to speak "proper" English. My being able to speak English without an accent while being an immigrant was astonishing to many people. Perhaps this was something to be proud of. To white people, I spoke English perfectly without an accent; however, my parents had a different opinion. They would ask my sister and me why we did not speak English like white people. They always wondered why there was always a slight accent or tone to my voice, and why I did not sound like a white person.

My parents spoke *Bangla* to each other and to me while I was growing up. I understood *Bangla* quite well, and could speak it minimally. Much of my *Bangla* was mixed with English. I felt insecure speaking *Bangla* at Bengali gatherings, as I felt I would be criticized or humiliated. Coming from a family that is rooted in duality, the Bengali language became a medley of different dialects and pronunciation, as my father is from

West Bengal, and mother is from Bangladesh. I grew up speaking *Bangla* like my father, whereas my sister spoke like my mother. Although I absolutely loved the diversity in my Bengali family, speaking West Bengali *Bangla* in a majority-Bangladeshi community was uncomfortable. In many situations, if I said a word in Indian *Bangla*, I would be corrected into saying the world in "normal" *Bangla*. I found this "normal" *Bangla* concept bizarre, as Bangladesh itself has many diverse dialects. Correcting my West Bengali *Bangla* words is essentially articulating the underlying idea that my father's Indian nationality and *Bangla* language was not seen as "normal" *Bangla*. I now speak with a mixture of both Bangladeshi *Bangla* and West Bengali *Bangla*, and am proud of it.

4. NEGOTIATING BENGALI AND WESTERN GIRLHOOD

Being a woman can be difficult in both the Western world and the Bengali world. It is especially difficult when there are set discourses on what the ideal woman looks like. In many cases, a girl is taught from when she is very young how she should look and behave. An ideal girl must be gentle, quiet, nice, obedient, modest, pure, heterosexual, smart but not overly smart, etc. In my personal experience, these expectations and ideals have shaped my entire identity. The ways in which my gender intersects with my ethnic culture, nationality, and religion have always created challenges and fissures.

I will first consider my gender and Bengali culture. As a Bengali girl, I have been brought up with many of the common discourses of being a girl in that culture. Growing up, I was known to be very obedient, soft-spoken, and passive. These characteristics earned me high praise in the Bengali community. My parents have always told me what a good girl I am and how I make them proud. The phrase "good girl" became less praise and more expectation. Being obedient had always been second nature to me, mainly because being disobedient had resulted in scolding and disappointment from my parents. Talking back and speaking my mind had also resulted in words such as *"shoytan"* (devil) or *"beyadob"* (disrespectful or naughty) being used to describe me. I was taught how to sit like a lady – with my legs closed or crossed – especially in front of men. Essentially, most things I know about being a girl ultimately relate to the interest of a man. For example, I have been taught to dress modestly and behave like a lady lest I incur negative attention from men. I must also be pure, soft-spoken, physically beautiful, etc., all for my future husband. These things are what both my Bengali culture and Western culture have taught me.

Attending Bengali gatherings were essential in order to keep close ties with the culture we had left in Bangladesh. For me, Bengali *dawats* meant dressing up in order to look presentable and preparing myself mentally for the "Aunty" gaze. This is a common phrase used by South Asian girls to describe the interesting culture of a group of middle-aged, married women scrutinizing Bengali girls. It came naturally for me to speak to the aunties and uncles in a soft and feminine manner. Conversations with adults were limited to small talk, as I was told not to speak too much. At these gatherings, Bengali girls from the age of 15 onward are constantly being watched. How we spoke, dressed, looked, and behaved was always a topic of discussion. What we did outside of gatherings in our "Western lives" was also a hot topic. Many Bengali girls have had this same experience of feeling as though they are constantly under a microscope. Hanging out with the opposite sex, at Bengali gatherings as well as outside of them, is treated as an immoral

act. Unfortunately, I sometimes feel as though this constant watching and critiquing of young Bengali girls is part of Bengali culture. When I went to Bengali gatherings, women would be in one room and men in the other, and the same for boys and girls. My mother used to always tell to me to never sit with Bengali boys in the room, even if I had no other friends to keep me company at a *dawat*. I was told that "someone is always watching." Girls who did talk to boys, or even sat with boys, were slut-shamed consistently. Even to this day, as an adult, I see the anxiety on my parents' face if a Bengali male and I have a conversation or mingle at a gathering. For many of us Bengali youths, these situations are quite complicated and culturally confusing, as Bengali culture can clash drastically with our Western culture.

When a girl is being brought up, generally she is not existing for herself; instead, she is existing for others – first for her parents, then for her husband or for her in-laws, and then finally for her children. In order to reach the "ultimate" goal – marriage – a Muslim girl such as myself is expected to live life without a flaw. If she were to have flaws, she would be held accountable for them. My persona and the way I carry myself will determine what kind of girl I am.

Purity is one of the most essential aspects of being the perfect girl or woman. South Asian girls are supposedly embodiments of chastity and purity, which results in society policing our bodies. Our worth is determined by our chastity, and by our behaviour. Our family's reputation is expected to be our responsibility, and is contingent on our chastity. Of course, being a virgin is also crucial if marriage is prospective; however, chastity can also be determined by one's character. If a community member detects a Bengali girl with her partner, or even accompanied by a male, the news will surely reach her parents. Indeed, this could be called "being a good neighbour" or "watching out for the community's girls"; however, I interpret this as an act of policing women's bodies. I personally have been a victim of every Bengali girl's worst nightmare: being exposed for my "Western" way of living. This happened when the community found out that I was dating, and my personal pictures were sent around to my Bengali community, finally reaching my parents. I was considered one of the community's "gold options," which meant that I had many offers for future suitors. Bengali community members are extremely efficient at *"ghotkali*" (matchmaking), which is why they would ask my mother to consider their sons, nephews, or grandsons as my future husband. Once it was "exposed" that I had been dating, I was off the market. My experience is evidence that once a girl is seen with the opposite sex in a romantic or sexual manner, her "value" decreases. As I mentioned previously, a woman's body is only valuable when it conforms to people's expectations of chastity and pureness. In my Western world, I am an independent person who is equal to men and does not have restrictions based on my gender. On the other hand, my Bengali world reminds me that a girl cannot be equal to a man. I have grown up witnessing the way community members do not discuss the behaviours and value of Bengali boys. The concept of "boys will be boys" rang in my ears. I always wonder why I am still not able to do what Bengali boys are, such as staying out late, wearing whatever I please, etc. It is interesting that amidst the harsh focus on the behaviour and reputation of Bengali girls, Bengali boys' behaviour and reputation seems constantly to be swept under the rug.

Living in Canada will inevitably expose Bengali youths to Western culture, no matter the substantiality of Bengali culture in their lives. I have had many male friends throughout my life; however, once I entered high school, having male friends meant many boundaries

and limitations. I was often told from a young age never to let boys touch me, and vice versa. My parents did not restrict me from having male friends; their main concern was regarding romantic relationships and sexual attractions. I knew that dating was a very normal and common concept in the Western world, which was also my world, but because of my cultural restrictions I felt a barrier between my Western culture and myself. My parents always made it clear that I am not white; I am Bengali and Muslim, and therefore dating was restricted. It is true; I am Bengali. Yet I am being raised in a Western culture, and finding the balance is almost impossible. Being attracted to someone was understandable, but acting upon it was not. For Canadian Bengali girls like me, one part of our lives is always kept secret. For me, my Western identity was made up of constant secret phone calls, late night texting, etc. Dating was not considered a necessary part of my life in my Bengali culture. I admit that it saddened me not to be able to talk about my "boy problems" with my parents, as I knew many of my friends were able to talk to their parents about almost anything. This sense of dual identity and the awareness that I was constantly fighting between my Western identity and my Bengali identity caused me stress and anxiety in a way that is common among many Bengali youths.

5. CONCLUSION

The process from immigration to integration is complex terrain. Bengali youths raised in the West face a duality between two identities. Negotiating between these two identities is a challenging task that may create tensions and fissures in one's lived reality. Throughout my life, I have been negotiating between my Western world and my Bengali world. It is not easy when both worlds are drastically different and often unable to mix. Negotiating between these worlds has meant having two separate lives, and mixing the two has created tension between my family and me as well as in my own self-perception and sense of being in the world. These tensions are created due to cultural and ideological differences that often feel insurmountable. I have found that trying to balance my two lives is an ongoing learning process, which is complicated especially by my positionality as a Bengali woman raised in the West. This positionality pushes me to negotiate between highly polarized expectations: Western expectations of independency and competency versus retaining my Bengali cultural heritage that values fixed gender roles and familial expectations. While Bengali immigrants are navigating their way through the Canadian Bengali diaspora, Canadian Bengali youths are navigating through both Western and Bengali cultures that build layered and multifaceted identities.

BIDUSHY RAHMAN

UNBELONGING BETWEEN TURTLE ISLAND AND BANGLADESH: A SECOND-GENERATIONAL RAMBLING

It is integral to remember Indigenous history and sovereignty before discussing my contribution to commemorating 150 years of a country's sovereignty at the expense of so many people's sovereignty. Thank you to the people and land in whose space I live, experience, and affect. Lest we forget.

Bidushy, my name, resembles the *Bangla* noun *bideshi*, meaning "foreigner." It was always a little joke between born Bangladeshis:
"Amar nam Bidushy."
"Ki? Bideshi?"
As I got older, it became less of a funny mispronunciation and more of a revealing title that sits next to my namesake. Being, feeling, and getting addressed as a *bideshi* eventually became as familiar to me as is the name Bidushy, with the term reshaping itself in both meaning and intelligibility. I am a foreigner. I am always a foreigner, whether I am in Dhaka, Bangladesh or in Vancouver, Canada. I can never be fully part of either culture because I'm too Canadian to speak like a Bangladeshi and too racialized and Bengali to be Canadian. Yeah, my passport says I'm Canadian, but you don't picture me when you hear the word "Canadian," unless someone mentions the cultural mosaic. It's a great script for foreign policy, Canada, but maybe y'all should try implementing its value at home first.

Indeed, Canada has no shortage of discrimination against the foreignness of one's skin, sexuality, ability, age, and so forth, but when you're right next to the United States, that kind of dialogue gets shoved under the rug. The thing is, if you don't look like the British or French colonists that came here centuries ago to lie, steal, exploit, and murder Indigenous communities – sorry, I mean bravely venture into unknown, barren land – then you're never going to lose your foreignness. I was born in the capital city of Canada and have lived here all my life, but I'm never confused about my belonging – not anymore, anyway. It takes time for us to understand where we belong. Are we coconuts? Are we white-washed, dippers, or a cookies and cream mix? I used to judge classmates who identified as Canadians instead of representing the countries their families came from. In retrospect, I was wrong. Don't feel ashamed of acknowledging the culture you're really from. You didn't grow up in Bangladesh or Nigeria; you grew up here, and you're not white-washed or lacking culture. Canadian culture is just as valid as a racialized culture.

Race being a fluid, discursive construct doesn't give you belonging; rather, it's the culture you live in. Maybe you're like me, and you don't feel like you could firmly plant your feet anywhere. Maybe you're mixed, unlike me, and have that kind of additional complexity to deal with alongside these other issues. To save you time, I'll tell you that you don't need

to belong to either dichotomy/polychotomy. All of you – all of us – we're not made up of two incomplete halves, because all the experiences we've had make us a whole person. Unbelonging becomes our own belonging.

Sure, it seems contradictory to feel at home as an outsider, and it's just as conflicting when I name this mesh as my unbelonging. It's not that complicated when you get that not belonging is what makes you belong. Where you belong becomes the space in-between where two cultures drip and flood in and out – sometimes in and out of each other, and sometimes not; either way, you're there to receive the waves. You float in and out of where you are and where you could have been. For me, where I am is Vancouver, Canada and where I could have been is Dhaka, Bangladesh. Most of my family is from South Asia, and I've seen our struggles as Bengali Canadians in navigating and negotiating our belonging between dual nationalisms such as that of Canada and Bangladesh or India and so forth. For second-generationers, specifically the ones born in the "New World," it's tough in a shared, bittersweet kind of way. You're accomplished with a supposedly bright future just for being a citizen here. Not to say there isn't wealth to enjoy in our home countries or wealth outside of the value of money, but usually we have seen the daily hardships colonized countries endure. It's an age-old colonialist discourse that Western countries are more successful and smarter than non-Western countries. However, the effects of centuries' worth of colonialism exist, and many of our family members and countries witness this. We are no exception as colonialism pushes itself forward in the 21st century.

I don't have the clearest definition of what home is, but I do reside, experience, and live on unceded Indigenous land. My family and I came to be trespassers in response to the devastating aftermath of colonialism in what is known as Bangladesh. Racialized immigrant relationships with and entitlement to this land are complex and often undermine this land's history and contribute to the ongoing violence against the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island. The first colonialist intrusion of British and French immigrants on this land is what made them the hegemonic or dominant group. Hegemonic groups establish a hierarchy of power and value wherein the groups themselves are valued at the expense of those outside of these groups. This is why I mention racialized immigrants; however, power never acts neatly.

Moreover, despite the complexity of our relationship with Indigenous peoples and their land, we must acknowledge our capacity to harm while we are being oppressed. If we're fighting for anti-oppressive spaces, we have to uphold our end by resisting settler colonialism. Otherwise, we should really question our values because they are clearly colonial, selfish, and limiting. Upholding Indigenous voices before we proceed allows us the knowledge to disrupt a system that profits off of our subjugation. No one is truly free until the peoples of Turtle Island feel freedom. Being mindful of the violent history that brought us here always brings us closer to where we want to be, and in this paper I'm hoping I make that clear.

UNBELONGING

Although I am Canadian born, my Bengali or Bangladeshi heritage has always preceded me before my rather conditional Canadian nationality. On paper I'm Canadian, but due to my racialization I'm automatically cast aside by a nationalist gaze. My parents, too, always

reminded me that I'm Bangladeshi before anything else. So yeah, the racialization of my physical features determines the experiences I navigate through in the Canadian public sphere while my upbringing within my family determines my private Bengali sphere. These two worlds collide and stretch, configuring with one another, and a lot of us become the manifestation of that configuration.

There seems to be a cultural pedestal that diasporic migrants consistently fall short of as if by structural intention. There exists a circular state of foreignness – one is, for instance, too Bengali to be Canadian but too Canadian to be Bengali. Our loyalty to our multiple nationalities and/or ethnicities is often the site of contestation wherein we test our cultural integrity as best we can. Who we are becomes a question of where our loyalty lies. Are we over here or over there, and how well can we prove it? For me, the big problem isn't usually the lack of representation as a Canadian, because this is my culture that I grew up in. There's more tension with my Bengali essence being compromised according to my family, especially my mother. My footprints and bra straps are measured and calculated in relation to how admissible my behaviour is according to my parents' Bengali ways. Things have changed in Bangladesh – my parents admit it themselves – but you teach what you've been taught, and it intensifies under attack.

There's a lot to say on this subject, but my main point is that these two cultures I am part of are where I am situated. I am both Canadian and Bengali, and those experiences are not mutually exclusive even when our parents pit them against each other. I'm always both, even if I'm not wanted by both all the time, and even if I don't want both all the time. That doesn't mean I can't move to Barbados and have that become part of my culture as well, because I experience life through my positionality. Culture is not a rigid concept; rather, it is fluid. You live what you become, and you become what you've lived. South Asians ourselves have one of the richest collisions of historically diverse cultural transaction within our genealogies. Indeed, cultures are formed over thousands of years of two or more cultures coexisting in the same space.

What we are is a newly formed culture.

What we're not is the lesser of two cultures.

Basically, unbelonging is a pretty frustrating state to be in, but if we see ourselves as a culmination instead of a division, maybe this frustration can dissipate.

Bangla has always been an insecurity of mine ever since I was young. For some reason, it felt like it was my fault I didn't speak like a native Bangladeshi even though I grew up in another country learning other languages my entire life. There are still many mundane words I don't know. I learned what I heard, and what I heard were day-to-day conversations between family members. When I was growing up, my parents really struggled to make ends meet, and the language we'd use was short, simple, and efficient like most of our encounters. My *Bangla* actually improved when our financial lives improved. Understanding Bangladeshi dramas and the like became clearer with more exposure, too.

There's no right or wrong way to speak a language. Many Bengalis have an idea of what *"shudho" Bangla* is and we shame different dialects and structure. If you recognize two or more languages, that isn't not knowing a language. Maybe you're not as fluent as you're told (or feel) you should be, maybe you can't speak the language but can understand it or vice versa, or maybe you talk with a funny accent – yet you do know and recognize that language. Say you hear a neighbour play piano from their balcony all through your

adolescence; you can't play the piano, but it's more familiar to you than a guitar, isn't it? Don't let people shame you, and if they do, ensure that eventually it will roll off your shoulders.

Language for me as a Bengali is definitely unique, since our country fought and died for the freedom and right to speak *Bangla*. I've realized maybe that's why I'm so scrutinized for speaking broken *Bangla*. Baba is a pretty liberal-minded guy, and I don't entirely mean that as a compliment. He's not religious in the slightest, but he does maintain tradition when it comes to my clothing and sexuality as a girl. Moreover, he never thought I needed to learn *Bangla*; in fact, he'd be okay with me forgetting it altogether. It's strange, because, although my father isn't very cultural, he is very politically engaged. Yet although our country fought and died for our language – a war that my father remembers year 'round – he's never seemed to mind my lack of fluency. Ma and the women of the family, on the other hand, used to shout at my sister and me day in and day out, telling us to speak *Bangla* to each other. My uncles and grandfather never said much but I'm pretty sure that's just because my aunts and grandma were already on my ass about it. It's funny how guys profit off of that – being the chill, laidback ones – at least until the women take a break.

I wish I were fluent in Bangla like I am in English – but hey, helping me is better than complaining about it any day. Language represents that pedestal of belonging, where how you speak will impact how Bengali you appear to your community. Just like your clothing and manners, your language is how you communicate with others, and it's time we widened what we're really saying to each other. Making us feel like we belong in our culture is something I believe our communities are responsible for. No one wants to have fun somewhere they feel judged or underestimated, and a lot of us do feel that way. I have a page limit, so I'll leave it at this: we should remember that there's more to us than what other people criticize.

COLONIALISM

How often do we contemplate how a nation of people that lived from the west coast of Vancouver Island to the east coast of Nova Scotia isn't with us in the supermarkets or on television? Our modern day system of government is founded on the genocide and desecration of both nobility and humanity enacted against those who had initially welcomed migrants of Europe onto their land. Selfish greed exhibited by colonialists must be terminated because in order to profit as an imperialist you must take and maim. This begins with Indigenous peoples (using the word *peoples* to prevent generalizing distinct communities as one static Indigenous identity), as they are the primary receivers of colonial violence.

Being on Canadian soil entails settler colonialism, and all of us participate in it whether we have a hyphenated title or not. My family is South Asian-Canadian, and growing up I never learned about Indigenous history or the decolonized Canadian history we all should have learned. In 1971, Bangladeshis fought for our language, identity, and freedom, and yet here we are on someone else's land, neglecting the rightful inhabitants of Turtle Island.

Immigrant/Indigenous relations are underdeveloped in my experience. My knowledge of Indigenous peoples' ownership and positionalities before, during, and after

Confederation was very limited during my highly sanitized education. Colonialism was seldom mentioned, let alone the past and present violence foundational to Canadian history. I saw cartoons and television shows where derogatory stereotypes (I do not wish to re-implement these by specifying them) of Indigenous characters created two-dimensional caricatures. When we happened to see totem poles or other Indigenous art, my family appreciated the work and informed us how the First Nations people lived here before we did, but that's about it. There wasn't anything particularly malicious in this, but there was erasure, taking space for granted, and negligence. At cultural events, we never perform land acknowledgements, nor do most places outside of school campuses. Although we did have one high school teacher who taught First Nations 12, there was another who talked about Indigenous communities solely as powerless victims. Even in Grade 4, we learned about kayaks and the cedar tree but never that much about the people themselves, whose lifestyles and presence were portrayed as historic and ancient as opposed to modern and present.

Racialized immigrants also being settler-colonialists isn't always a comfortable realization, but being uncomfortable is never a just excuse for failing to unlearn harmful discourses/habits. We cannot decolonize without Indigenous sovereignty, and we cannot be anti-colonialist while we are anti-Indigenous. To sum up, if we really want sustainable change, it's either all of us or none of us.

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Due to the furthering of the European construct of race, the term "Bangladeshi" is thought to pertain to common (see: stereotypical) Indo-features such as dark skin. As a light-skinned Bengali, I have been asked by both non-Bengali and Bengali people if I have mixed heritage; people usually assume I have a European parent. Since people move beyond our planned perceptions of them, my skin and features perhaps stretch beyond the cultural imagination of what an entire population of 165 million people should look like. In addition, it's pretty annoying when I can sense the underlying question: *how can you be this attractive given your ancestry?*

Despite this mild discomfort, I have never had to think twice about my complexion, unlike many darker Bengalis who bleach their skin or eagerly avoid the sun. It seems like it's always tougher for younger girls with dark skin who grow up with internalized self-hatred and shame. I'm not sure why this applies particularly to girls, since both boys and girls are planned to be married, but I've noticed that when a girl is *"shemla"* or *"kahlo,"* people tend to make a bigger note of it. I've seen my cousins and friends pay greater attention to their pigment in a day than I ever did in a year if at all. I always received compliments on my beauty and pureness without ever critically considering that perhaps this wouldn't be the case if I were several shades darker. My light skin is definitely valued above rationalization in both cultures, and this is due to (surprise!) colonialism.

It's just a preference! yeeEEAAAH: A racist one.

I'm not exempt from prejudice; in fact, I realized some time in Grade 10 that I wouldn't date someone darker skinned because I don't find that attractive. Hoping to relieve myself of this racist internalized prejudice, I followed blogs that had mostly black models; whenever a black model would pop up on screen, I would just stare at the model for a bit before moving on. Eventually, believe it or not, I too was surprised how you really can alter a seemingly stubborn perception sometimes. I remember being about to scroll

past one picture after a regular stop-and-scroll when I had a passing thought: "he's cute." And there it was.

Maybe it's childish, and I really hope it's not wrong, but I just wanted to share that decolonizing your values is possible. I didn't just normalize non-European features, I started to admire them. In the process, I noticed that I started to love my own features more, too. Changing our own perception is what enables long-term change. I'm not saying people can easily change or that all people can unlearn in their lifetime, but I am saying that you should try and do whatever you can to move in that direction. Colonialism truly hurts us all, but we can't always identify it.

You already know I'm going to talk about it. I have to find a Bengali Muslim man, several years older and taller than I am, able-bodied, and with a stable income. Ma's always been insistent, probably because the responsibility of raising a proper young woman falls on the mother. Baba's considerably more laid back, but does prefer I marry a Bengali so he can speak to them. If Ma had to choose, she'd probably choose Muslim. So yeah, that's my sexuality:

Birth – School – Marriage – Kids

I try to keep it PG.

Bengali sexuality, even sexuality in general, is one where it's somehow no one's business but everyone's business at the same time – particularly if you're a girl. Your family's respect apparently lies between your thighs, meaning you can't have sex before marriage or wear a miniskirt. I remember in seventh grade I was out with a group of friends at the mall food court when a Bengali aunty greeted me. A few days later, my parents told me that my aunt's friend told my aunt she'd seen me at the mall with a boy. Was one of the four friends I was with a boy? Heteronormatively yes, you could consider them a boy. Were the other friends girls? Yes. They were. Yet here I was, having to explain myself because a member of our community felt it was her duty to inform my family of my relationship with a boy – the main sentiment being that if anything compromises your ability to get married into a heteronormative lifestyle there are going to be problems.

Abstinence is obligatory, and showing any interest in sexual desire often receives harsh backlash. This desire is special but secret for a monogamous married couple; however, it is also disgusting and immoral outside of marriage. Especially as a girl, your family's reputation teeters on your presence as a proper and modest Bengali, but more often than not, it's what you can afford to keep secret on your private Instagram. Many of us make compromises and lead double lives in order to feel as comfortable as possible in both our Canadian and Bengali lives.

Although there are Quranic interpretations that influence abstinence, the purity-policing of women's bodies has been heavily influenced by colonial discourse introduced during British imperialism in India. The sexism apparent within British imperialist men became effective through policy reforms and legislation. Colonialism, being a moral venture, assumed British morality was superior and needed to be implemented in order to erase alternative ways of life.

Queer desire is treated no differently, as the stigma against queer people is just as influenced by our internalization of British values. Non-heteronormative desire is even more abominable and perverted, whereas heteronormative desire is pure and morally superior. Many queer Bengalis jump in and out of the closet because being gay isn't

something just anyone in the community should know. Feelings of shame, guilt, and self-hatred, and toxic, internalized misconceptions of what queerness means accompany many Bengalis due to their upbringing. Our family's reputation precedes our public actions, and the added stigmatization prevents Canadian Bengalis from exploring their queerness fully. Canadian culture does tend to be more lenient; however, queerphobia still exists systemically. All in all, both cultures provide limited avenues for queer kids to understand non-heteronormative desire in a healthy, responsible manner. The same goes for policing women's bodies: Canadian culture has way more leniency than Bangladesh; however, that does not mean women can move freely without consequence.

We could all use a systemic cleansing, but I believe subversive power can lie outside of the system. Going to queer-prioritized events and consuming queer art, film, books, etc. can really give you a sense of belonging and relief even if not consistently. Decolonizing your space, body, and health has ripples; nonetheless, the priority remains alleviating pain from the subject oppressed: you.

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As a non-essentialist, I believe we are a product of our environment. This means that our brain – being our largest and arguably only sensor, since our senses require our brain to recognize them in order for anything to be sensed – absorbs everything we experience. *Every. Single. Thing.* Our brain likes patterns, and supposedly if a regular stimulus gives you the same neuron activity over an extended period of time, your brain begins to repeat this activity without the stimulus. When your brain keeps excreting certain hormones, it excretes fewer of the hormones you're not using, and depression and anxiety can be produced from this process. (N.B. I am not qualified to speak about this confidently, so feel free to confirm my statements).

For us second-generationers, being racialized, queer, or a woman are a few examples of the culturally complex terrain that can really personally affect our lives. Stimuli exist everywhere, and having an unhealthy approach and/or no support makes all the difference in developing a mental illness. You're always trying to find that space between what your family finds comfortable, what your friends find comfortable, and what you find comfortable. Different cultures enact different consequences, and neither properly addresses mental health at the right time.

I've struggled with depression off and on since I was nine years old and failed to receive any real support. Of course, I didn't have the language to understand what I was going through and assumed it was normal to regularly fantasize about being dead. Anxiety and depression became a part of my personality and comfort, and moving away from that was something I wasn't used to. However, when it peaked the first time, I figured I would end my life sometime before age 18 even if I didn't at 15. I managed to overcome it on my own using faith in Allah and/or the universe's love; I was sick of feeling terrible, but mainly I realized that if I died there would be one less person to advocate for those who can't advocate for themselves. It sounds fair, until I started living for other people's desires and sweeping my pain under the rug, and all my problems remained. I was a doormat, and although I had desire I had nothing to show for it until I was 21 years old. Perhaps this was because I felt I was only worthy of taking up space if it was in the service of others, and if I was being useful in the slightest ways.

I'm sure everyone's heard the sentiment "there are people with worse conditions than you, so be grateful" at some point, and that's probably the most toxic idea I lived

through. I didn't have negative stimuli in my life comparable to the kind people affected by human trafficking, poverty, corruption, etc. have experienced. During their adolescence, my parents witnessed numerous awful events, and both they and Canada believe this land to be a haven for equality and prosperity apart from Bangladesh (which is not true). Due to this discourse, it can be hard not only to get family, friends, and others to take you seriously, but also to take yourself seriously. It's true that I am blessed and fortunate enough not to experience the awful situations my parents and so many around the world experience; however, despite this inexperience, my trauma remained and failed to disperse. In retrospect, all I did was shame myself for feeling bad on top of feeling bad, convince myself my problems and feelings weren't real, fall into denial about reality, and begin to see myself as a "weak-minded" person. Sure, I wasn't depressed, but I still self-harmed during moments of heightened stress and felt harrowing lows sporadically. These lows don't mean you're paying the price for being happy; feeling suicidal is never a product of a balanced life or mind. I had the idea that I was always exaggerating my emotions for attention and that somehow wanting attention or help was something to be ashamed of. It's not, but both of my communities made me feel so guilty at this vulnerable age.

You can pray, masturbate, exercise, sing, deny, build, paint, jump, escape – in short, do everything you can to alleviate your pain because activities that make you happy help maintain your wellbeing. Yet these only worked for so long, and although I never thought I would be depressed again, I reached a boiling point at age 21. Although I had arguably the best year I had ever had since childhood, I was running low at the same time. I was supposed to be dead at 18, so what was I still doing here at 21? All my reasons to stay alive vanished; I couldn't live for others anymore. If I gave it my every fibre of energy, I figured I could live until February to tie up loose ends and figure out where to die so as to reduce inconvenience for my loved ones. Dying was my heavily contemplated, logically thought out solution.

I received consistent counselling and medication for clinical depression, and now when my friends feel old on their birthdays, I just feel like I earned one more year. I believe if I had had more resources from school, home, and friends while I was growing up, I would have avoided so much pain and suffering.

Your health matters. You can live again and you can feel beyond your numbness. Just because you can ignore an issue doesn't mean it doesn't grow tenfold unattended. Happiness and peace are possible for someone like you, and you deserve to be selfish with your energy and rehabilitation. You will learn to love again because you deserve love. People you love will hurt you and might do disgusting things, but that always says more about them than it does about you. You only realize how strong you are when you need to be, and all the resources available to you are made for you. Be open, soft, and kind. If you turn to stone, it's hard to turn back, but it is possible. Your dreams are possible – so start somewhere.

CONCLUSION

You can be ableist while having a disability, and you can be racist while racialized. Decolonization is necessary to relieve significant, life-shaping stigmatic knowledges, and we need to fight for Indigenous sovereignty while fighting for our own sovereignty. You are

not white-washed; you are Canadian. If you're a fob, stay fresh. You don't need a label to belong. Just look at yourself like, "Wowowow. I am the product of generations of my ancestors who've lived since the beginning of time to get to me. Wow. I do deserve to be here, and I do deserve love and respect. I deserve to take up space and hold space for others, and every step I take generates *eudaimonia*."

MAZ HAQUE

THE "FILMY" LIFE OF A BENGALI WESTERN BOY

1. INTRODUCTION

Canada is considered one of the "Golden Nations" to various developing countries in the modern world. Bengalis have been migrating to this country since way before I was even born. The core idea beneath every family's migration is the desire to provide better educational and economic opportunities for the members of that family. Immigrants come from all over the world, including nations struggling during political crises. In the end, everyone comes with the hope of having a better life in Canada. My family also migrated to this country with that hope. However, one cannot determine the future or how this decision may reshape the identity of each member of the family. This essay is a reflection on my journey as a Bengali boy navigating through the Western world and adapting to a different culture. The process itself shaped my identity as I adjusted to life within the Western culture of the Canadian Bengali Diaspora. I use the word "filmy" in the title of the paper to refer to the ways in which I draw connections between my life (and the lives of other Bengali youths) and classic Bollywood television shows and movies. I believe the struggles, suffering, and success of Bengali immigrant families is not too different from what is shown in these Bollywood films. I will be discussing this journey through four major sections. The first will shed some light on my upbringing and the life I left behind in Bangladesh. The second section will describe the migration of my family to British Columbia, Canada, and the struggles that came with the hope of a better life. The third section will discuss the role I had to play and the responsibilities I took on as the eldest son of the family. Finally, in the last section, the importance of maintaining the social image of the youths in British Columbia's Bengali community will be discussed.

2. MY UPBRINGING

For the context of this paper, it is crucial to describe the life I had left behind in Bangladesh prior to migrating with my family to Canada. I was born in December, 1990 in the capital city, Dhaka. Aside from my parents, my maternal grandparents – my *"nana"* and *"nanuma"* – played a huge role in raising me. My mother conceived me at a very young age; however, she successfully completed her education, raised her two children, and went on to become a professor of Library and Information Science at Rajshahi University. Due to her work, she had to move to a different city, and since my sister was finishing Kindergarten, it only made sense for her to move with my mother. My father, on the other hand, was in the import/export business and had to travel a lot to countries like Dubai, Saudi Arabia, and

China. It was best for me to be raised by my grandparents since they lived so close to my birth home. I never felt a lack of guidance or parenthood, and I owe a lot to my grandparents for raising me to be the man I am today. However, from a very young age, I spent most of my free time watching Bollywood and Hollywood movies to keep myself entertained, which is exactly why, as I grew older, I was able to connect my life with movies a lot more.

The last school I attended before migrating to Canada was an "English Medium" boarding school. Going to an "English Medium" school was the norm in Bangladesh for middle to upper class families; every parent desired that their children would grow up and go abroad in the future to further their education. Hence, it was crucial for me to learn proper English and educate myself with a reflection of Western culture while living in Bangladesh.

As this was the beginning of my teenage years, life seemed "cool." Maintaining grades was an easy yet tedious aspect of life, but having friends and doing various activities was more amusing. As a fan of movies such as *Vaastav*, *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, and *Kaho Na Pyaar Hain*, I adopted certain traits that I learned from watching the heroes of these movies. There are various things I did with my friends that I am not proud of, but at that point in time even the wrong things felt so right; it seemed to me that I was living my life to the fullest. However, my parents decided to move me out of boarding school, and told me quite suddenly that we were migrating to Canada. The situation had all the potential to be a travesty for me, yet somehow, I was looking forward to a new and challenging adventure.

3. THE MIGRATION

It was May 9, 2004 when we boarded our flight from Dhaka, Bangladesh on route to Vancouver, Canada. The unknown adventure lying ahead manifested feelings of excitement within me. Coming from Dhaka, Vancouver seemed much more tranquil. I did not hear the constant honking of cars or people chattering all around me. The fresh air of Vancouver gave me the feeling of a Bollywood movie scene – when the hero goes to a beautiful new country to pursue his dreams. My parents' dream was to work towards a better future for their son and daughter. The political uncertainty and constant violence in Bangladesh caused them to believe that migrating to Canada would provide an ideal and secure life. This dream mainly applied to my sister and me, and in order to fulfill this dream my parents confronted the inevitable obstacles that many new immigrants must encounter.

As I mentioned earlier, we lived a happy upper-middle class lifestyle in Dhaka. In Vancouver, our first apartment was a one-bedroom unit for the four of us. Finding a job was the one of the most challenging experiences for my parents. It was clear to me from an early age that employers in Canada do not always consider past accomplishments of immigrants, if they are from a different country. My father struggled to explore potential business opportunities in Vancouver, regardless of his years of experience as a businessman. My mother, on the other hand, would have to go back to school for another degree if she wanted to stay in her field. In the meantime, savings were running thin, hence both of my parents decided to apply to work at a nearby Petro-Canada gas station. I realize now how difficult this was for them, as status and class are core aspects of a Bengali family's identity. As the autumn of 2004 neared, I had to take a test with the Vancouver

School Board to determine the level of my mathematics and English. Based on my score, I was admitted directly into Grade 9, even though I had only completed a quarter of Grade 8 in Bangladesh. However, it was mandatory for me to take an ESL course for a semester. Through this course, I was introduced to a group of international students. Due to my high school being very multicultural, racism and discrimination were issues I did not have to face at a young age. I thrived on studying different cultures and meeting people from different backgrounds and learning their traditions.

Based on my experiences, I found that happiness is a by-product of money. It has been an ongoing debate for countless years whether money does or does not buy happiness. As much as I wish for the old saying to be true, my personal experience speaks otherwise. I believe every immigrant family requires some level of capital to avoid conflict within the family, especially those who come from a middle class standing in their birth country. Based on discussions I have had with friends from immigrant families, most of us are aware of our parents' motivation for deciding to move to North America. As we hit our adolescence, we start to acknowledge the sacrifices our parents make and the motivations behind the sacrifices to succeed in this society. This idea becomes an integral part of shaping our identity. Therefore, from an early age, the idea of finances and savings was entrenched in my brain. My father would always bring me toys from his business trips when we were residing in Bangladesh; in Canada, it was much different. My parents did their best to make sure that we never felt less than other kids around us. Somehow, we adapted to the concept of asking for less. They worked hard in the early years, doing various odd jobs such as working at gas stations, grocery stores, or Subway in order to buy us clothes from our desired brands. My mother would never shop for herself. I noticed this, and it made me become very focused on my education and career goals for the future.

Even when I started to understand the importance of finances and asked for less, it did not necessarily stop the battle of living in Canada as immigrants. I do believe I would not have understood the importance of money and how one should learn to spend it if I were still in Bangladesh. Being an immigrant made me notice and appreciate the little things in life. I mentioned how throughout my life I have been able to draw connections between my life and the movies and the characters within them. In the midst of financial struggle, I used Bollywood movies and shows as a source of positive inspiration. The future is always unpredictable; however, if we observe similarities between our lives and the lives of characters from a show, we not only connect to those characters on a personal level, but we also find inspiration from the paths those characters choose. This inspiration eventually guided me from my present to my future in a positive way.

4. THE ROLE OF THE ELDEST SON

Anyone who is familiar with Bollywood movies or any South Asian drama knows that the eldest son must deal with responsibilities that are determined by society and their families. As a teenager, instead of focusing on bettering myself, I first had to think about being the eldest son and a big brother for my sister. Even though my sister is only two and a half years younger than me, my parents engraved in my mind the idea that whatever I do, my sister will follow in my footsteps. My actions will impact the social image of my family. Until I was 21 years of age, I did not go out on dates with anyone, have any romantic

relationships, or attend any "parties" late at night, since I would always find myself thinking it was my duty to not give my sister a chance to use my "bad" behavior as an excuse for her own. I felt I had to maintain the role of the obedient son/brother of the family. So much of my life revolved around family and culture, which created a rift between me and Western society, where people seemed to live for themselves. For a man that is so involved with culture and family, completely adjusting to the Western independent lifestyle was challenging.

My identity has been significantly shaped by my family. However, it has always been difficult to balance my Western life and my Bengali life due to the two drastically contrasting beliefs of my parents. My father views the world like it is still the 1970s, and a son can never look his father in the eye and tell him he is wrong. During my early teenage years, I would always get involved whenever my parents had arguments, and it did more harm than good. In the end, my father would think his son had become a *"beyadob chele,"* which basically means a "disrespectful boy." If I saw that my mother was not being treated fairly, I would raise my voice against my father. Over the years, I have controlled my passion and anger and realized that no matter how hard I fought or how high I raised my voice, it was not the ideal solution.

The title of this paper refers to my "filmy life" and how I view my relationship with my father. Growing up, some of the movies I watched portrayed the father/son relationship as extremely friendly, and the rest would focus only on the respect and obedience aspects of their relationship. In the movie *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham*, the eldest son must make really hard decisions just to please his father, but there is a point in the movie when he has to put himself first before his family, which ends up causing a rift between father and son. When it came to my own life, I started focusing on finding the middle ground to avoid a possible rift just like in the movie. However, since my father is more traditional minded, no matter how hard I tried he considered himself as the "man of the house"/provider, and believed that I as his son would have to agree with his decisions. My mother's liberal ideologies allowed for open communication between her and me. By contrast, even after turning 27 years of age, I have not had the opportunity to talk to my father about adulthood, issues I may face in life, or even "girl problems." Most conversations I have had with him are based around the concept of money and business. I know I will need to start providing for my family so that he can retire and focus on his business ventures. My mom, on the other hand, suggests that I build my own assets based on the money I earn so that my future is secured. She does not allow me to worry about taking care of my parents once they are old. Even though I will look after them one way or another, my father's traditional mentality differs from my own mentality, and a lot of the difference is due to our migration to Canada. In Bangladesh, often the son inherits the father's business; however, in Western culture everyone needs to learn to stand on their own two feet. As the only son and as an older brother I must still carry myself in such a way that my family can depend on me for both financial and emotional security when needed. At the age of 27, I am still learning and working hard towards keeping a balance. Movies will always depict a fictional story, however when there is a sense of realism in the decision-making process of the characters, I am inspired by it and apply it to my own life.

5. NAVIGATING THROUGH BENGALI SOCIETY IN A WESTERN WORLD

One of the most difficult aspects of living in Canada as a Bengali youth is maintaining a good image of ourselves within Bengali society. There are already a set of rules that Bengali youths should abide by. However, it becomes especially tough when how I live Western life can be determined by my Bengali culture and society. Having to maintain my image in accordance with Bengali cultural expectations has created complications and an imbalance in my Western life.

The ingredients of a proper Bengali are generated from both culture and religion. Cultural and religious traits of a youth are analyzed to determine whether they are a "proper" youth or not. For example, whenever guests would be over at our house, it was mandatory for my sister and me to not only greet the guests, but also spend some time with them. Exam preparation days were exceptions. There were days when I simply would not be in a proper mood to be in front of people, but I still had to go through the meet and greet process of giving my *"Salaam"* to every guest. This kept my parents happy, and preserved my image of being such an obedient boy towards the "aunties" and "uncles" of the society. Once I completed high school and was finally enjoying a summer with my family, the most common question I would get asked was whether I got into the University of British Columbia or not. It was 2008 and Simon Fraser University was a well-established institution. However, when I chose to go to SFU instead of UBC, the society spoke up. My parents had to clear up that I was offered admission into both schools, and I chose SFU. Any youth of my generation who chose to attend any other schools besides UBC would be looked at as someone of lesser intelligence. Students go through grueling times in their senior year of high school, and massive amounts of stress and depression deciding which post-secondary institution they want to attend. Yet within the Bengali community, all that hard work is overlooked if a student does not attend the institution they consider to be the best.

Most of our family friends in Canada are treated like they are our blood relatives, since most parents left their own families and friends behind in Bangladesh. Hence, it is crucial for parents to attend Bengali gatherings we refer to as *dawaats* or *onusthaan*. Similar to meeting and greeting guests if they came to our own house, I would have to comport myself the same way whenever I attended these *dawaats*. It was and still is crucial to keep myself from talking to girls of my age to avoid any potential gossip, as it is considered that a male and female cannot have a friendly conversation without underlying interest. Since Bangladesh is a Muslim-majority country, most people also consider Muslim traditions to be part of Bengali culture. A Bengali girl not only has to worry about being presentable or *"shalin,"* but must also avoid situations where she gets caught speaking to another Bengali boy either during a gathering or out somewhere in public. The ideology of the elders is that before marriage a Bengali girl and a boy should not be seen together in public, even if they are only friends; it is considered taboo. Western culture completely goes against this ideology and the way youths are viewed.

It seems that Bengali elders who come to Canada somehow do not completely conform to Western cultural norms, and view many of these norms as taboo. Since I grew up in British Columbia, I have also attended many Western social gatherings or parties. In Western society, I was not expected to be obedient or follow certain rules to maintain my image. I realized I could be completely myself around my friends without being judged for

who I am. My Western identity did not put limitations on my personality; however, this part of me found it difficult to adjust to Bengali society as I grew older. I always welcomed a good debate no matter who was on the opposing side. In a traditional Bengali society, youths are not eligible to have debates with their elders since they will consider it *"beyadobi,"* or we will simply be told that we are not old or experienced enough to debate on any topic. Most of my Bengali male friends who were raised here not only avoid Bengali gatherings but also do not put much thought into their social image in our community. However, it has always been an issue for me to balance my Western mentality with the Bengali ideologies I have been raised with in order to preserve an ideal image for the sake of my family's reputation.

6. CONCLUSION

Migrating and navigating through Western society is a difficult task for any immigrant family. Bengali youths who were not born into this society face an identity crisis in balancing out their true selves. Our parents expect us to stay loyal to our cultural and religious ideologies; however, Western culture may often create a roadblock in between us and our parents' ideologies. The growing up process is already difficult for many of us since we not only have to understand how to navigate in the Western world, but must also realize the sacrifices our parents are making for to give us a better future and thus try to stay true to our roots. This creates scenarios where we may feel obligated to shape ourselves a certain way that we normally would if we grew up in Bangladesh. As the eldest son in my family, I had to conduct myself in such a way that I inspired my sister to stay on the "right path" and gave my family support and security. I found inspiration in movies where the eldest son must make hard choices as to how they balanced their lifestyle. However, every human being is their own individual, and often these responsibilities come across as very overwhelming for a young adult. Finally, the constant pressure of being the ideal Bengali boy just so society does not speak ill of you creates detachment from Bengali society. There is a detachment from Western society as well when most of our identity is shaped by Bengali culture and expectations. In order to preserve our families' reputation, many of us youths must learn and adapt to the proper ways to interact with the Bengali community, which ultimately creates an identity crisis as we can never be completely Western or Bengali. This constant drama is no less dramatic than scenes from our favourite television shows or movies. Most movies and television shows are fictional, especially the ones made under the Bollywood banner. However, human beings are often able to connect to characters and find realism within these fictional stories, and I was no different. I call my life "filmy" because there was never any lack of drama as I grew up. Characters that fascinated me also inspired me to make better life choices since films would always show the consequences of good and bad decisions. I am proud to be the man I am today all because of my family. Their guidance and sacrifices molded me to become a strong individual, but along this journey there were constant surprises, struggles, and commotion. The concept of dual identities may cause Bengali youths to experience a "filmy" life wherein they must live a double role as both a Western and a Bengali individual.

RAFIA MAHZABIN

THE EVOLUTION OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITY OF A FIRST- GENERATION BENGALI IMMIGRANT

Religion and culture are two of the most prominent influences on the identity of an individual. This paper focuses on the transition of my religious outlook as a Bengali immigrant in Canada. It synthesizes my personal experience of growing up within a South Asian Muslim family and community and finding my true religious identity. I focus especially on the influence of religion on my adaptation to new elements I was introduced to as an immigrant – such as food, attire, and culture – compared and contrasted with the impact it could have had if I started my journey here in Canada as a "non-Muslim," "spiritual," or "atheistic" believer, or a second-generation Bengali Canadian. I then consider the possibility of the contrary – that is, the effects of immigration on religious beliefs and whether this influenced my transition to a religious limbo. I will be using a comparative approach to examine the relationship of immigration and religion from both these angles to form my theory that as first-generation immigrant children or teenagers, we are unable to experience complete religious freedom due to family beliefs and societal norms. Even if an individual grows up agreeing with and following the same religious beliefs as the rest of the family, they are incapable of being transparent about their opinion regarding religion in a Bengali cultural setting. The concept of home as a religious space will also be further analyzed in this paper, and through personal stories and reflections, I will discuss the significance of religion in relation to Bengali immigrant families and their social institutions, workplaces, schools, and more.

"Astagfirullah, astagfirullah, astagfirullah." I uttered this word a thousand times the first time I ever swore in public. This was in my first year as an immigrant in Canada; I was 11 years old and in Grade 6. During lunch hour, I got into a heated conversation with a classmate, and for the first time ever I said the "B" word. It was a new word I had recently learned from watching TV, or perhaps I had picked it up from a conversation I had heard on the street. It was never used in my household; in fact, my parents had a strict "no swearing" rule in the house like most other parents. I was so angry and hurt by my classmate's behaviour that it just came out of my mouth. Instead of clearing the air with the individual whom I had fought with and sworn at, I sought forgiveness from Allah. My devotion to my god came before anything else at the age of 11. As I grew into a teenager, however, my priorities gradually changed and so did my religious outlook.

As a first-generation immigrant, I was brought up in a Bengali Muslim family, practicing the ways of Islam. Children at this stage are introduced to several new elements at school, where we spend the majority of our time. A microcosm of culture, food, languages, and even new religions are some of the many things we experience. As we explore each of these elements, we adapt to new hobbies, new habits, and new favourite

cuisine; some of us even start to dress differently. Similarly, we start to notice new religions and the ways of life practiced under these different religions, which have ultimately shaped me as an individual. In this paper, I would like to further explore and discuss this transition of becoming a Bengali-Canadian youth, and the impact of immigration on religion.

Islam is the largest religion in Bangladesh, and my family have been moderate followers of Islam for generations. As we migrated to Canada, the way we followed this religion has transformed slightly. For example, we were not able to pray five times a day, and during the month of Ramadan we could not fast for 30 days straight. However, we did participate religiously in some of the biggest Islamic celebrations, such as *Eid*. Bangladesh has a very rich and diverse culture which is reflected through art, music, film, and the number of cultural events celebrated across the country. Of the more prominent celebrations, Bengali New Year, *Eid-ul-fitr* and *Eid-ul-adha* are some of the most celebrated events across the world for Bengalis. These events are also promoted by the different Bengali organizations built within foreign countries for the purpose of spreading and preserving Bengali culture.

As a child growing up in this community, it was rather easy for me to learn more about these big celebrations. My parents have always encouraged me to participate as a singer in cultural programs in the community. They have also hosted dinners at home to celebrate these special days with other Bengali families, which gave me more opportunities to learn about these religious or cultural events. What I took away from all these events was that even though we didn't pray five times a day, we were still considered followers of Islam. Even though we did not fast for the whole month of Ramadan, we still celebrated the big *Eid-ul-Fitr* by buying fancy dresses and enjoying a lot of traditional Bengali food. Even though we were not entirely following all the laws of the religion, we followed some extremely important ones, such as "no pork," "no alcohol," and "no provocative dresses for women." As a Bengali Muslim youth, I was a strict follower of all these rules, but these rules only.

At my elementary school, Mount Pleasant (which I attended for two years, in Grade 6 and 7), I forced myself to follow each of these rules very strictly, despite not knowing the clear reasoning behind them. Of course it was illegal for me to consume alcohol at this age, which made it easy to avoid. Pork was also easy to avoid, as I have never really enjoyed the smell of it – or perhaps I was subconsciously nauseated by the smell because it was restricted for us. The rule I was very reluctant to follow was the one dictating how "girls should dress." There are several reasons why I protested.

Islam suggests, "in general, standards of modesty call for a woman to cover her body, particularly her chest." The Quran calls for women to "draw their head-coverings over their chests" (24:30-31), and the Prophet Muhammad instructed believing women to cover their bodies except for their face and hands. Most Muslims interpret this to require head coverings for women. Some Muslim women cover the entire body, including the face and/or hands.

For men, "the minimum amount to be covered is between the navel to below the knee."Like many other Bengali Muslim families, my family did not follow the dress code entirely; however, we were expected to dress in a "decent" or "modest" way. This entailed that we were to dress very close to how we would dress back home. For example, I was asked not to wear dresses that were too short, sleeveless tops, or shorts. This was not a difficult task, as we live in a city like Vancouver, which has lower temperatures for most

months. However, during the summer months, I often wanted to wear summer dresses, which my mom would sometimes purchase for me – with the special request that I not wear them in front of other Bengali families. The reason was gossip, and negative connotations that my mother expected from our family friends or other Bengali community members. In my opinion, Bangladeshi or the subcontinental culture in general does not promote individuality, and youths of my age can often feel burdened by the pressure of culture and religion. It is a very tight-knit culture, where members of the society feel entitled to express their opinions and people tend to seek validation from other members. *"Manush ki bolbe,"* meaning "what would people say," is something I always heard from my mother. Of course, there were no bad intentions behind it, and it was not meant to demean me in any way. However, as a child, what I took away from this whole concept was: a) we are not allowed to dress a certain way because of our religion; and b) we are also not allowed to dress a certain way because we are Bengali. I didn't quite understand which one was more important to abide by, because Islamic standards for modesty are quite different from Bengali culture's standards for modesty. For example, in Bengali culture, showing one's stomach and back while wearing a *saree* is acceptable; by contrast, this would be deeply frowned upon in Islamic culture. Although we continued to celebrate our religious festivals here in Canada over the last 13 years, we also gradually drifted away from all the rules and laws of this religion. From praying a couple of times a week to almost never, from fasting 4-5 times a year to none, from drinking no alcohol to taking sips of wine here and there, from always covering your legs to wearing shorts – everything happened within this span of 13 years for me. This transformation happened gradually as I grew older and adapted to my new environment, with the permission of my family (even as an adult). However, all this is still disapproved of by Bengali Muslim society.

My fear gradually transitioned from fear of a higher power to fear of disapproval from members of the society. From a very young age, there was an inner struggle between a young Bengali, Muslim, immigrant girl and a girl trying to assimilate with the culture here and find her individual voice. There were so many roles to choose from, yet we were never truly given the opportunity to choose how we wanted to live our lives individually. It was either family or the society or religion dictating the formation of our identity. To elaborate more on the *"manush ki bolbe"* theme, I once asked my parents what would happen if I married a Caucasian Muslim man – if they would accept him. In response to my question, they implied that it was not okay to marry outside my race because I would not be able to adjust to my husband's culture and vice versa. In addition, our families would have nothing in common to bond over. If I had simply rephrased my question – "What if I married a Caucasian man?" – the answer would perhaps have been that it is against our religion to marry someone outside of our religion. As a Bengali person living in Bangladesh, this is often not an issue even to be considered because of the limited number of foreigners living in our country. In the case of Bengalis, I personally have experienced the situation to be very challenging as we grow up in a multicultural community. As a 12- or 13-year-old, when I was starting to develop emotions for another person, the first thing I personally remember considering was this individual's religion and race. As I grew older and made male friends who were not Muslim or Bengali, I would subconsciously restrict myself from feeling any attraction towards them, a restraint that I would not impose in the case of a boy who was both Bengali and practiced Islam. Could this possibly be because of the way I was brought up? Or perhaps it was due to the fear of people talking: *"manush ki bolbe?"* This is a

question I cannot answer, as it goes way beyond my expertise, but if I had to guess, I would say it was because I was always scared of disappointing my family, my family friends, and the Bengali community, because their expectation has always been that I would marry into another Muslim Bengali family. What I have realized now as an adult is that both of these characteristics – being Bengali and Muslim – do not act as that much of a restraint for me anymore as I don't consider myself to be an ordinary follower of Islam, nor do I only bond with people of my own race.

Diaspora always has an effect on religious views and sentiments; however, for every individual it is a unique experience. For myself, it was definitely on the more challenging side, yet I don't believe I could have become the person I am today without facing these challenges. For example, religion for my family and me has been a bonding element. It was the magnet that attracted other Bengali Muslims living in Vancouver and helped form relationships that eventually bloomed into great friendships. Douglas S. Massey and Monica Espinoza Higgins (2011) state that "whatever one's view, as religion came to be accepted as an important mediator between immigrants and society, sociologists began once more to incorporate it into their thinking and models" (1372). Hagan and Ebaugh (2003) offered concrete empirical examples of how religion was used instrumentally by immigrants to advance their interests in the United States, and Hirschman (2004) argued that religion offered immigrants three critical benefits: refuge, resources, and respect. This is exactly what religion did for us in Canada; it was a way for us to connect with people here in the new world, but also a way for us to stay connected to the world we left behind back home.

I have spent 11 years of my life in Bangladesh and 13 years here in Canada. I have experienced the culture and religion in both countries. Because I spent such a significant amount of time in Bangladesh, my attachment to all these elements was much stronger compared to those who left Bangladesh right after birth or were born abroad. When I first came to Canada, this attachment certainly made it difficult for me to assimilate into the new society. I had to be aware of the food I was eating and the clothes I was wearing, and make sure not to do things that are considered *"gunah,"* or sins. This resulted in me being very aware of my surroundings, always thinking about my actions and their consequences from a very young age. As I developed into a teenager, religion to me started to become a bit more abstract because of the lack of knowledge and practice. This metamorphosis was a slow process due to the society constantly reminding me of my identity as a Bengali Muslim girl. It is also considered impolite for a teenager in our culture to express his or her opinion if it contests the opinion of the elders. Religion especially is a very sensitive topic to question elders about. This change is not because of how my parents treated me, as they have always supported all my rational and irrational decisions and opinions. However, I was always asked to be considerate of the rest of the community members who were directly or indirectly related to my family. Because of this, I often felt trapped in my own cultural and religious limbo that I couldn't seem to get out of.

Either way, I came to the conclusion as an adult that my experience of finding my true identity involved several stages of negotiation with myself and others. In my mind, the perfect analogy for religion would be a Rorschach inkblot test. We see what we want to see subconsciously because of our upbringing, extraneous influences such as culture and friends, or even life-altering moments. The same girl who was afraid of swearing and prayed to god for forgiveness now feels more or less detached from an Islamic identity. Western culture preaches freedom of opinion and speech, and over the last 13 years

certain aspects of it got ingrained into my family environment. Perhaps this melting pot of influence made my parents respect my choices and opinions, for which I am eternally grateful.

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SESSSION 7

Concurrent Round Table Forum

ROUNDTABLE I: Migration, Settlement Experience and Community Service in Greater Vancouver

ROUNDTABLE II: Multiculturalism, Activism, and Social Justice

SANZIDA HABIB

ROUNDTABLE I: MIGRATION, SETTLEMENT EXPERIENCE AND COMMUNITY SERVICE IN GREATER VANCOUVER

1. OUTLINE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE ROUNDTABLE

The Canada 150 Conference on Migration of Bengalis attempted to document the past and present of Bengalis in Canada – their migration and settlement patterns and their contributions to the Canadian mosaic and multiculturalism. The conference also tried to shape the future of Bengali Canadians by compiling information, insights and reflections not only from Bengali academics and scholars but also from community members and residents of Greater Vancouver. The general purpose of the roundtable session was to engage community members from diverse professional backgrounds in a discussion on the topic at hand, and to hear their personal stories related to migration and settlement experience. The more specific objectives of this roundtable were as follows:

- To discuss and document the history and settlement patterns of Bengali migrants.
- To generate dialogue related to migration experience, and to the challenges and achievements of the Bengali community in Greater Vancouver.
- To understand the role of settlement services and community organizations in the settlement process of local Bengalis.

The roundtable was planned, designed and moderated by the author of this report. Participants were invited by the author, and the objectives and expected outcomes of the session were explained to them. They were also emailed a few written questions to ponder in preparation for the discussion. Participants were asked to share their personal experience and opinions, and to engage in conversation about the challenges of migration, including: finding employment; family life and raising children; coping strategies and contributions to Canadian society; and the role of settlement or community organizations in the settlement and inclusion of Bengali migrants. At the table, rather than posing the exact questions shared beforehand, the moderator kept the discussion unstructured and free-flowing to ensure open dialogue. The discussion was recorded in writing by two appointed note-takers. Participants were assured that their identities would not be disclosed in the written report, and that the discussion would be summarized as common themes relating to the experiences of Bengali migrants in Greater Vancouver.

2. PARTICIPANTS

A total of 12 community members participated in the roundtable. All except one were of Bangladeshi origin (one was from West Bengal, India) and only one was born outside of Canada. A few of the participants had migrated from a different country such as the UK or

the USA, and a few had landed previously in provinces other than British Columbia. There were three community and settlement service providers, a couple of engineers and a couple of retired government officials; the rest came from other professional and service backgrounds. Most of the participants had been in Canada for over five years, though there were a few newcomers at the table. The earliest year of migration among participants was reported to be 1964. All except one were of Muslim faith. All but one could speak fluently in Bengali; however, the discussion took place in English since that was the preferred language.

3. MAJOR THEMES OF THE DISCUSSION

The common themes related to migration and life in Canada as discussed at this table ranged from issues of identity to discrimination and struggles including lack of proper accreditation and un/der/employment, and barriers to becoming part of mainstream Canadian society and culture. Some coping strategies and ways out were also discussed. The following broad themes emerged during the lively discussion:

What's in a Name?

According to the lived experience of a veteran member who migrated to Canada in the mid-1960s, people used to get hired in good faith without having to display original documents or certificates in those days. In addition, changing names and related legal documents was easier compared to current procedures. The issue of name changes led to a vibrant discussion about identity and names.

While the most common reason for name changes in Canada is a change in marital status, a few Bengalis at the table said they often contemplated changing their names due to the challenges and often discrimination they faced due to the cultural origin and religious beliefs reflected in their names. One person shared his experience of having a friend suggest that he change his original name and take a French or English name, since the chance of getting called for a job interview was astonishingly lower in the French-speaking province of Quebec if one had a native Bengali name. Several other participants shared similar concerns and challenges, while a few mentioned the nuisance they suffered in their everyday lives due to the fact that their Bengali names were difficult for most Canadians to pronounce. They often had to shorten their original name or adapt it to a more Anglo-sounding name to avoid embarrassment in public spaces. Raising another serious issue related to names, participants discussed how having a name that reflects religious beliefs could often translate into hours of excessive security checks before they were able to board a flight.

In fact, discrimination against job applicants based on ethnic-sounding or foreign names is well researched and documented. For example, a *Globe and Mail* report (Immen 2011) stated that even ethnic minority immigrants raised and educated in Canada could be at a disadvantage in terms of job hunting solely because of their foreign-sounding names. One person at the table pointed out that in order to address this problem, a new policy has been proposed in Canada to remove identifying details such as name and gender from resumes so that the hiring process can be anonymous and free from conscious and unconscious biases of employers and hiring committees. According to *CBC News* (Common 2016), Liberal MP Ahmed Hussen recently stood up in Parliament to suggest that the

federal government adopt Britain's policy of name-blind recruitment for public services. Such steps may reduce discrimination against ethnic minority applicants based on names that reflect ethnicity and religious beliefs.

Employment and Inclusion Barriers

Meaningful and suitable employment is the most important vehicle to successful settlement; yet many newcomers encounter challenges in finding jobs commensurate with their qualifications and caliber. Participants at the table talked about such barriers and impediments, saying that lack of "Canadian experience" is an extra hurdle for newcomers, who have to prove themselves to be many times better than their Canadian counterparts because most mainstream employers are suspicious of newcomers and instead want to hire people from the same or similar cultures as themselves. Even those who upgrade their skills to gain Canadian certification and exposure still struggle in the employment sector because employers tend to prefer those that are more similar to themselves.

It was pointed out that employers often view equivalency exams for professional degrees as appropriate for educational institutions, but not fitting for the hiring process. Furthermore, regulations and laws related to certain professions often vary between provinces and territories, and therefore equivalency exams taken in one province may not be valid in another. This creates extra challenges for professional immigrants, especially because certain provinces may have more job opportunities than others but moving to those provinces may require retaking those exams to acquire a professional license. Another issue is communication skills, which many Bengali immigrants tend to lack or ignore, while Canadian employers make hiring decisions based on candidates' interpersonal and communication skills. As a result, many Bengali professionals find it hard to obtain a professional job despite their excellent hard skills and qualifications. Thus there is a big disconnect between the Canadian immigration system and Canadian employers' hiring policies and practices; people that are accepted into Canada as skilled immigrants for their specific credentials do not actually find jobs in their respective fields in Canada.

Intersecting Barriers

It was reflected in the discussion that some Bengali immigrants face more intersecting challenges than others. It is usually more difficult to immigrate and settle at an older age, especially with larger families. Older adults, especially women with children, may have to juggle work, family and parenting issues. They may find it hard to go back to study and upgrade their skills in Canada when they have to prioritize taking care of their family and their children's education. On the other hand, younger and single immigrants may face fewer barriers and time constraints related to settlement and integration, as they can focus on retraining themselves to find a decent job. However, it was also pointed out that the value and support women can and do bring to families must be recognized. Children in immigrant families are more likely to be successful when mothers do well in terms of employment and stress management. Therefore, the Canadian government also needs to support immigrant women and families.

Lack of Community Support

There was some dialogue about the lack of community support for Bengali newcomers. In particular, many newcomers sense a lack of willingness on the part of professional Bengalis

who have been successful in Canada to help fellow Bengalis. Rather, successful Bengalis seem to dissociate themselves from the community. All the participants at the table felt that the Bengali community needs to be more supportive to each other to overcome the stigma and embarrassment around struggling with employment or doing survival jobs. Moreover, Bengalis should try to build connections in the local Canadian community, mingle with their neighbors from different cultures and be part of the multicultural community. The majority of Bengali immigrants are unaware of the free community resources and services available to provide settlement support for newcomers. Free booklets with such information are handed out to newcomers at the airports upon their arrival to Canada. However, most people do not even read or use those booklets, as the settlement service providers at the table had noticed.

An example of a success story was shared to show that when Bengalis come together to change systems through organized action and lobbying the government and regulatory bodies, they can move mountains. The Association of Professional Engineers (APE) was unaware that training in Bangladesh was at the same level as that in Canada, and required Bangladeshi engineers to take additional academic courses and learn materials they had already learned in Bangladesh. Bangladeshi engineers overcame this problem by organizing themselves and inviting the Association for seminars. This made the APE realize that Bangladeshi engineers were already trained and knowledgeable in the areas they were asked to take courses in. Now they are no longer required to take those extra courses.

Coping Strategies for Success

Participants shared their own survival strategies and offered various suggestions and tips for newcomers and immigrants to be successful in Canada:

- Success depends on strength of conviction and the ability to face challenges and be adaptable, according to one participant. Another participant thought newcomers need to be prepared to take hard knocks. Some newcomers tend to see themselves in terms of who they were in their home countries and do not want to accept the current reality they are facing. They need to change this mindset and leave their "baggage" behind.
- Flexibility is important. For example, an engineer who specialized in a highly competitive area was initially successful in finding a job, but was ultimately laid off. He pursued additional training in another less prestigious area of engineering in which he had some experience, and eventually became very successful working in that field.
- A positive attitude is a must to survive and be successful. One of the participants shared his own story, saying that when he first immigrated, he knocked on the doors of neighbors and employers telling them that he had a degree in a certain field and was looking for a job. Later, however, he realized that skills are more important and appealing to employers than degrees. He started working in a survival job, but gained valuable insights into how Canadian society and systems work.
- People should not shy away from asking for help from neighbors and other people around them. One can only benefit by asking people for help with finding a job. In the worst possible scenario, one might get rejected. Yet people in Canada are usually

helpful, and they often refer anyone in need of assistance to someone they think would be able to help if they cannot be of help themselves.

- Volunteering can be extremely helpful in gaining Canadian experience and building networks. Sometimes volunteer service leads to paid employment, as it gives the organization a chance to see what skills someone has to offer.
- Improving communication and spoken English language skills is vital. Volunteering for organizations and socializing with non-Bengali or multicultural neighbors and communities can help in this regard. While mixing with Bengalis can be comforting, limiting interactions to only Bengalis can create barriers to getting out of ethnic/job ghettos.
- Immigrants need to become familiar with the Canadian system. Bengali newcomers tend to rely heavily on their friends and fellow Bengalis for information, employment and settlement support. This can lead to receiving wrong information and can result in confusion and mistrust. It is better to find professional support, such as proper employment counseling. A lot of information is available on the internet as well, and a simple Google search can help locate employment counseling and other settlement services.
- Long-time residents and successful professionals need to share success stories of how they reached where they are now. They need to inspire and support other Bengalis, especially newcomers.
- Online spaces, social media outlets and modern technologies should be used to build networks and support groups for newcomers. Facebook groups can be helpful; for example, there is a Facebook group for prospective Bangladeshi students in Canadian Universities. Similar virtual support groups can be formed for newcomer professionals.

4. CONCLUSION

The Canada 150 Conference on Migration of Bengalis aimed to document the history, settlement procedure and contributions of Bengali migrants in Canada. The roundtable discussion forum made an attempt to include the participation and voices of local Bengali community members in Greater Vancouver in this dialogue and documentation process. The invited participants engaged in an enthusiastic discussion on the topic and shared their experiences of migration, including their settlement challenges as well as their successes. They were pleased to be part of this conversation and conference, and hoped that their voices would be useful not only in terms of collecting and reporting their lived experiences, but also in shaping improved policies, programs and services for future newcomers, especially Bengali immigrants in Canada.

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SUPRIYA BHATTACHARYYA

ROUND TABLE II: MULTICULTURALISM, ACTIVISM, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

It is common knowledge among the Bengali community of the Lower Mainland that Bengali settlement in British Columbia started in the 1960s. From the 1960s to the turn of the century, the Bengali community did not grow much, and as a result it was a tight-knit community. At the turn of the century, the number of Bengali immigrants started to grow. Currently, the Lower Mainland boasts two registered Bengali cultural societies, the combined membership of which totals approximately 175 households. Moreover, there are Bengalis in the Lower Mainland who do not belong to either of these two organizations, and others scattered throughout British Columbia.

1. PARTICIPANTS

Against this backdrop, a group of 10 Bengalis were invited to a round table discussion on the second day of a two-day conference centred on the migration of Bengalis to British Colombia. All participants in this group are Bengalis from India. Demographic details of this group are as follows:

Total Number of Participants: 10
Female: 5 | *Male:* 5
Age Range: 32 – 57
Female: 32 – 42
Male: 39 – 57
Year of Arrival in Canada: 2007 – 2018
Language Skill: *Bengali, Hindi and English*: 10
Marathi: 2 | *German:* 1 | *Urdu:* 1
Religion: *Hindu:* 6 | *Agnostic:* 3

All but two of these participants can be defined as part of a nuclear family. Chart 1 illustrates the number of dependent children per household, and chart 2 shows their level of education indicating that the participants had a minimum of Bachelor's degree.

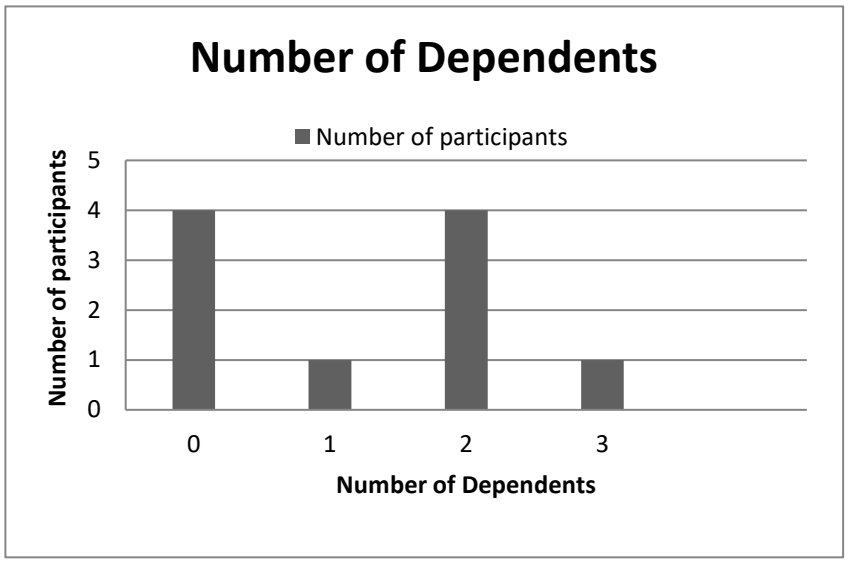


Chart 1: Number of dependents in the families of the participants

The 10 participants were a group of highly educated professionals. Seven out of ten participants had received their education in India. In this Indian-educated group, two had taken some executive development courses abroad. Except for one, all were employed in their respective fields of training.

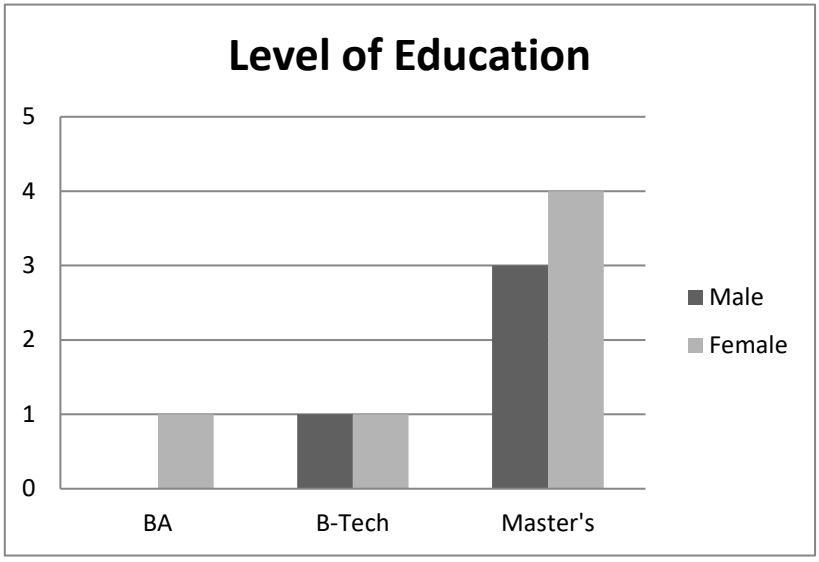


Chart 2: Level of Education among the participants

Though the title of the round table forum specifically states multiculturalism, activism, and social justice as the subjects under discussion, the participants were not limited in their topics. Rather, they engaged in an overarching discussion about their personal stories of migration and their experiences in Canada.

2. SUMMARY OF THE FORUM

Discussion began with the reason for participants' migration to Canada, which mainly presented as several individual reasons indirectly tied to Canada's multiculturalism policy. None of the participants were under any compulsion to leave India. Six participants out of ten had lived outside of India prior to moving to Canada. Their decision to move out of India and eventually settle in British Columbia was an effect of globalization. The rationale for choosing Canada varied from one person to another. One participant chose to immigrate to Canada from Germany because, as an only son/child, he was responsible for taking care of his parents who lived in India but would eventually live with their only child as tradition prescribes. Canada's immigration laws accommodated this need, thus he chose to move to Canada. Being in the IT sector and having worked in a Western country, his transition to Canada was smooth. Another participant who was also living in a European country prior to immigrating to Canada said that he did his research and found out that his credentials would be accepted on a par with the Canadian standards in his field, and only then did he decide to migrate. The most noteworthy reason for choosing to migrate to Canada was expressed by a member who came as a spouse; their decision to immigrate here was Canada's same sex marriage policy. This participant's story has the underpinnings of social activism, as Indian society in general is still very closed-minded when it comes to the LGBTQ+ community. By leaving that country and mindset and choosing Canada as their destination, this couple crossed many boundaries, allowing for new freedoms. The fact that this person sat with other fellow Bengalis and openly stated the reason for their migration is also noteworthy.

As mentioned earlier, modern Bengali migration to BC began in the 1960s. In the late 1970s, the first registered Bengali cultural society, the Lower Mainland Bengali Cultural Society, was established. It remains an active and growing society to date. There is a second Bengali cultural society that formed around 2005, known as Utsab. Both these societies have a very similar calendar of events, and these events not only provide Bengali members with the opportunity to celebrate some of their ethnic festivities, but also function as networking hubs for Bengalis to connect with each other.

It is a mark of a quintessentially multicultural society for there to be a number of cultural societies within an immigrant community. Most often, these societies are formed by the first group of immigrants from that ethnic community, and reflect the needs and culture of that time. However, culture is never static, and the problem with this type of ethnic cultural societies is that often they tend to be frozen in time – a snapshot of the time of the founders who formed these societies. Meanwhile, the culture in their home country continues to evolve.

Most of the participants in this round table discussion are younger than the first registered Bengali cultural society of BC. Through the discussion, it became evident that their generation has different expectations and ideas related to belonging to a cultural society. One participant expressed that though she was very happy to find out about the society when she first came to Vancouver, she felt daunted by what she perceived as the society's puritanical approach to preserving the Bengali language when she attended her first event. Whether this society does or does not hold this view is not the issue here, but the fact that she perceived this is significant and has two prongs to it. The first is that, being a Bengali, this participant felt intimidated among Bengalis whom she perceived as puritans.

This demonstrates the cultural shift among Bengalis in India. Secondly, the fact that she brought this issue to everyone's attention is an example of social activism, albeit within her own ethnic group.

Other participants expressed the need for a better networking system to support newcomers to the city/country. These participants are looking at the cultural society as a system which should serve beyond its current mission, which is to provide a platform to showcase arts and celebrate festivals. They want these associations to provide systematic support to newcomers. For example, they saw the need to have a community inventory of whom to connect with for what reason – such as talking to parents who have raised children here when they need to understand the dynamics of raising children in a foreign land. Once again, this reflects how culture is evolving. When the cultural society was formed by the first wave of Bengali immigrants, their needs were different. Forming a cultural society to maintain their cultural heritage was first and foremost among their goals. The small number of members knew each other, and each was aware of what the other families were going through. Since they were the first wave of Bengalis, they did not have the option to look up to someone else for advice. They were the trailblazers. On the other hand, recent arrivals are coming to this city where an established and functional Bengali cultural society already exists. To them, the society is the representative of the Bengali community within the Lower Mainland. They know what it is currently, but they are asking what more it can do. This was evident during the discussion about the plight of Canada's Aboriginal people, and the truth and reconciliation process. Each participant was forthcoming in saying that they are learning about the country's history slowly. Some mentioned that they are learning from their children's history textbooks. They showed a good understanding of the plight of the Indigenous peoples of Canada, and suggested that the government should make the effort to have all newcomers know the history of the country's First Nations. One participant suggested the Bengali cultural societies could play a role in bringing the Bengali community and the Aboriginal community closer by inviting members of local First Nations communities to our cultural events. This seemingly ordinary suggestion incorporates multiculturalism, social justice, and activism.

Bengalis from India are historically known to be proponents of social justice. Though the round table discussion did not overtly address the issue of social justice in Canada, this issue surfaced incognito several times during discussion of different topics. The oldest member in this group was 57 years old, and had migrated when he was in his early fifties. Prior to coming to Canada, he lived outside of India for many years and worked for a multi-national company where he held a senior position. Upon his arrival in Canada, he faced tremendous difficulty in finding a job. He applied for 300 jobs, but prospective employers made it clear that they wanted a person with Canadian experience. Eventually he did find employment, but at a much lower level. The fact that he had 20 years' experience working for a foreign oil company did not seem to matter to the Canadian employers. The frustration felt by this participant is not that unusual among the recent immigrants in Canada. The ever perplexing question remains: if the newcomer is not given a job, then how will they gain Canadian experience? Listening to this participant's plight, the other participants expressed that though they are employed in the field of their training, they would have been at a higher position had they lived in India.

A female participant shared her experience at her workplace in Canada. She worked on a team where all the other members belonged to a particular ethnic group and most of

them were men. She too had worked in different countries outside of India. However, she sensed resistance from the members of her team here. She felt that just because she was female and from India, the team members had difficulty accepting her authority over them. She had never faced this situation anywhere before. This could point to an alarming issue, as Canada is a country of immigrants and it is necessary that the different ethnic groups that create the mosaic of the society respect and understand each other regardless of race, gender, or culture.

3. CONCLUSION

Attracted by the rhetoric of multiculturalism in Canada, young Bengali immigrants from India are aspiring to carve out a distinct identity for themselves, both professionally and culturally. Participants did not face overt racism during their settlement process, but became aware of undercurrents based on preconceived biases at their workplaces. Though they cannot be labeled as activists, they demonstrated an innate sense of social justice when some of them described the obstacles they faced during the job search or at their workplaces. While maintaining their cultural identity by actively getting involved with the local Bengali cultural societies, this group of people did not by any means limit their involvement in Canadian society at large. Four of them owned and operated their own successful businesses. All of them were becoming aware of Canada's Aboriginal peoples' history, and the truth and reconciliation process. The fact that one member among the ten suggested that the local Bengali cultural societies should invite members of local First Nations communities to their functions captures the essence of multiculturalism that Canada stands for.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1:
MUSTAFA CHOWDHURY: MY REFLECTIONS ON THE CONFERENCE

Appendix 2:
CONFERENCE PROGRAM

Appendix 1:

MUSTAFA CHOWDHURY

MY REFLECTIONS ON THE CONFERENCE

ABOUT THE CONFERENCE

My participation at last week's (Sept. 16-17, 2017) two-day conference entitled *Canada 150 Conference on the Migration of Bengalis to British Columbia* and organized by Professor Habiba Zaman (SFU) and Dr. Sanzida Habib (Centre for India and South Asia Research) at UBC was one of the highlights of my recent professional activity. Having brought together a large number of scholars, artists, and community members to examine and document the history, settlement patterns, and contributions of Bengali Canadians (originating from Bangladesh and India's West Bengal, now called Bangla), the conference was a great success, to put it succinctly.

Seeing the dearth of primary immigration records of the migration patterns of Bengali Canadians, Professor Zaman took special initiative to arrange a conference that would address this issue in particular as well as a host of other associated issues and challenges faced by this particular segment of the Canadian population. Having participated in the conference, I have no hesitation in stating that it met the first set of Professor Zaman's expectations – namely, to gather knowledge about the Bengali population whose specific history and circumstances within Canada have thus far been overlooked by the country's historical establishment.

In their speeches, both keynote speakers – Dr. Tania Das Gupta and Dr. C. Emdad Haque – touched on the issues surrounding the theme of the conference in a way that stunned the audience, who were absolutely spellbound; sitting in silence in which you could have heard a pin drop, the attendees listened to the keynote speakers' presentations, which were rich with historical data and fascinating anecdotes based on primary sources. Through their research work, both speakers clearly demonstrated their deep knowledge and understanding of the subject at hand. Consequently, they aroused profound interest among the participants and attendees, who interacted with the speakers during the Q&A session with discernibly eager avidity.

The presentations by all other designated speakers/presenters, who included both first- and second-generation Canadian Bengalis, also generated enthusiasm among the attendees to the point that there were numerous follow-up questions. All of the narratives were superb, with presenters demonstrating a keen sense of what would be interesting to their audience. In discussing the issues of identity formation, cultural adaptation, and the retention of family values *vis-à-vis* Canadian core values, some of the second-generation Canadian Bengalis were utterly frank in demonstrating the piercing pathos of the situation.

As a presenter and as an audience member for the other presenters, I consider myself fortunate to have been a part of this conference, which will be a part of the historiography of the migration of the Bengalis in Canada. We owe a debt of gratitude to Professor Zaman for her vision and readiness to document a part of Canada's demographic and social history in which there currently exists a large gap.

MY COMMENTS, QUESTIONS, AND OBSERVATIONS

How are Bengali Canadians, having constructed and selected their notion of *who they are,* practicing their ideologies in their country of adoption (or in their country of birth, as is the case with second-generation Canadians of Bengali origin)?

On the second day of the conference, it became clear how the second-generation Canadians of Bengali origin select, negotiate, and communicate the intersectionalities of their identity in Canada. Simply put: *how do they go about defining their multiple identities?*

One of the greatest problems I see in this area is the non-availability of migration/immigration data which Professor Zaman had already talked about. In fact, it is specifically for this reason that she had taken the initiative to organize this conference. Historically speaking, all Bengalis who came to Canada prior to 1947 came with an Indian passport. In the immigration records, there was no breakdown by province (such as West Bengal) or language (such as Bengali-speaking). Following the creation of Pakistan, Bengalis of East Pakistan who came to Canada had entered as *Pakistanis* (with no breakdown of linguistic background, such as Bengalis, or geographic background, such as East or West Pakistan). In fact, it is only from 1972 onwards that we have a record of the arrival of Bangladeshis in Canada. The Bengalis from West Bengal still come with an Indian passport, and Canadian immigration records designate them as *Indians* as opposed to Bengali-speaking Indians. This means that past immigrations records now in the archives do not assist us in any way in determining the number of Bengali-speaking immigrants arriving from India or Pakistan. The present Canadian Census is the only source for determining the current number of Bengalis in Canada since the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. The present migration of Bengalis from India (or the State of Bangla, formerly West Bengal) is problematic since, as mentioned, there is no data under the category *Bengalis.*

In tracing the history of and reasons for migration, it is necessary to look into the fact of immigration to Canada by Bengalis of West Bengal or Bangladesh through another lens. Reasons for migration include emigration for economic gain and flight to Canada to escape political and religious persecution. The *"push/pull"* concept may be used to explain in part *why* Bangladeshis immigrate to Canada in large numbers – how they are *pulled* to Canada by the lure of a higher standard of living, and by employment and educational opportunities. This is something that many presenters talked about. This discussion may assist us in determining the reason for migration, but not the number of Bengali-speaking migrants from India and Pakistan. For my forthcoming book entitled *Canada's Role in the Emergence of Bangladesh,* I have conducted extensive research on the migration of Pakistanis (Bengalis and non-Bengalis) since 1947. I may therefore be able to assist the research team in this matter.

Professor Zaman may *explore the possibility of creating a taskforce to look into collecting immigration data from those who are still around.* This may be possible by

working with families that still have the memories of their senior members – about their arrival, struggles, and subsequent settlement. The *oral history project* method is a common historical research method that may assist us in creating a database for the future. The sooner this is done, the easier it will be for all of us to collect documentation for future historical research in the area of Bengalis' migration to Canada.

One important point that became clear from the presentations by the second-generation Canadians of Bengali origin is how the social and political identity of individuals can be changed, and how people can adjust their identity in accordance with their situation. Having listened attentively to the presentations of a few second-generation Bengali Canadians, I came away with the message that *ethnicity is something that is being negotiated and constructed in everyday living*. In a changed situation, some of the common characteristics of an ethnic identity that may be relevant in some places may not be appropriate in other places. Through a follow-up dialogue with the second-generation Bengali Canadians, Professor Zaman can engage them in studying *how they select the strategies to find some common characteristics with other persons or groups* and *how they establish solidarity with some people and distinguish themselves from others.*

Since there was quite a bit of discussion on the *challenges faced by Bengali immigrants,* it would be necessary to focus in on the exact nature of the barriers and the ways in which these are being overcome. It is gratifying to hear how some professionals have been addressing this and assisting many other professionals by steering them along the fastest path to upgrading their education and obtaining equivalencies. Further discourse may assist us in obtaining a fuller understanding of the problem of *foreign credential recognition* and recognition of "*portable skills"* (i.e., skills that may be used in Canada regardless of where they were picked up and honed) across the country.

Again, although the second-generation Bengali Canadians who have studied in Canada generally don't face this problem, they often face subtle and covert racial or systemic discrimination. Well-structured dialogue with the second-generation Bengalis, facilitated by experts in the field, would generate some fruitful discussion on this problem. The outcome of their discussions may be shared with others to incorporate into their job-search strategy.

There was quite a bit of discussion related to the importance of *the retention of language, culture, and religion* that is evident in the ways in which Bengali Canadians have formed various associations and groups to assert their *collective identity* as Canadians of Bengali origin. Needless to say, the two-day conference merely pointed out the gravity of this matter. Research must be undertaken in this area involving Bengalis (both first- and second-generation) to conduct a comprehensive study of this phenomenon.

Since immigrants, whether first-, second-, or even third-generation Bengalis, are *always seen as "immigrants"* simply due to the colour of their skin, it is imperative to conduct studies on how a mainstream Canadian *perceives* a visible minority Canadian. *Perception,* regardless of other facts, continues to play a vital role in the eyes of the mainstream Canadians who continue to see the children and grandchildren of immigrants as "*immigrants."* This is not the case with the Caucasian immigrants whose children and grandchildren are instantly seen as members of the *mainstream Canadian* group; no questions are ever asked about their country of origin. Given that this will continue to *exist perpetually* in people's minds, it is essential that research be undertaken to determine *how a harmonious racial relationship could be established* among Caucasian and non-Caucasian

Canadians. Those who presented their papers from a diverse point of view may again be engaged to conduct further research on the *phenomenon of race, ethnicity, and identity* in order to enhance our understanding of race and race-related phenomena.

Another important fact worth mentioning that became evident during the two-day conference is the fact that Bengali Canadians, despite all odds and insurmountable difficulties, devote their time to doing various types of *voluntary* work. Their *determination to do voluntary work* remains paramount. Many presenters mentioned how Bengali Canadians, regardless of their age, juggle their schedules and manage to find some time to volunteer. Both first- and second-generation Bengalis clearly stated in their presentations the phenomenon of *volunteerism* that is inherent in their minds. This area of their lives may be looked at by researchers to gain an expanded understanding of their *cumulative pride, energy, and enterprise* and incorporated to demonstrate their ongoing contribution to Canada, the country they call "home." A narrative history of this phenomenon would be one way to counter negative stereotypes regarding visible minorities, who would then be seen as contributors to Canada's pluralism.

The next area that may be explored is the area of accomplishment and tangible progress that has been made by Canadians of Bengali origin. These narratives may be placed under the heading of *success stories – how Bengali Canadians are contributing to Canada in their respective field of endeavours.* There were references to the accomplishments of Bengalis in several fields: education and teaching, medicine, law, business enterprise, management, the hospitality industry, provincial civil service, and federal public service. Over the years, on numerous occasions, many of Bengali Canadians have received *recognition awards* from their workplaces. Taking this fact into account, a historical narrative may be produced to demonstrate *how Bengalis are a part of the Canadian mosaic* and *how they are recognized for their outstanding achievements.* Such demonstration of the level of success and prominence of Bengali Canadians may also be a *source of inspiration* for the next generation of Bengalis, allowing the older generation to serve as "role models" for members of the younger generation who are pursuing their own career goals. In fact, I believe this will form a part of the historical narrative of the migration of Bengalis and their settlement and subsequent contribution to Canada. Since this would be based on authentic history, it would also constitute the diasporic historiography for future research in the area of Bengali Canadians.

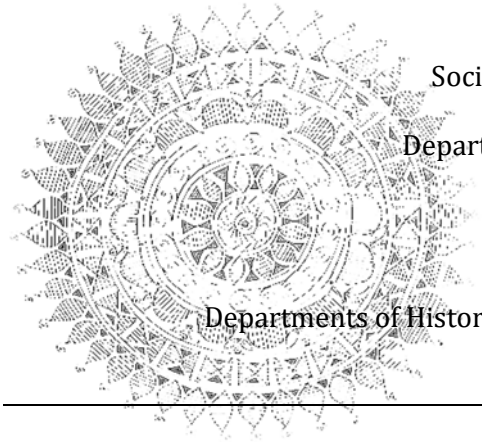
Personally, I would consider myself privileged if, in any way, I am given an opportunity to engage myself in documenting the history and contribution of Bengali Canadians in this historical narrative.

Appendix 2

CONFERENCE PROGRAM

CANADA 150 CONFERENCE ON MIGRATION OF BENGALIS

Saturday 16 September – Sunday 17 September 2017



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Centre for India and South Asia Research (CISAR), UBC
Dr. Hari Sharma Foundation
David Lam Centre, SFU
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Departments of History, Sociology and Anthropology, and International Studies, SFU
An anonymous donor

DAY 1: Saturday/16 September

Simon Fraser University, Vancouver Campus
515 West Hastings, Harbour Centre, Room 7000

8:30 am – 9:30 am: REGISTRATION with light BREAKFAST

9:30 am – 9:50 am: OPENING
Welcome Remarks: Habiba Zaman and Sanzida Habib
Opening Remarks: Jane Pulkingham, FASS Dean, SFU

9:50 am – 10:35 am: SESSION 1
Session Chair: Lara Campbell
Keynote Speech
Tania Das Gupta "'Are You a Bengali or Are You an Indian?' Bengalis in Canada"

10:35 am – 10:45 am: BREAK

10:45 am – 12:30 pm: SESSION 2
Migration and Settlement of Bengalis: History, Demography, Religion, and Health Issues
Session Chair: John Harriss
Bidisha Ray "Migration of Bengalis to Canada: An Historical Account"
Supriya Bhattacharya "Oral History of Bengali Immigrants in BC: 1960 – 2010"
Khaleda Banu "In Pursuit of Dreams"
Sanzida Habib "Bengali Immigrants: Health and Wellbeing"

12:30 pm – 1:30 pm: LUNCH

1:30 pm – 2:45pm: SESSION 3
Gender, Culture, Family, and Work: Stories of Migration
Session Chair: Charles Greenberg
Sarika Bose "Multicultural: Straddling Continents, Straddling Identities"
Tareq Islam "Adaptation and Acceptance in Canada: A Story of a Student, Immigrant, and Citizen"
Marina Hossain "Making My Path in Canada"
Mustafa Chowdury "Fulfillment of My Hopes and Aspirations in Canada: The Country I Call My Home"

2:45 pm – 3:00 pm: BREAK

3:00 pm – 4:30 pm: SESSION 4
Multiculturalism, Bengali Organizations, and Social Justice Issues
Session Chair: Bidisha Ray
Ranjan Kumar Datta "Intercultural Activities: A Bridge Building Program among First Nations, Bengali Visible Minority, and Non-Visible Minority"
Iqbal Bhuiyan "Challenges for the Internationally Trained Engineers in BC and the Role of Bangladeshi Engineers' Association"
Mohammad Aminul Islam and Mohammad Zaman "*Ekush*e February – The International Mother Language Day: History, Significance and Implementation of Challenges"
Sanzida Habib and Hafizul Islam "GVBCA: Celebrating and Incorporating Bengali Culture in Multicultural Canada"
Chinmoy Banerjee "Coming Abroad to Find Home"

DAY 2: Sunday/September 17

University of British Columbia, Point Grey Campus
Choi Building, 1855 West Mall, Room 120

9:30 am – 10:00 am: REGISTRATION with light BREAKFAST

10:00 am – 11:15 am: SESSION 5
Session Chair: Mohammad Zaman
Opening Remarks: Mandakranta Bose, Professor Emerita, UBC
Keynote Speech
C. Emdad Haque "Migration, Identity and Contributions of Bengalis to Manitoba: An Ethnographic Account"

11:15 am – 11:30 am: BREAK

11:30 am – 12:45 am: SESSION 6
Canadian Bengali Youths: Identity, Social, Cultural, and Family Life
Session Chair: Habiba Zaman
Fariha Khondaker "Split between Cultures: Negotiating my Bengali and Western Girlhood"
Bidushy Rahman "Diasporic Foreignness: Bengali Social, Cultural, Family Life on Colonized Land"
Maz Haque "The "Filmly" Life of a Western Bengali Boy"
Rafia Mahazabin "The Evolution of Religious Identity of a First Generation Bengali Immigrant"

12:45 pm – 1:45 pm: LUNCH

1:45 pm – 3:45 pm: SESSSION 7
Concurrent Round Table Forum (1:45 pm – 3:15 pm)

ROUNDTABLE I: Migration, Settlement Experience and Community Service in Greater Vancouver
Moderator: Sanzida Habib
Participants will engage in conversation and discussion about their migration history, reasons for migration, settlement patterns, finding job, family life, raising children and other challenges and coping skills to adjust to new life and integrate into Canadian society, and the role of settlement organizations in their settlement and integration.

ROUNDTABLE II: Multiculturalism, Activism, and Social Justice
Moderator: Supriya Bhattacharya
Participants will present, share and discuss their experiences in the Canadian labor market, constraints, challenges, and opportunities in the labor market, ideas about multiculturalism and social justice in Canadian society and their organizing activities and contributions to Canadian society.

Combined Reporting and Discussion on Roundtables (3:15 pm – 3:45 pm)

3:45 pm – 4:00 pm: CONCLUDING SESSION and WRAP-UP
Habiba Zaman

4:00 pm – 4:30 pm: CLOSING with REFRESHMENTS

"The conference was an eye-opener to me in many ways …from card-carrying academics to informed lay persons – everybody enhanced my understanding of what goes on in a Bengali immigrant's life. The print/digital output of the proceedings will be a valuable contribution to immigration studies."
Tirthankar Bose
Simon Fraser University

"Three second-generation Bengalis spoke about their feeling of 'imposed Bengaliness'. It was intriguing to find out their perspectives on what being a Bengali meant to them… The social judgment, the 'aunty stalking' and 'upholding the family honor', in conjunction with their already mixed experience of life, made their personal identities a hotchpotch of emotions."
Moumita Chakraborty in blankslatechronicles.com
September 19, 2017

"Although my area of expertise is completely different from [the conference] topic, I thoroughly enjoyed attending both days as a participant. All talks were excellent and very informative."
M Morshed
BC Center for Disease Control

Habiba Zaman is Professor of the Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies at Simon Fraser University.

Sanzida Habib is Research Associate at the Centre for India and South Asia Research at University of British Columbia.