

## **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 21<sup>st</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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 21<sup>st</sup> (originally the Language Martyrs Day of Bangladesh) as International Mother Language

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<sup>1</sup> 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 15<sup>th</sup> to April 21<sup>st</sup>) 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.<sup>2</sup> 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

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

## REFERENCES

Websites of the organizations cited in this paper:

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Mother Language Lovers of the World Society (MLLWS): [www.motherlanguagelovers.com](http://www.motherlanguagelovers.com)

Multicultural Helping House Society (MHHS): [www.helpinghouse.ca](http://www.helpinghouse.ca)

Vancouver Asian Heritage Month Society (VAHMS): [www.explorasian.org](http://www.explorasian.org)

Vancouver Co-op Radio: [www.coopradiio.org](http://www.coopradiio.org)

Vancouver Tagore Society (VTS): [www.vancouvertagoresociety.org](http://www.vancouvertagoresociety.org)

