

The Genesis of Education System in Bangladesh: Policies and Practices from Value-Driven Perspectives

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Abstract

The education system in Bangladesh is primarily derived from the British colonial legacy, imposing a secular philosophy despite a majority Muslim population. This article critically examines the roots and historical development of the education system in Bangladesh, discussing its basic structure and framework while presenting chronological narratives. The study seeks to comprehend prevailing trends by employing content analysis involving historical records, government documents, study reports, and expert opinions. The findings reveal a consistent neglect of religious education at all levels, lacking a foundation in Islamic philosophy. The study traces the curriculum's evolution from the early Muslim era to current times. Despite efforts to incorporate Islamic education during the Pakistan period and the post-independence era, these initiatives largely faltered. Post-independence, the recommendations of various education commissions primarily reflect the intentions of ruling powers, lacking consistency and failing to incorporate universal values into education policy. The study advocates for a comprehensive review of education policies, curriculum frameworks, and textbooks, emphasizing the identification of gaps and the incorporation of moral and ethical values to foster the balanced growth of individuals.

Keywords: Education System, Value Driven Perspectives, Secularization, Religious Education

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1 INTRODUCTION

Developing countries, such as Bangladesh, face the lasting effects of colonialism and Eurocentrism, which hinder their efforts to develop education curricula that reflect their indigenous cultures and contexts. These effects stem from the historical and cultural domination of Western powers during the colonial period, which imposed educational systems that often disregarded the local needs and realities of the colonized peoples. As a result, Western knowledge and methods were privileged over indigenous knowledge and traditions, marginalizing local languages, cultures, and histories and creating a sense of alienation and inferiority among students (Yunkaporta, 2009). Eurocentrism also distorts students' global perspectives, devaluing local knowledge and contributing to their dependence on external sources of information and validation. The inability to develop indigenous education curricula reflects the broader challenges that developing countries face in overcoming the colonial and Eurocentric influences and the constraints of resources, politics, and expertise. Consequently, students in developing countries often receive an education that fails to address their needs and neglects their cultural heritage (United Nations, n.d.). To address these challenges,

developing countries must engage in educational decolonization, which entails reclaiming control over their educational systems and designing curricula rooted in their cultures and histories. This holistic approach involves the content, methods, pedagogy, and assessment practices used in schools. Indigenous education curricula play a vital role in this process by providing students with culturally relevant education, affirming their identities, and empowering them to interact with the world authentically (Jonnaert et al., 2021). By incorporating indigenous knowledge, traditions, and perspectives, students can develop a deeper understanding of their culture and a stronger sense of self-determination.

Developing indigenous education curricula requires collaboration among educators, communities, and policymakers. Indigenous communities should be involved in ensuring that the curricula align with their needs and aspirations, while educators need training in culturally relevant pedagogies for effective implementation. Policymakers should also support developing and recognizing indigenous education curricula as part of the national education system. Overcoming the colonial and Eurocentric legacy is essential for enabling developing countries to realize their potential. Through the development of indigenous education curricula, countries like Bangladesh can foster critical thinkers, problem solvers, and leaders who can contribute meaningfully to their communities and the global society (UNESCO, 2019). Bangladesh, which has a predominantly Muslim population, struggles with an education system that lacks Islamic perspectives due to its secular origin. This study examines the historical evolution of the education system in Bangladesh, focusing on integrating Islamic viewpoints. The article consists of four sections: an overview of the education system, the historical development from the early Muslim era to the present, an analysis of secularization and the incorporation of religion in education trends, and concluding remarks. The Bangladesh education system traces its origins to the colonial era when the British established an educational framework to produce civil servants and clerks. This system, marked by a Western-centric focus, often marginalized indigenous knowledge and traditions. Consequently, Bangladesh's education system grapples with a lasting legacy of colonialism, influencing educational policies, practices, and outcomes. Scholars, such as Ahmed (2014), argue that the British colonial education system intended to create subservient Indian civil servants, shaping Bangladesh's system with enduring features like rote learning, hierarchical structures, and a deficiency in critical thinking emphasis. Kassam (2013) similarly contends that the emphasis on Western knowledge has marginalized indigenous elements, fostering student alienation.

Addressing the challenges posed by the colonial legacy, scholars like Belhiah (2015) highlight the barrier posed by English as the medium of instruction, particularly for disadvantaged students, perpetuating social inequalities. Islam (2011) argues that the prevalent rote learning culture is a colonial-era legacy, stifling creativity and critical thinking skills. This colonial legacy presents a multifaceted issue impacting Bangladesh's educational policies, practices, and outcomes. Scholars identify challenges, including the marginalization of indigenous knowledge, English as the medium of instruction, and the rote learning culture. To surmount these challenges, the Bangladesh government must initiate educational decolonization, reclaiming control over the educational system. This comprehensive approach involves developing curricula deeply rooted in the country's culture and history, addressing content, methodologies, pedagogy, and assessment practices. Creating indigenous education curricula becomes pivotal, providing students with culturally relevant education that affirms their identities and enables them to engage with the world authentically. By incorporating indigenous knowledge, traditions, and perspectives, students gain a profound understanding of their cultures and a stronger sense of self-determination. Overcoming the colonial education legacy is crucial for Bangladesh to unlock its full potential. Through developing indigenous education curricula, the country can empower citizens to be critical thinkers, problem solvers, and leaders contributing to their communities and the global stage.

2 METHODOLOGY

The study employs qualitative research methodologies for data collection and analysis. Two primary methods were utilized: content analysis and expert interviews. Historical trends and

the foundational philosophy were explored by examining historical records, education policies, curricula, and textbook contents. A structured checklist guided the content analysis process. Additionally, expert interviews were conducted to provide contextual insights, with experts elucidating on the data gathered through content analysis. Subsequently, utilizing post-coding, the study conducted its analysis and formulated findings and discussions.

3 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Bangladesh, a nation born from the struggle for independence, has embarked on a remarkable journey of progress and development. Yet, amidst this transformation, there lies an unfulfilled aspiration: the seamless integration of religiosity and values education into the country's educational landscape. Since its inception, Bangladesh's education system has grappled with the legacy of colonialism, inheriting a curriculum that often overlooked the nation's rich cultural heritage and the deep-rooted religiosity of its people. This disconnect between the formal education system and the lived realities of Bangladeshi citizens has hindered the holistic development of individuals and the preservation of the nation's cultural identity.

The National Integrity Strategy of 2012 unequivocally underscores the nation's steadfast dedication to nurturing an ethical, moral, and values-driven generation. This commitment extends beyond mere economic prosperity, aiming to cultivate individuals who embody the core principles of humanity and global citizenship, characterized by unwavering integrity and a robust personality. The strategy recognizes that the development of a nation goes beyond economic indicators and necessitates the cultivation of a citizenry grounded in a strong moral compass. By instilling values that transcend individual success and encompass a broader commitment to humanity, the National Integrity Strategy aspires to shape a generation capable of contributing to the global community with economic prowess and, more importantly, a profound sense of ethical responsibility and integrity. The *National Education Policy (2010)*, a landmark document, acknowledged the need to address this gap. It envisioned an education system fostering moral values, respect for diverse cultures, and a sense of national identity. However, translating this vision into tangible curricular reforms has been gradual and challenging.

The National Curriculum Framework 2021 represents a significant step forward in this endeavor. It emphasizes the importance of incorporating values education into all levels of schooling, recognizing that such education is not merely about imparting religious knowledge but also about nurturing ethical behavior, social responsibility, and intercultural understanding. In a Muslim-majority multicultural society like Bangladesh, religio-cultural values play a pivotal role in shaping individuals and society. Integrating these values into education is not about imposing a particular religious doctrine but fostering a deeper understanding of the values underpinning the nation's cultural fabric. This integration should not be viewed as a retreat from modernity or a concession to religious conservatism. Rather, it is an opportunity to harness the power of religiosity to promote positive social change, foster civic engagement, and cultivate individuals who are both religiously grounded and globally competent. As Bangladesh navigates the complexities of a developing world, still influenced by colonial legacies, it is imperative to recognize that education is not merely a means to economic advancement but also a tool for cultural preservation and moral development. By integrating religiosity and values education into the curriculum, Bangladesh can nurture citizens who are not only intellectually equipped but also spiritually enriched and morally upright, individuals who can contribute to the nation's progress while upholding its cultural identity and values.

4 AN OVERVIEW OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN BANGLADESH

Bangladesh has a population of 160 million. Muslims constitute 88% of the population, while the remaining 12% are Hindus (10.5%), Buddhists (0.6%), and Christians (0.3%). Bangladesh has two parallel public education systems: secular-based general education and Islam-based Alia Madrasah. In addition to this, there are also two streams of private education, namely the 'Qaumi Madrasah System' and the 'English Medium International School System (Table 1).

Table 1. The Education Structure of Bangladesh

		Public Education			Privately Managed Education	
		General Education System	Alia Madrasa System	Vocational Education System	Qaumi Madrasa System	English Medium Int. School System
Age	Grade	Level	Level		Level	Level
General						
25+	XX	PhD				
24+	XIX					
23+	XVIII					
22+	XVII	Masters	Kamil		Takhmil	
21+	XVI	Bachelor (Honors/pass)	Fazil		Fazilat	
20+	XV					
19+	XIV					
18+	XIII					
17+	XII	Higher Secondary School	Alim	HSC (Vocational)	Sanaria ammah	'A' Level
16+	XI					
15+	X	Secondary School	Dakhil	SSC (Vocational)		'O' Level
14+	IX					
13+	VIII				Mutawassitah	Standard Level
12+	VII					
11+	VI					
10+	V	Primary Level	Ibtida'i	-	Ibtida'i	
9+	IV					
8+	III					
7+	II					
6+	I					
3+ to 5+		Pre-Primary Education		-	Tahfiz ul Quran	

Source: moedu.gov.bd, 2022

The public education system may be divided into three stages: primary (G1-5), secondary (G6-12), and tertiary. Secondary education can also be divided into three sub-stages: junior secondary (G 6-8), secondary (G 9-10), and higher secondary (G 11-12). The five years of primary education concludes with a PSC (Primary School Certificate) or an Ibtida'i examination. After passing the PSC/Ibtida'i examination, students progress to three years of Junior Secondary education, which concludes with a JSC (Junior School Certificate) examination. Then, they progress to two years of secondary education, culminating in an SSC (Secondary School Certificate)/Dakhil/SSC (Vocational) examination. After passing the SSC/Dakhil/SSC (Vocational) exam, students proceed to another two years of Higher Education, which concludes with an HSC (Higher Secondary School Certificate)/Alim/HSC (Vocational) examination. Students can proceed with Higher education after completing the HSC/Alim/HSC (Vocational) exam.

The general education stream is a mainstream system of schools, colleges, and universities from primary to Ph.D. level. The Government controls it. It offers modern subjects such as mathematics, physics, economics, political science, and applied sciences, mostly taught in Bangla. This system is fashioned after the Western secular model and produces a class of people, which Lord Macaulay envisioned. There is no room for Islamic religious teaching and philosophy. On the other hand, the Alia Madrasah system is constituted of Madrasahs from ibtidai (primary) to Kamil (Master). It falls within the purview of the government, and it teaches traditional subjects and modern subjects.

This system continues the traditional Islamic education system with modifications introduced by the British during their colonial period and by the Bangladesh government. The present version of the Alia Madrasah system is a combination of Islamic and secular sciences, but it weighs more heavily on the religious side. The traditional Islamic curriculum has been significantly modified to fit into the mainstream secular systems instead of including Islamic philosophy in the secular ones. Consequently, the graduates of those systems have been divided into two distinctive groups, i.e., Secular and Religious.

In addition to the education mentioned above systems, there are also two privately managed streams of education, i.e., secular-based English Medium International schools, which provide 'O' level and 'A' level education under the authority of Cambridge University and the Islam-based 'Kowmi Madrasahs' which offer elementary to tertiary education in Bangla and Arabic languages. The latter stream of education follows an even more traditional curriculum and disregards secular sciences altogether. A large number of Muslim families send their children here to attend part-time courses or even to pursue a full-time religious education. It is taught in Bengali and Arabic. The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) formulates the curriculum and prepares textbooks and instructional materials. At the same time, the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education is responsible for directing, supervising, and maintaining the schools and colleges for secondary and higher secondary levels of general education. There are separate education boards for Alia Madrasahs and Kowmi Madrasahs, which will maintain the institutions and formulate the curriculum of the respective sub-systems.

Tertiary education is offered in universities (both public and private) and post-HSC level colleges and institutes of diversified studies in professional, technical, technological, and other special types of education. HSC holders are qualified to enroll in a three-year degree pass program; however, for honors, they enroll in a four-year bachelor's degree (honors) program in degree-level colleges or universities (It's important to note that bachelor's degree programs in the field of architecture, dentistry, medicine, and traditional medicine take five years to complete). For SSC holders, programs leading to a professional diploma (in agriculture, civil engineering, computer science, food science, etc.) normally take four years; diploma holders can also enroll in a one-year program leading to a diploma in technical teacher education. After completing a pass/honors bachelor's degree, students can pursue a master's degree (one year for a bachelor's degree with honors and two years for a bachelor's degree with a pass). For students pursuing an M. Phil and Ph.D. in selected disciplines or areas of specialization, the duration is two years for an M. Phil and three to four years for a doctoral degree.

Bangladesh's education sector is highly subsidized. Public schools, colleges, and universities provide almost free education for all. The government also subsidizes the partial funding for many non-government schools and colleges. Despite this, Bangladesh still has a low literacy rate of 61.3% for males and 52.2% for females in 2010.

5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section's findings shed light on the historical development of the Bangladesh Education System, tracing its evolution from the early Muslim period to the present post-independence era starting in 1971. Through an in-depth examination of the educational landscape during pivotal epochs, such as the colonial era and the period under Pakistani rule, our objective is to offer a comprehensive understanding of the factors and influences that have molded the educational framework in Bangladesh. This exploration lays a critical groundwork for scrutinizing the current state of the education system and discerning the prominent patterns, challenges, and opportunities that have arisen throughout its intricate historical progression.

5.1 Education of Bengal in the early Muslim era

Bengal (the present eastern part of India and Bangladesh) came under Muslim rule in 1207 CE by a Turcoman general named Ikhtiyar Uddin Mohammad Bakhtiyar Khilji (*Al-Ahsan, 1994*). His rule continued for nearly seven centuries. The Muslim rulers of Bengal were distinguished patrons of

arts, science, language, literature, and architecture. Education had a primary role in their state policy. Rich Muslim men were lovers and patrons of learning. They considered the establishment of mosques, madrasahs, and khanqahs to be their moral and religious obligations. They used to make generous endowments of rent-free land to maintain these educational institutions. The exact number of madrasahs established during the Muslim rule is unknown. However, when the country was taken under British rule in the latter part of the eighteenth century, there were 80,000 Madrasahs in Bengal, functioning effectively with high standards of teaching. Adam estimated that even as late as the 1830s, these institutions in Bengal were 100,000. This is an average of one village school for every sixty-three children of school-going age (Haque, 2004).

The curricula and syllabi followed in these institutions were almost similar to other major Islamic higher learning institutions of other Muslim countries of that time. The subjects of the study were divided broadly into two categories: (a) al-ulum al-taqiyya (traditional sciences), otherwise called al-ulum al-shariah (religious sciences), and (b) al-ulum al-aliyah (speculative sciences/acquired sciences) (Salahuddin, 2018).

5.2 Education of Bengal in the British Colonial Era

By the early 18th century, the British East India Company (BEIC) had a strong presence in India. They allied with various princes and Nawabs, promising security against usurpers and rebels. The Battle of Plassey was a decisive victory for the British East India Company over the Nawab of Bengal and his French allies on June 23, 1757. The battle established the BEIC rule in Bengal, which expanded over much of India for the next hundred years. The battle occurred at Plassey on the banks of the Bhagirathi River, about 150 km north of Calcutta and south of Murshidabad, then the capital of Bengal. The battle parties were Nawab Siraj-ud-daulah, the last independent Nawab of Bengal, and the secular British East India Company. This is deemed one of the pivotal battles for controlling the Indian subcontinent by British colonial powers who strove to spread secular ideology in various ways (Rahman, Hamzah, Meerah, & Rahman, 2010).

India was under Muslim rule for nearly seven centuries. After the great battle of Plassey in 1757, the Muslims lost control of the eastern part of the sub-continent to the British, who began to carry out reforms not only to administrative but also to education systems. In the beginning, Calcutta was made the capital of India, and the policies and programs of the Indian government were implemented in different parts of India. In the beginning, the British policy on education was to leave the traditional modes of instruction undisturbed and to continue its support of the Muslims who had been accustomed to traditional education implemented by the Indian rulers. But as the official language was Persian and the administration was run according to Muslim law and jurisprudence, the East India Company realized that there was a need for an institution that would train officers to be qualified in Islamic law and jurisprudence and which would also produce well-qualified officers, judges, and assessors for their Courts of Justice. Thus, the British divided Bengal's educational system into modern education and madrasah education. The traditional system has been partly modified in Bengal by introducing Madrasah education (Haque, 2004).

In 1781, Warren Hastings established the Calcutta Madrasah, marking the inception of the first Muslim college under British rule. The education imparted in the madrasahs was very useful, as, at the time, knowledge of Persian law was a passport to posts of honor and the potential to receive emoluments. For more than half a century, this Calcutta Madrasah served its original purpose of teaching Muslim boys Arabic, Persian, and Islamic Law from Arabic sources. It supplied educated officers for the Courts of Justice and other Government offices. By 1873, three more madrasahs were established in Dacca, Chittagong, and Rajshahi, following the teaching template of the Calcutta Madrasah (Khan, 2014).

With the inauguration of the English education system in 1835 and the substitution of Persian for English as a court language in 1837 by the Act XXIX of 1837, the madrasah lost its importance as a recruiting ground for public services. However, the Arabic department of the Calcutta Madrasah didn't innovate and change and continued to run as it had previously, losing its practicality and importance. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Muslim community sought a

formula to reassure them of their cultural safety and access to employment and other economic opportunities.

Two Muslim scholars named Sir Syed Ahmad Khan of North India and Nawab Abdul Latif of Bengal tried to change the Muslim aversion to English education and to reconcile the two systems. They aimed to combine English education with Arabic and Persian education so that the cultural heritage could be preserved along with the benefit of modern knowledge (Haque, 2004). Though the famous dispatch of 1854 included Muslim madrasahs in the list of institutions worthy of being affiliated with the universities, the establishment of the Calcutta University in 1857 didn't appeal to the Muslims, as there was no provision for the teaching of Arabic and Persian in the new university system and neither the Calcutta Madrasah nor any other madrasah was included within the Calcutta University scheme. Thus, the Muslims were left behind with their madrasahs and traditional education, which was ill-suited for the requirements of the present day. This resulted in a class of people degenerating into useless members of society.

In the ideological history of Bengal, 1857 can be considered a landmark year. It was a turning point for the Muslims against the rule of the East India Company. Muslims were insulted and discriminated against by the racist English soldiers, and this was the root cause of the partition movement (Bennett, 1958). Muslims felt left out and became victims. Hindus developed good relations with the British and enjoyed all the government facilities. The Indian National Congress wanted to share the power with the British by keeping them rulers; however, the Muslim League rejected the British rule. They created the slogan that people in Bengal did not belong to a single nation; there were, in fact, two: Hindus and Muslims; the division was based on their religious faith. The Muslim League used religious sentiments to unite against the Hindus, and the British presented them as the defenders of religion in Bengal. The masses were united under the leadership of the Muslim League to establish a separate Islamic Republic of Pakistan, not a mere secular state. Under tremendous pressure from the Muslims, the British rulers divided the province of Bengal into two: one as a Muslim-dominated area, East Bengal, and the second as a Hindu-dominated area, West Bengal.

5.3 Bengal under British era: The establishment of the University of Dhaka

In 1905, the "Partition of Bengal" was announced by the Viceroy of India, George Nathaniel Curzon. The former province of Bengal was divided into two new provinces. One was named "Bengal," and it comprised western Bengal as well as the province of Bihar and Orissa, and the other was "East Bengal and Assam," Dacca (Dhaka) being the capital. This partition separated the largely Muslim eastern areas from the largely Hindu western areas, which the Muslims of East Bengal greatly supported. This was due to their poor economic situation under the most centralized capital of Calcutta and the dominance of Hindu businessmen and landlords of West Bengal. However, the Indian Hindus reacted negatively to the decision of the Bengal partition and continued their protests against the partition of Bengal (Haque, 1990a).

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a few Muslim leaders of Bengal, like Nawab Abdul Latif and Justice Ameer Ali, made efforts to popularize the English system among Muslims without compromising their religious and cultural identities. The issue was formally discussed, and a resolution was adopted in the Provincial Muhammadan Educational Conference held in 1906. The All-India Muhammadan Educational Conference, held in Dhaka in 1907, also unanimously reiterated the resolution. Sir Barn Field Fuller also encouraged the idea and formed a committee led by Shamsul Ulama Abd Nasr Waheed in 1909 to examine various questions related to revising the study syllabus for madrasahs. He had visited the centers of Islamic learning in Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Turkey, the oriental institutes in Budapest, Vienna, and Berlin, and the Ecole des Language Vivantes of Paris. He then designed a comprehensive curriculum scheme with very high standards of Islamic learning and culture as its goal. As far as it was practicable, it modernized Arabic and Islamic studies courses and included English and other secular subjects, which the Dacca University Committee subsequently adopted. He suggested the inclusion of a Faculty of Islamic Studies to be an integral part of the proposed Dacca University. The Dacca University Committee

was appointed, and it considered the scheme in light of the previously mentioned suggestions by the Indian government.

This committee, which had highly placed Mussalman, a gentleman of Bengal, on it, with Sir Robert Nathan as President, was assisted in their work by people with international reputations in traditional learning. It had people like Maulana Shibli Nomani of Lucknow, Maulana Shah Sulaiman of Phulwari Sharif, Nawab Imadul Mulk, Syed Husain Bilgrami, C.S.I., C.I.E. and Dr. J. Hotowitz, Professor of Arabic in the M.A.O. College, Aligarh and others. Together, these men recommended that a department of Islamic Studies should form an integral part of Dacca University, where Arabic language and literature, various branches of Islamic learning, and English would be taught. In a conference held in Dacca in March 1912, the scheme was adopted with a revision that the revised curriculum should be as simple as possible and introduced into as many madrasahs as was financially feasible. In 1911, the partition of Bengal ceased to exist as it was annulled in 1911 by the British Government through their Governor General's office in India. This was done to please the Hindu community and Hindu Zamindars residing at Calcutta and also to foment communal tension. This annulment of the partition of Bengal pushed the Muslim population of this region into destruction. It also caused resentment among the Bengali Muslims, which lasted until the end of British rule in 1947 (Haque, 1990a). The Muslims were afraid that their educational advancement would be halted. However, just after the territorial adjustment, Lord Hardinge, the Governor-General of the Indian Sub-Continent of the British Government, visited Dhaka on the 31st of January 1912 to conciliate the Muslims and to soothe their ruffled feelings. The Muslim delegation headed by Nawab Syed Nawab Ali Choudhury met with His Excellency to present the current situation facing the Muslims in East Bengal. It strongly demanded immediate measures be taken, especially on educational development. The British government eventually recognized the Muslim community's long-standing educational issues and announced their decision to establish a university in Dhaka through a letter in April 1912. The decision to establish the University of Dhaka was a consolation for the broken-hearted Muslims of the then East Bengal.

In anticipation of the establishment of Dacca University along with its Islamic departments, the government of Bengal, in their resolution No. 450 T.G. dated the 31st July 1914, sanctioned a scheme for the reorganization and reform of madrasahs in Bengal to produce 'Cultured Moslems fit to enter one or other of the careers open to educated men and to play their part in the various activities which go to make up the public life of modern Indian' (Haque, 1990b). This scheme is known as the 'Reformed Madrasha Scheme,' which produced many talented individuals and fulfilled the long-awaited needs of the Muslim Community of then East Pakistan. It is observed that when the syllabus was proposed to the Muslims either in the madrasahs or in the schools, it can be seen how it reflected contemporary politics. It's also interesting to note that this situation demonstrated the boldness displayed by educational reformers compared to the political reforms brought about by the government.

Despite all these complaints and assurances, establishing the University at Dhaka was referred to the Calcutta University Commission appointed by the Governor-General in council in September 1917 under the Presidency of Dr M E Sadler. The Calcutta University Commission's recommendations differed from those submitted by the University of Dhaka Committee under Mr P Nathan, with whom the Hindu community did not agree. Thus, the establishment of the University of Dhaka was delayed and was only founded on the 1st of July 1921, which was not in the timeframe that was intended by the Nathan committee in 1913 but one based on a scheme devised by the Calcutta University Commission (Rahim, 1981).

The University of Dhaka was established through the efforts of Muslim educationists Nawab Sir Salimullah, Nawab Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury, and other Muslim leaders in Bengal who made huge donations of land and provided monetary support. However, this new University of Dhaka was not headed and directed initially by any Bengali Muslim thinkers, educationists, teachers, planners, or visionaries. English and Hindu administrators and faculties managed it. The University of Dhaka was established in 1921, Sir P.J. Hartog was appointed as the founding Vice-chancellor, which caused significant damage to its expected missions and visions at the beginning of the new university.

5.4 Education of East Pakistan in the Pakistan era

In 1947, Pakistan was established based on religious faith and thus can be considered a vital event that conformed to the spirit of the majority of Muslims in Pakistan. In 1950, the United Front declared that no law contradictory to the principle of the Qur'an and Sunnah would be enacted (Mohomed, 2014). The first constitution of Pakistan, made in 1956, declared Pakistan as an Islamic Republic with several Islamic provisions. In 1969, Article 20 of the legal framework provided that Pakistan would be declared as an Islamic Republic with Islamic ideologies, the basis of the establishment of Pakistan would be preserved, and that the President of Pakistan would be a Muslim. It is worth mentioning that when Pakistan came into existence in 1947, the then education minister, Mr Fazlur Rahman, invited all senior Muslim educationalists to provide Islamic input into the education system inherited from the British. The only solution they suggested was the introduction of the teaching of Islamiyat (Islamic Studies) as an obligatory subject at all levels of education. Unfortunately, they failed to see the basic anti-religious, secularist approach that governed all other branches of knowledge. There is no segregation between religious and non-religious education in Islam. Pakistan educationalists did not delve into this and accepted or adopted a superficial compromise (Ashraf, 1990).

A lot of effort was made during 1947-1971 in order to reform the education system through Education Reform Commissions; examples of these efforts are (a) A Report of the East Bengal Education System Reconstruction Committee, Dacca, 1952, (b) A Report of the Education Reforms Commission in East Pakistan, Dacca, 1957, (c) A Report of the Commission on Student Problems and Welfare, Karachi: Government of Pakistan, 1966 and (e) A Report of the New Education Policy, Government of Pakistan, 1969. Although the proposals and recommendations of the different committees and commissions lacked the presentation of Islam as a complete way of life, some elements of an Islamic educational system appeared to be present. In reality, none of the recommendations were implemented in full. Nevertheless, they played important and positive roles in developing and advancing future education policies and helped create physical infrastructure, syllabi and curricula, and classifications and composition of textbooks.

5.5 Independence Movement and the Emergence of Secularism

The ideological history of Bengal and East Pakistan from 1857 until 1969 demonstrated that the people of this region sacrificed their lives and supported politicians with the implementation of Shari'ah laws. However, exploiting religion for political purposes caused the failure to achieve their goals. During the partition of India, the Bengal Muslims joined Pakistan for the cause of religious identity. The majority of people of Pakistan expected the laws of Shari'ah to be established and Pakistan to be an Islamic Republic. But the rulers of the then-West Pakistanis practiced all sorts of exploitation and persecution in the name of Islam on Bengalis, the then-East Pakistanis. East Pakistanis were always segregated from the ruling power as the West was dominant. However, West Pakistani rulers did not fulfill the promises made during the election to implement the laws of Shari'ah. Instead, they focused on the promotion of their personal and material interests. They also manipulated the political, social, economic, and cultural sectors of the East Pakistani people. After the establishment of Pakistan, a demand was made by East Pakistanis to include 'Bangla' as the state language of Pakistan. Accordingly, a strong movement emerged in 1952, led by prominent Muslim leaders and scholars of East Pakistan. However, this demand of the Bengalis was rejected by Pakistani President Mohammad Ali Jinnah, who mentioned that "Only Urdu would be the state language of Pakistan." This was the crux and the beginning of the struggle of the people of East Pakistan against the unjust and illogical decisions of Pakistani rulers. A few sections considered it as strong evidence of how politicians pretend in the name of religion. In 1969, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman warned against exploiting religion for political purposes. Two years later, in March 1971, the Pakistani armed forces committed barbarous genocide. As an inevitable consequence, the Bengali Nation began fighting for liberation.

It is worth mentioning that the Awami League leader, the late Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was influenced and surrounded by leftist supporters in the pre-liberation period. Consequently, the Chattra League (the student wing of the Awami League) and the Awami League scrapped the

word 'Muslim' from their name. This leftist and secular group led an anti-Pakistani movement and demanded the autonomy of East Pakistan. Against the backdrop of continuous exploitation of religion for political purposes, non-communal values of the concept of secularism emerged. Thus, secularism in Bangladesh began with the liberation war and flourished rapidly during the war (Fair & Patel, 2020). During the liberation war, the leftist political parties, along with the Awami League, proclaimed that the state ideology of Bangladesh would be based on secularism, socialism, and Bengali nationalism, which indicated their intention to establish a secular country through independence. However, Muslim intellectuals kept silent and supported the country's independence movement.

Generally, the only focus of most freedom fighters was to liberate the country from West Pakistan's unjust rulings. History showed that Bengali Muslim politicians and intellectuals mostly led the independence movement during the British time with a true Islamic spirit. The death of most leaders of previous movements and unjust rulings of Pakistani leaders caused the emergence of a new dimension of leadership in East Pakistan that led to the rise of a leftist approach with a secular spirit. Since leftist political leaders of the country led the liberation war with direct support from India to liberate Bangladesh, the result of the war turned to a different approach from the real purpose of independence. Also, almost all Islamic party leaders, Muslim scholars, and intellectuals failed to realize the sentiment of the masses. They were either silent about the barbarous attacks by Pakistani armed forces or supported them in the name of Muslim unity and brotherhood that led to the rise of secularism in Bangladesh. Bangladesh became an independent country on December 16th, 1971. In 1972, the first constitution of Bangladesh was prepared by lawmakers of the Awami League. They were previously elected in the East Pakistani provincial assembly election 1970; the election was effective on the 16th of December 1972, on the first anniversary of the day of victory. The constitution of Bangladesh had several parts with 153 Articles, which contained fundamental principles of the state policy.

The original constitution 1972 had four basic principles: Secularism, Nationalism, Democracy, and Socialism (which meant economic and social justice for all). These principles were considered the foundations and establishment of secularism in Bangladesh. Even though secularism was inserted into the constitution of Bangladesh, it was rejected by a majority of Muslims in the country. As a secular party, the Awami League manifested the element of secularism into the party constitution, though many members were religious. However, leaders of the newly independent country, with vast support from India during the liberation war, had been influenced to acquire secularism as a key principle of the state. The Awami League government was secularist and socialist and had a strong commitment and loyalty to India as it assisted them during the liberation war. The First Constitution in 1972 was modeled on "social communism," which blocked multi-party democracy, banned religion (basically Islam) based parties, associations, and societies, and curbed media freedom. Four Amendments were made within three years from 1972 to 1975 by the government of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to marginalize religious influence and to protect rulings on promoting secularism. The insertion of secularism into the constitution seriously impacted different aspects of life, including the country's education system.

5.6 Education of Bangladesh in the post-independence era

After the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent state, the Government's top priority was to create a constitution. Secularism and socialism were incorporated in the newly created constitution and were considered fundamental principles. The proof of the malignity of the then-ruling party can still be found in educational institutions today. In those days, there were races and competitions to rename the universities, colleges, and different halls of student residences. The word 'Iqra' (read) was wiped out of the monogram of the University of Dhaka. The monogram of the Rajshahi University containing a verse from the Holy Quran was altered. The word 'Muslim' was excluded from the name Salimullah Muslim Hall and Jahangir Nagar Muslim University. Numerous examples like these can be cited. The then Government felt the necessity to reform the education system to awaken the nation into a new consciousness. An Education Commission of 19 members, led by Dr. Kudrat-e-Khuda, was created in line with this aim. On being invited

by the Government of India, the Commission members paid a visit to India for one month. The commission gained direct experience in India's educational system and submitted a final report to the Bangladeshi government. But unfortunately, the report was open to serious controversy immediately after its publication. A good number of recommendations were important and beneficial for the nation. On the other hand, however, there were elements contrary to most people's ideologies and cultural values.

The aims and objectives of the Kudrat-e-Khuda Commission's report can be ideologically divided into two parts (Azharul, 2001):

- i. To create workers for the establishment of a socialist society; and
- ii. To instill in people secular thought devoid of religious beliefs and the establishment of practical living.

Some of the main features of the report aiming to detach the educated mass from religion were:

- i. To compose secular curriculum and textbooks;
- ii. To appoint teachers enlightened with the four basic principles of the state;
- iii. To free the primary level of education from religious dominance;
- iv. To make religious instruction non-compulsory at the secondary level of schooling; and
- v. To place a light emphasis on religious teaching even in Madrasah Education.

The Commission, submitting an interim report in May 1973, recommended the separation of religion from the education system. The curriculum recommended by the interim report contained no religious education course from years one to eight. However, it recommended it as an elective subject from years nine to twelve but in the humanities group only. Moreover, the Education Commission of 1972, after preparing the interim report, sought to elicit public opinion through a questionnaire survey. The survey found that secular education was acceptable to about 21% of the "most educated section of the people of Bangladesh"; however, the majority favored having religious education in schools.

Under significant pressure, the Commission recommended that religious instruction should be provided from years six to eight and that in years nine to eleven, it should be introduced in humanities as an elective subject only (Khan, 1974). The ideological foundation of the Commission was based on Bengali socialism, secularism, and democracy. Thus, an education policy was created to create a socialist society devoid of religious values and beliefs based on the four basic principles of the state. The Kudrat-e-Khuda Commission has great importance in the sense that all subsequent steps taken to reform and reconstruct the educational system were based on the report of this Commission.

5.7 Attempt to Incorporate Islam in the Constitution and Education

After the assassination of President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in August 1975, General Ziaur Rahman took over through martial law and received support from both right and left-wing supporters. The constitution was amended a few times during the first martial law regime for about four years (1975-1979) through four major proclamations and various other orders. The Fifth Amendment brought about the following major changes to the Constitution:

1. The word "Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim" (In the Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful) was inserted into the beginning of the Constitution, i.e., above the Preamble. This insertion reflects the fundamental Muslim faith, which is that every action of a believer should start with the Name of Allah, who is the Lord of all creatures, and no one has the legal right to be worshiped except Him (S.W.T).
2. One of the four fundamental principles of state policy, 'secularism,' was omitted and replaced with 'the principle of absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah.' (Article 8), (1A) Absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah was to be the basis of all actions.

The secular character of the Constitution of Bangladesh was amended. The four basic principles of the country's constitution were changed with the following insertions: i. Belief in the unity of Allah, ii. Socialism means social justice, iii. Bangladeshi Nationalism, and iv. Democracy should be the source of inspiration for all the work of citizens. During the second martial law regime led by General HM Ershad (1983-1990), the Parliament of Bangladesh (Jatiya Sangsad) passed the Constitution (Eighth Amendment) Act on June 9, 1988. The Eighth Amendment incorporated two fundamental changes in the Constitution, which were as follows: (a) Islam was made the state religion of Bangladesh by way of the insertion of Article 2A in the constitution, and (b) new branches of the high court to spread a judicial service within the range of masses were created. The changes made by the Fifth and Eighth Amendments were according to constitutional law and legitimized by the country's Supreme Court at that time. Some political analysts of the country asserted that the intention of making Islam a state religion was to legalize the martial law regime and attain the support of the masses. The argument might be true in a logical sense, but the change was in line with the Islamic spirit and Islamic worldview and supported by a majority of the people. There were several committees formed to create new education policies as per the amended constitution;

- i. Government of Bangladesh Report of Bangladesh National Committee for Curricula, Courses and Studies, Dhaka, 1976.
- ii. Government of Bangladesh, Interim Education Policy, Recommendations of Jatiyo Shikhya Upadestha, Dacca, 1979.
- iii. Gonoprojatontri Bangladesh Sarkar, Bangladesh Jatiyo Shikya Commission Report, 1988.
- iv. Gonoprojatontri Bangladesh Sarkar, Shikhya Sanskar Sankaranto Taskforce Protibedon, 1994.

The main focus of the different reports was on religious education to ensure a student's character developed with religious moral values. The First World Conference on Muslim Education in 1977 at Makkah opened the minds of some policymakers. The follow-up committee requested that the Bangladesh government establish an Islamic education system. Dr. Abdullah Omar Nasseef, the then Vice-President of King Abdul Aziz University, and Dr. Sayed Ali Ashraf, the Secretary of the follow-up committee, came to Bangladesh in 1979 on invitation from the then Prime Minister Shah Azizur Rahman to discuss the matter. After a discussion, they agreed to set up a center for this purpose. Accordingly, the government approved their proposal to establish an 'Institute of Islamic Education and Research,' passed by the parliament in its 1980-81 budget session as an autonomous body. It received the assent of the President on the 17th of September, 1980. Then, it started functioning to formulate Islamic concepts for all branches of modern knowledge (Ministry of Education, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1983).

The Institute, in collaboration with King Abdul Aziz University, Jeddah, organized the 3rd World Conference on Muslim Education in 1981 Dhaka, Bangladesh. After this conference, the government realized the necessity of incorporating an Islamic perspective in all branches of education. Later, the then government of Bangladesh formed a national committee headed by Prof. Dr. Syed Ali Ahsan to examine the recommendations of the four world conferences on Muslim education in Makkah, Islamabad, Dhaka, and Jakarta. The committee also reviewed the Makkah Declaration, created in the 3rd Islamic Conference of OIC (Organization of Islamic Conferences) in 1981. The review was done so Bangladesh could adopt Islamic guidelines in its education policies (Aziz, 2015). The committee did the job they were commissioned for and submitted a report to the government within a reasonable period. However, none of the reports/recommendations were implemented due to political considerations.

5.8 Attempt to secularize the national education policy.

In 1996, there was again a political change in the country, and the Awami League came into power. The new Government started to form a National Education Policy. A Committee comprised 56 members headed by Professor M. Shamsul Haq in 1997. The government set a pre-condition that

the new Education Policy would be based on the report of the 1974 Kudrat-e-Khuda Commission. Different sectors of the public raised a series of protests. They argued that with the alteration of fundamental principles of the country through the amendment of the Constitution of Bangladesh, the Kudrat-e-Khuda Commission's report had become obsolete, irrelevant, and contrary to the amended constitution and so could not be legally accepted as a basis of the new Education Policy. However, ignoring the protests and public opinion, a final report was submitted to the Government. This report was, in fact, almost the same as the one in 1974, which described the aims and objectives of education at different levels, national curricula, textbooks, and other relevant topics from a secular point of view. The government appointed a six-member committee to analyze the Shamsul Haq Committee report and to suggest the implementation process. The report of this six-member committee is termed the National Education Policy 2000, though it was not implemented during this period.

5.9 Secularization in the constitution and education

Muslim intellectuals and scholars have discussed the effects of secularization in Bangladesh. The country has undergone many attempts to become more secular since its independence, especially under the Awami League governments of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (1972-1975) and his daughter Sheikh Hasina (1996-2001 and 2009-present). The current Awami League government wants to restore secularism as one of the four state principles of the country. To do this, the government has sought legal support from the courts. The Supreme Court upheld the High Court verdict that declared the Fifth Amendment illegal during the martial law regime. The full text of the judgment (184 pages) was released on Tuesday, July 27, 2010, six months after the verdict.

Finally, on June 30, 2011, the government reinstated secularism in the constitution of Bangladesh and passed it in parliament. According to the Bangladesh constitution, the government has announced four ideologies as the basis for running the state. These are considered as the four pillars of the country. The new four ideologies/state principles are i. Nationalism, ii. Secularism, iii. Socialism, and iv. Democracy (ref. Bangladesh Constitution, 2011). These are different from the previous ideologies/principles of i. Belief in the unity of Allah, ii. Socialism to mean social justice, iii. Bangladeshi Nationalism, and iv. Democracy is the source of inspiration for all the work of citizens.

These ideologies are somewhat contradictory in theory and practice. They also hurt the cultivation and practice of religion and meditation. The former law minister of the Bangladesh government said, "Secularism is once again the cornerstone of our constitution." However, the religious and opposition political leaders disagreed and said this was not in line with most people's views. According to the constitution of Bangladesh (1972-2009), nine education commissions were formed in the country. Most of their recommendations followed the secular worldview. The latest education commission was established by the Awami League government in 2009. It reviewed the previous education systems and aimed to introduce a comprehensive and modern scientific education policy. This policy used secular ideologies to improve the quality of education. Some of the major aspects of the new system are summarized below:

"The policy aims to promote humanity and make patriotic, rational, tolerant, non-communal, unbiased, and progressive individuals with a sense of morality, ethics, respect for other religions, leadership quality, and mass-oriented development. This policy will act as strategic tools to prepare the ground for building a secular, mass-oriented, universal and planned standard education system by the constitution of the country (National Education Policy, 2010:26)."

The above statement shows that the new policy aims to make the country more secular. Moreover, the new education system includes no moral education, except for a course called Islamic Studies (which only focuses on worship issues). The new education system of Bangladesh is largely influenced by secular curricula, which aim to develop a secular mentality and remove religious influence from the next generation. The commission also suggested teaching a new course called 'modern culture' in all public institutions, including religious ones. This course included drama,

dance, and other non-Islamic cultures. It was mandatory for all primary and secondary students. The commission also recommended not teaching nursery and year three students Islamic studies to create open-minded pupils. These strong attempts by the government of Bangladesh to implement a secular education system showed that Islam was less important for most of the Muslim society. The dominant secular group did not allow the inclusion of Islamic values either in the constitution or in education.

As a result, the nation could not escape from the intellectual colonialism and hegemony of the neo-imperial powers, even though it was a free country. The education sector was largely based on a secular model. The young generation adopted secular ideologies as a key element of modernity and progress. Globalization also significantly impacts people's culture, religion, and lifestyle, conveying secular ideologies to Muslims and others. This contributes to embedding a secular mentality in future generations.

6 CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this article comprehensively explores the historical development of general education in Bangladesh, particularly from a value-laden perspective. It sheds light on various attempts to secularize and incorporate Islamic content into the education curriculum, varying across different regimes. Despite these efforts, Bangladesh faces a significant challenge in establishing a consistent and universally values-oriented education system that can instill moral and generic aptitudes in its diverse generations.

The article points out a prolonged lack of prioritization of religious education in policy decisions in Bangladesh. While religious education is acknowledged as a fundamental source of moral education, it has not been emphasized in the education curriculum. It's important to note that Bangladesh has a majority Muslim population, along with other communities. Hence, there is a necessity for the curriculum to reflect the priorities of the diverse population, with a special focus on the majority Muslim community. However, the inclusion of religious discourse remains minimal, limited to a single course, "Religion and Moral Education," at the primary and secondary levels, which is deemed insufficient for fostering a comprehensive understanding of religion.

Moreover, at the tertiary level, mainstream public universities in Bangladesh do not offer courses specifically focused on religious education. The education curriculum, largely inherited from the British colonial regime, has remained unchanged, reflecting a secular orientation that omitted religious elements. The article underscores the significance of a value-laden education, aiming to prepare well-rounded graduates who are both good human beings and good citizens.

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