

**Can We Really Have a *Jaiga* (Space) in a New Place?:
An Ethnographic Quest of Migration, Identity, and Contributions of Bengalis
in Manitoba**

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Introduction

Immigration of Bangladeshis to Canada is a recent phenomenon. According to Statistics Canada, there were a total of 45,325 Bangladeshi immigrants in 2011. Survey findings of a recent study revealed that immigration from Bangladesh to Canada has increased at a rate of 110% per decade recently (i.e., 2001-2011) (see Figure 5). The 2016 statistical update of the *Canadian Magazine of Immigration* (2016) suggested that 14,652 Bangladeshi immigrants were added during the 2012-2015 period, bringing the total number to around 71,000 immigrants. Although the data for 2016 and 2017 are yet to be released, with an assumption of a linear trend, the estimated number of Bangladeshi immigrants who live in Canada would be approximately 90,000.

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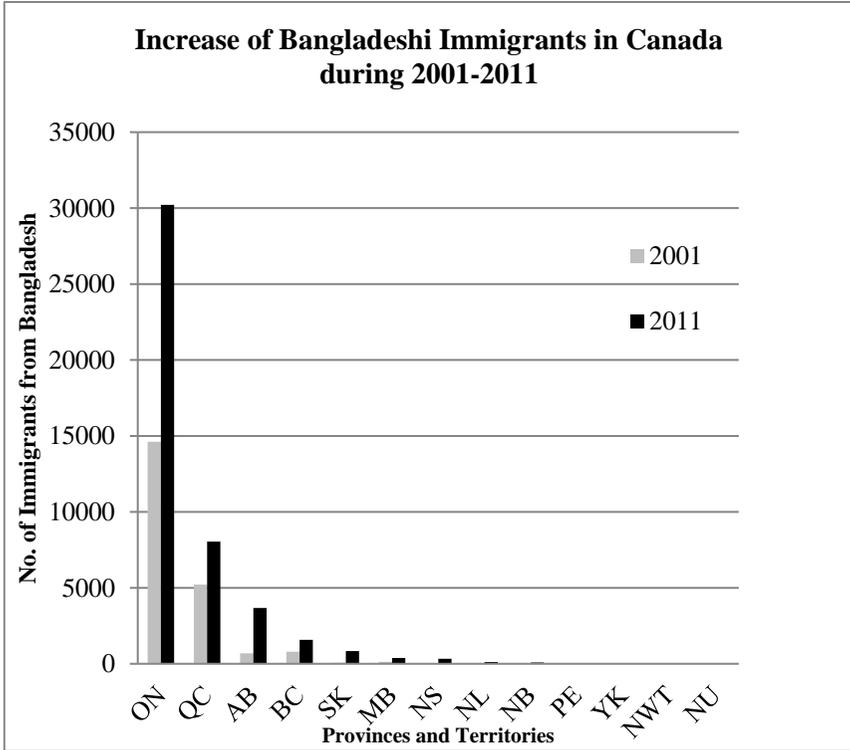


Figure 5: Increase of Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada during 2001 – 2011 (canadaimmigrants.com)

The Bangladeshi immigrant community in Manitoba is one of the smallest in Canada. According to 2011 statistics, as shown in Figure 5, 67% of Bangladeshi immigrants settled in Ontario, 18% in Quebec, 8% in Alberta, 3% in British Columbia, and the remaining 4% in all other provinces (Canadian Magazine of Immigration, 2016). In 2011, there were 20 Bangladeshi immigrants in Yellowknife, and 510 in the Province of Manitoba (Statistics Canada, 2011). However, a count by a 2009 community study (Mohiuddin, 2009) recorded the presence of a total of 589 Bangladeshi immigrants in Manitoba. At present, about 1,700 Bangladeshi-originated residents live in Manitoba. Of them, nearly 1,200 are immigrants, and the rest reside on student visas, temporary work permits,

dependent visas, and other types of temporary stay permits (Canada-Bangladesh Association [CBA], 2017).

It is apparent that, with a 115% increase in less than a decade (8 years), the Bangladeshi immigrant community in Manitoba is one of the fastest growing communities among similar ethnic groups in Canada. Expansion of the community may invoke diverse livelihood stresses and struggles (e.g., adaptation crises, settlement woes, skills utilization anomalies, and job dissatisfaction), and also generates new ideas, opportunities, and synergies. Against this backdrop, this ethnographic study aims at examining the migration trends and settlement patterns of Bangladeshi immigrants and capturing the *emic* and *etic* perspectives of their identity and contributions to community building (see Footnote 9). As well, the study draws insights from narrative-based discussions with expatriates and immigrants who directly experienced (*emic*) the transcontinental change of permanent settlement, as well as Manitoban observers' or outsiders' (*etic*) perspectives. For the purpose of employing appropriate ethnographic methodology, archival research, desk review of documents and statistical datasets, and key informant interview (KII) technique were employed; data were collected to analyze settlement, assimilation, and integration processes, as well as to learn from early immigrants and influential leaders of the community about challenges and opportunities in the new place.

Immigrant Identity Construction: A Theoretical Perspective

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

James Clifford (1994) presented “diasporas” as the transmigration of groups of people that does not take a uniform shape, but rather frequently changes and transforms across different historical courses and political experiences of the immigrants in extra-origin settings. He agrees with Safran (1991) that the term “diaspora” should be understood in terms of immigrant communities’ identity-construction dynamics reflected in attachment to ancestral homeland. However, he disagrees with the nuance of the proposition that “diaspora” be considered an “ideal type.” To Clifford, attempts to reveal diasporic features lead identity-construction analysis in the wrong direction. For instance, the term “Jewish diaspora” is a reductionist path for ethnography. Such labeling limits analysis of the diversity of accommodation and adaptation of immigrant communities. He writes,

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

The “creolization” or “hybridization” thesis comprises a major segment of diasporic identity-construction literature in anthropology. Building on Derrida’s “deconstruction” and “difference,” Stuart Hall (1990) adopted the term “creolization” for his post-colonial anthropological pedagogy in general. However, the concept helps in better analyzing immigrant identity construction. To Hall, and subsequently to Charles Stewart (2007), Robin Cohen (2006, 2007, 2008), and Wendy Knepper (2006), identity construction cannot be a binary process. For instance, “Canadians” and “non-Canadians” in a “we” and “they” structure or “we” and “others” constructions could be labeled as phenomenally flawed.

Two groups of enslaved Black people – one group imported to the Caribbean and the other group exported to Europe from the same departure point (Africa) – apparently become two binary entities after a generation: born-Caribbean and born-Europeans. However, when both born-Caribbean and born-Europeans immigrate to North America, they immediately become identified as “Black” people – not as Europeans or Caribbean. Those emigrating from France, Britain, or Portugal often lose their French, Briton, or Portuguese identities. A

French Black immigrant community in the USA accommodates and assimilates with a Caribbean Black community much faster than the French immigrant community. Their historical past and biological features make them members of one community. However, this does not restrict or limit their capacity to assimilate with all other communities despite the fact that their “Black” identity outweighs all other identities. “Hybridization” is the greater mingling process in general. “Hybridization” can be better understood through popular labeling such as “Mexican-Americans” or “Irish-Americans.” Stuart Hall’s approach assists us here in understanding Bangladeshi immigrants’ identity-construction process in Canada as well.

Arjun Appadurai’s (1991, 1995, 1996) concept of “ethnoscapes” or “global ethnoscapes” also lends considerable insight into immigrant identity construction under globalization. Interconnections and interactions of the “scapes” construct the minds and actions of global citizens. Appadurai introduces the term “transnational anthropology” to denote that present-day people on our planet are continuously in a process of transnational and cross-border movements, and become exposed to diverse global cultures. Such movements do not always mean physical relocation from one country to another country or one place to another place. In this era of globalization, citizens can hardly claim their entitlement to one specific culture or ethnic identity based on political or cultural boundaries. Appadurai’s approach indicates that immigrants experience more dispersal than consolidation in the process of identity construction in transnational settings.

Migration, Identity, Interaction, and Performance: An Ethnographic Account

The above theoretical perspective¹⁵ provides an analytical framework for analyzing the dynamics of the Bangladeshi immigrants in Manitoba. The

9 This study employed anthropological methods combined with archival document analysis. For key informant interviews (KIIs), five informants were extensively interviewed, with periodic follow-up rechecking and debriefing of information. Another six informants were interviewed for the purposes of collecting supplementary information, and cross-checking. Six focus group discussions (FGDs) were held informally, involving community members participating in six community get-togethers, parties, and potlucks. Additionally, in-person phone conversations were held with a dozen (12) senior Bangladeshi immigrants and seven non-Bangladeshi immigrants. The conversations were designed to gain insight into identity-creation processes of different communities, and to evaluate how the process Bangladeshi immigrants adopt may differ from other communities’ perceived processes.

dynamics of emergence of the Bangladeshi immigrant community in Manitoba over a half-century period – beginning from the late 1960s – represent features of multiple approaches (i.e., *asabiyyah*, “diasporism,” “creolization,” and “ethnoscapes”) in varying degrees. They were neither present uniformly at all stages, nor became completely absent at any stage.

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

The analytical premise of this study was built upon five interrelated questions: i) How has the Bangladeshi-Canadian community-identity evolved in Manitoba? ii) How is the community as a whole adapting to Canadian principles of multiculturalism, diversity, inclusion, assimilation, and integration? iii) What are the major challenges of cultural identity creation and inclusion of the Bangladeshi-Canadian community in mainstream society? iv) What and how has the Bengali, Bangladeshi diaspora community contributed to strengthening Canada or Canadian society at large? v) Which actions, activities, and interventions should be considered essential for the community’s mainstreaming and inclusion? The discussion deserves an assessment of the courses of emergence of the Bangladeshi-Canadian community and pertinent community organizations.

As tools, we used a checklist and a logical framework (logframe). Questionnaire schedules were avoided to facilitate informal free-flow discussion. Informants contributed in various capacities ranging from supplying a document to sitting for prolonged discussions. Six organized FGDs drew opinions of about 30 participants. Of these, five were present at all six of the community events and showed immense voluntary interest related to the study topic.

A Brief History of Bangladeshi Immigrants in Winnipeg

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

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

General Trends in Bangladeshi-Canadian Identity Construction

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

One of the most important reasons for the relatively low concentration of Bangladeshi immigrants in Winnipeg is that they do not generally fit into the agricultural workforce to which the Province of Manitoba historically catered. Before the 1930s, Winnipeg was the largest agricultural region of Canada with a considerable demand for an agricultural labour force. James Gray (1966) describes how the 1930s – “the dirty thirties” – caused the province’s decade-long economic depression and drought, and consequent harvest decline and agricultural unemployment. The economic loss was soon recovered by modernizing agriculture through massive mechanization, the introduction of sophisticated tillage methods, and the use of synthetic fertilizer (Francis and Ganzevoort, 1980). As grain production and processing became highly mechanized and each farmer could harvest several hundred hectares, the prospect of agricultural jobs for migrant agricultural labourers shrunk (Berton, 1990). Henceforth, with low-technology farming backgrounds, low-skilled and semi-skilled agricultural workers from Bangladesh never chose Manitoba as their destination of international migration.

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

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

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

Bangladeshi Diaspora: Identity Construction and Contributions to Canada

“Community identity is a social construction and community organization is the centre point of community identity creation” (Pratt, Schultz, Ashforth, and Ravasi, 2016). Pratt et al. (2016) noted a number of driving forces that lead community organizations to contribute to community identity construction. Of these, three important features selected for this discussion are: i) duration of sustenance, ii) strength of conflict resolution, and iii) prospect of service expansion. These features can be examined through mapping the historical trends of Bangladeshi community organizations in Manitoba, as well as the growing tendency of community members to contribute to Canadian society.

In Manitoba, there are four important community development initiatives undertaken by Bangladeshi immigrants that operate hand in hand to avoid conflicts of interest and competition. These are: 1) The Canada-Bangladesh Association of Manitoba Inc. (CBA); 2) The Canadian Association for Bangladesh Development (CABD); 3) The Bengal Tigers Club, 4) *Bibartan* – a cultural organization, and 5) The Friends Club (founded in 2017).¹⁶

¹⁶ The Manitoba Islamic Association Inc. (MIA) is a representative community organization of all Muslims in Manitoba. The Grand Mosque falls under the jurisdiction of MIA management. Presently, seven Bangladeshis are involved in regular volunteering for the centre. During the formation period, Bangladeshi immigrants donated a large sum for structure construction expenses. Dr. Mujibur Rahman and his family members (three daughters) were instrumental in donating, volunteering, and fundraising. The Bangladeshi-Canadian community uses the mosque as a religious-social-cultural hub for organizing community events, as well as mingling with other communities. In 2013, the mosque arranged an interfaith dialogue session involving religious thinkers of different faiths. The Bangladeshi-Canadian community volunteered and participated in the event with enthusiasm. The participation of Bangladeshi immigrants in that event was a testimony to their willingness to assimilate with other faith communities in Canada.

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

The organization was considered the very first immigrant community organization formed by Bengali-speaking people who had emigrated from what was then East Bengal/East Pakistan to North America. The success stories of relief and aid operation of the newly reformed “Bangladesh Association of Manitoba” (BAM) inspired the formation of many Bangladeshi organizations throughout North America. With support from 15 immigrants from both East and West Bengal (who migrated from East Bengal to West Bengal, India), the BAM members undertook tireless drives to raise funds for military logistical support for the freedom fighters, and everyday food and medicine supplies for Liberation War-induced refugees sheltered inside India from neighbouring East Pakistan (see Figure 6). Other important roles the organization played were mobilization of diplomatic support for the independence of Bangladesh, gaining recognition for Bangladeshi freedom fighters, and using diplomatic channels to transfer money and aid to help Bangladesh gain independence.

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

Figure 6: Contribution of Bangladeshi Immigrants in Manitoba Recorded in a History Book (Chowdhury, 1992, 163)

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

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

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

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

The Canadian Association for Bangladesh Development (CABD).

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

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

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

organizing musical evenings by inviting prominent Bangladeshi singers in Manitoba to perform for larger community audiences.

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

In reference to the element of duration of sustenance by immigrant communities as identified by Pratt et al. (2016), the above three organizational initiatives reflect a high level of commitment on the part of the Bengali-speaking population in Manitoba to Bangladeshi national identity, through a long duration of sustenance and effective mobilization of conflict resolution within and between communities.

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

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

dialogues, a centre for inclusion, a hub for religious knowledge-seeking, a site for sports and pastimes, and a community centre for social and familial events.

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

Features of Bangladeshi Community Identity in Manitoba

Small and culturally homogenous social groups tend to be more cohesive in themselves and protective of their cultural identity in alien cultural settings (Little, 1964; McIver and Page, 1967; Ogburn and Nimkoff, 1972). In this regard, Leiner and Meckl (1995) assert that immigrants' community solidarity is sustained mainly on the basis of serving economic interests and intra-organizational income-redistribution between members. Intra-organizational distributions take place through the economic and financial support of disadvantaged community members by well-off community members. Distribution is not necessarily expressed in economic terms; rather it is a social arrangement. For instance, immigrants from developing countries tend to promote reference-pool-immigration¹⁷ (Mohiuddin, 2009) of their family members, friends, colleagues, or kinsfolk or other community members

¹⁷ Mohiuddin (2009) uses reference-pool-immigration to shorten a long description of Leiner and Meckl (1995) that expresses the process of an immigration chain whereby a settled primer immigrant plays the role of a referee (guarantor) to promote immigration of dependent family members, relatives, and friends. For example, the immigrants of the Sylhet region of Bangladesh still promote a strong immigration pool in the UK, especially in the Brick Lane area of London.

voluntarily, thus creating scope for a strong organizational basis for solidarity while in expatriation.

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

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

Manitoba's Bangladeshi-Canadian community, indicating their greater solidarity than those in other larger Canadian communities.

Community Adaptation to Canadian Multiculturalism and Challenges to Identity Construction

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

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

The organizational and constitutional scopes of the Canada-Bangladesh Association are reviewed in this context. Some important objectives and principles stated in the constitution and revised by-laws (CBA, 1996) of the organization are: (1) preservation of community solidarity, unity, and

cooperation among the Bangladeshi residents in Winnipeg (CBA, 1982, 2), (2) resorting to all possible efforts to serve any valid and justifiable interests of its members (CBA, 1982, 2), and (3) elimination of conflicts of individual interests. “Conflict resolution” is declared and adopted as an objective of the Association in contexts of unwanted and unprecedented conflicting situations between the members (CBA, 1982, 6). Additionally, (4) the Association serves as the common platform to bolster community strength, takes measures to overcome limitations, and explore appropriate scopes for development of lifestyles of its members as well as to eradicate hindrances and obstacles to meet greater community needs and interests (CBA, 1996, 4). In short, the goals and purposes of the Association are to determine activities in compliance with strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to the Bangladeshi immigrant community. Correspondingly, solidarity dynamics of the community construe elevated levels and magnitudes of interactions, ranges of social groupings, association-dissociation, and cohesion and conflict between its members, as well as the nature and extent of intra-and inter-community linkages, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. In this process, however, external network building received least attention.

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

“*Polarization syndrome*” is reported as a form of subversion to community solidarity in new societies. The syndrome is identified as an impact of emerging politics of hatred in Bangladesh. In 2013, people of Bangladesh underwent several nationwide currents of political-ideological debates and discourses related to “pro-independence” and “anti-independence” rhetoric. Although these discourses were not characterized as ideological divisions, Bangladesh society in general became sharply divided politically into two camps. While one group tends to propagate the ideational term “the spirit of the

independence war,” the other camp detests the very motive of the former camp’s ideological stance as “false pretense guided by ultra-nationalist political vested interest.” This divisiveness is evident through the recent revival of an old debate over the “pro-Independence War force” (*Muktijuddher pokkho shokti*) and the “anti-Independence War sympathizers” or “Pakistani collaborators.” Despite the fact that the indicators for such distinctions are hardly objectively verifiable, they are contributing to growing divisiveness among the community members in Manitoba, similar to other Canadian provinces. Latent divisions and conflicts become evident when “groupings of immigrants by regional and linguistic origin” are crystallized. Occupational groupings (conformity) also become viewed as a “segregation complex.” Another form is “grouping by support to political parties of the origin.”

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

In Manitoba, non-Muslims (Hindus and believers of other faiths) in the Bangladeshi-Canadian community are closely attached to the West Bengal (India) immigrant community. Commonalities in religious belief system (Hinduism) and cultural practice are the driving forces for such extra-community affiliation. They participate with greater comfort in activities and performances of the West Bengal community organizations, namely *Bichitra* and *Sangskriti*. Our investigation reveals that the Bangladeshi-Canadian Muslim community members in general see the tendency of Hindu immigrants from Bangladesh to mingle with the West Bengal community as a “segregation complex,” and view them with “disdain,

suspicion, and disapproval.” In a focus group, some Bangladeshi-Canadian community members elicited that it could be a “form of resistance” (Ong, 1991) on Hindu immigrants’ part, as they are likely to perceive themselves as a religious minority group in Winnipeg, similar to the case in Bangladesh. The tendency can loosely be considered a “weapon of the weak” (Scott, 1985) as the Hindu immigrants from Bangladesh may perceive themselves as the weaker segment by entitlement and mainstream community activities within the community.

Discussion and Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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

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

the Canadian context depend largely on the increased practice of inclusion and faction-free human interaction within the immigrant community as well as within larger Canadian mainstream society.

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

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

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